

Early Adolescents in Social Withdrawal: Elements for the Assessment of Hikikomori Syndrome

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Introduction

Clinical psychologists and psychiatrists consider the social withdrawal and the loss of interest in the human environment as potential signals of distress and mental illness. A particular form of social withdrawal is the hikikomori syndrome, identified in Japan (Saito, 1998). The hikikomori are called "family hermits" or "bedroom hermits".

Objectives and Aims

The UFSMIA Arezzo has received during last years a number of requests to take care of hikikomori adolescents. The research collects clinical data useful to the assessment.

Methods

The research analyzed a number of clinical cases focusing the interest on five early adolescents in treatment. The researchers compared the different anamnesis, the symptomatology, likeness and difference in the teenagers life style.

Results

The work identifies some aspects in common from the five subjects of the study. These characteristics can be used as signals of the hikikomori syndrome among early adolescents in a Italian cultural context. The hikikomori's life style is centered on the own home; he/she presents an extreme withdrawal from peer group and a refusal of school; there is not a diagnosis of other significant psychiatric disorders; it is always present a distortion of the sleep-wake cycle and a conflict with parents.

Conclusions

The phenomenon of hikikomori syndrome appears also with the beginning of adolescence. The signs of disease are in large part similar to the Japanese descriptions, although if the researchers noticed some aspects typical of the Italian cultural context.