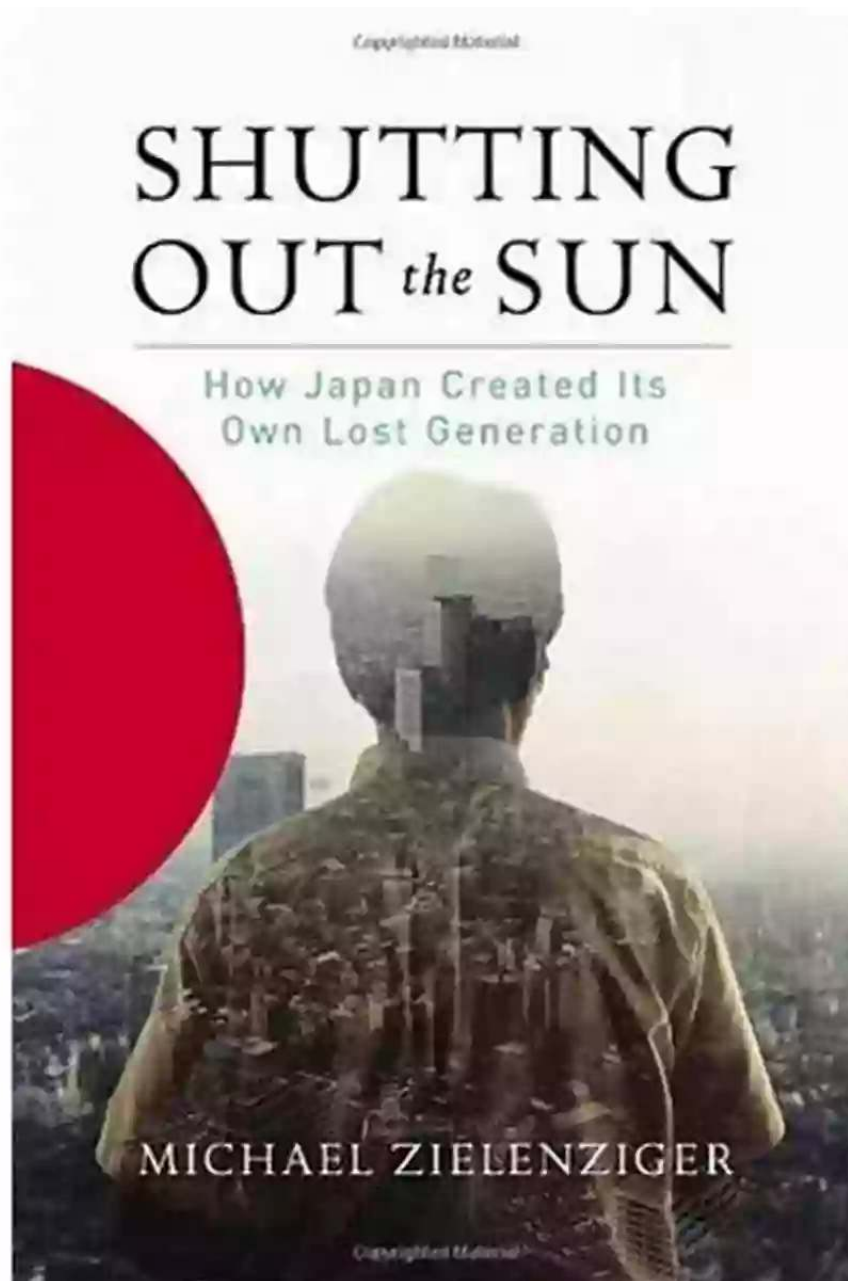


Shutting Out The Sun: The Rise of Hikikomori and Its Impact on Society

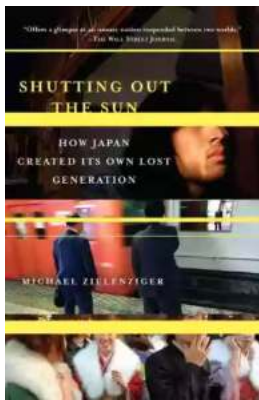


Have you ever imagined a life without sunlight, where your existence is confined within the four walls of your room? Such a life might be unimaginable for most of us, but for an increasing number of individuals in Japan, this is a reality they face

every day. Known as hikikomori, these individuals have chosen to shut themselves out from the world, living in voluntary isolation and seclusion.

The Rise of Hikikomori

The term hikikomori, which roughly translates to "pulling inward and staying secluded," was first coined by the Japanese psychologist Tamaki Saito in the late 1990s. It describes a phenomenon where predominantly young individuals withdraw from society, often remaining confined to their bedrooms for months or even years.



Shutting Out the Sun: How Japan Created Its Own Lost Generation (Vintage Departures)

by Michael Zielenziger (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 977 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 354 pages



Hikikomori typically begin their withdrawal during adolescence, often triggered by high levels of stress, pressure to conform, and an overwhelming fear of failure. These individuals feel trapped and choose to retreat from the demanding expectations of society, seeking solace in the comfort and safety of their own homes.

Although hikikomori is not unique to Japan, it has become a significant social issue in the country where it first gained attention. Estimates suggest that there could be hundreds of thousands of hikikomori in Japan, with varying degrees of severity in their withdrawal. This phenomenon not only affects the individuals themselves but also has widespread implications for Japanese society as a whole.

The Impact on Individuals

Hikikomori often face a multitude of psychological, social, and physical challenges. The lack of human interaction and engagement with the outside world can lead to feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety. Many hikikomori also develop unhealthy coping mechanisms such as excessive internet use, gaming addiction, or substance abuse.

Furthermore, hikikomori individuals often struggle with a sense of purpose and direction in life. Their withdrawal from society robs them of opportunities for personal growth, education, and employment. As they remain in isolation for extended periods, hikikomori may find it increasingly difficult to reintegrate into society, perpetuating a cycle of social exclusion and dependency.

Family Dynamics and Social Stigma

The burden of hikikomori is not only carried by the individuals themselves but also by their families. Parents often feel immense guilt and shame for their child's withdrawal, leading to strained relationships and emotional turmoil within the family unit. The financial strain of supporting a hikikomori, who may be unable to work or contribute financially, further exacerbates the stress.

Moreover, hikikomori individuals and their families often face societal judgment and discrimination. The Japanese society places a high value on conformity, and

those who deviate from societal norms are often stigmatized. Hikikomori may be labeled as lazy, weak, or even dangerous, deepening the sense of shame and isolation experienced by both the individuals and their families.

Societal Consequences and Economic Impact

The prevalence of hikikomori poses significant challenges to the overall well-being and functioning of Japanese society. As a result of their withdrawal, hikikomori individuals contribute little to the economy, further burdening the already struggling workforce. The long-term consequences of a generation that lacks essential skills, education, and work experience could lead to reduced productivity, increased healthcare costs, and a limited pool of talented individuals to drive societal progress.

Furthermore, hikikomori often rely heavily on their families or social support systems, straining resources and hampering the ability of these support networks to provide adequate care for other societal issues. The societal cost of managing the hikikomori phenomenon, both financially and socially, is high and continues to grow.

Addressing the Issue

Recognizing the severity of the hikikomori phenomenon, the Japanese government and various organizations have implemented measures to address the issue. Initiatives such as counseling services, support groups, and specialized treatment facilities aim to provide assistance and guidance to hikikomori individuals and their families.

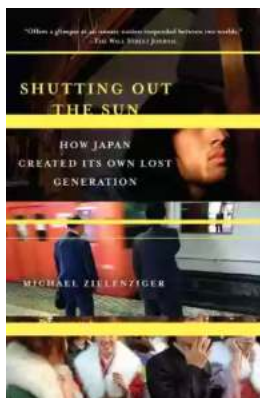
Additionally, educational reforms have been introduced to lessen the pressure on students, promote mental well-being, and foster a society that is more accepting

of individual differences. However, despite these efforts, stigma and a lack of understanding remain significant barriers to effective intervention.

: Opening Up the Shades

The hikikomori phenomenon highlights the complex interplay between societal pressures, cultural expectations, and mental health challenges. To tackle this issue, it is crucial to foster a society that values individual well-being, supports mental health, and encourages healthy social connections.

Breaking the stigma surrounding hikikomori is paramount in creating an environment where those who suffer from withdrawal can seek help without judgment or fear of rejection. By shining light on this often dark and hidden topic, we can work towards a brighter future where individuals no longer feel the need to shut out the sun.



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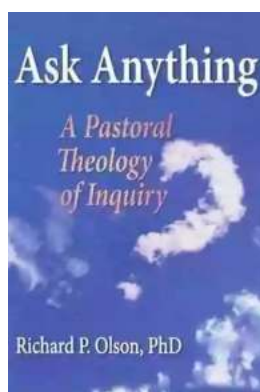


The world's second-wealthiest country, Japan once seemed poised to overtake America. But its failure to recover from the economic collapse of the early 1990s

was unprecedented, and today it confronts an array of disturbing social trends. Japan has the highest suicide rate and lowest birthrate of all industrialized countries, and a rising incidence of untreated cases of depression. Equally as troubling are the more than one million young men who shut themselves in their rooms, withdrawing from society, and the growing numbers of “parasite singles,” the name given to single women who refuse to leave home, marry, or bear children.

In *Shutting Out the Sun*, Michael Zielenziger argues that Japan’s rigid, tradition-steeped society, its aversion to change, and its distrust of individuality and the expression of self are stifling economic revival, political reform, and social evolution. Giving a human face to the country’s malaise, Zielenziger explains how these constraints have driven intelligent, creative young men to become modern-day hermits. At the same time, young women, better educated than their mothers and earning high salaries, are rejecting the traditional path to marriage and motherhood, preferring to spend their money on luxury goods and travel.

Smart, unconventional, and politically controversial, *Shutting Out the Sun* is a bold explanation of Japan’s stagnation and its implications for the rest of the world.



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