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The Existence of Personality and Hikikomori State: a Socio-Philosophical Reflection on the Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic

[Osobowość oraz stan hikikomori: socjofilozoficzna refleksja nad skutkami pandemii COVID-19]

Streszczenie: Artykuł jest poświęcony problemowi dołączania ludzi do szeregów hikikomori w czasie i po wprowadzeniu ścisłej kwarantanny podczas pandemii COVID-19. Przedstawiono styl życia hikikomori jako swoisty nurt subkulturowy, który skupia się na fizycznym dystansowaniu jednostki od przestrzeni komunikacji społecznej. Podczas pandemii COVID-19 styl życia hikikomori stał się powszechny dla wielu ludzi w kontekście przymusowej samoizolacji. Jednak nawet jeśli środki kwarantanny zostają złagodzone i dozwolony jest powrót do stosowanych niegdyś praktyk komunikacyjnych, nie wszyscy ludzie chcą wrócić do życia offline. W nawiązaniu do tego autorzy twierdzą, że postawy wobec czasowości zmieniają się również w warunkach pandemii i przymusowej samoizolacji, gdzie pojawiają się złożone dylematy etyczno-społeczne, przynoszące jednostce dyskomfort psychiczny na poziomie mikro i makro.

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Summary: The article is devoted to the problem of humans joining the ranks of hiki-komori at the time of and after the introduction of strict quarantine measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lifestyle of the hikikomori, as a specific subcultural trend that focuses on the physical distancing of the individual from the space of social communication, is emphasised. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the hikikomori life-style became common to many people under a regime of enforced self-isolation. Howe-ver, even when quarantine measures are relaxed and a return to familiar communica-tion practices is allowed, not all people are willing to return to offline life. Attitudes towards temporality also change under conditions of pandemic and enforced self-isola-tion, where complex ethico-social dilemmas arise, bringing psychological discomfort to the individual on micro-and macro levels.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed numerous challenges to humani-ty, among them the establishment of a medical system, the problem of keeping the economies of the world globally interconnected, the problem of employing people and getting them into precarious, unprotected labour, the problem of education, in particular the adoption of distance learning, the problem of maintaining the mental and social well-being of people, etc. Conventionally, the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic can be catego-rised as macro and micro, relating to the global world system, to each indi-vidual country, to each individual social community in that country and to each individual person who is a full actor in this complex social situation. These levels of "pandemic" problems are interlinked: macro-level problems affect micro-level problems, and vice versa; for example, the physical and mental health of each individual depends collectively on the economy, edu-cation, medicine, politics and other areas of government, while the eco-nomic, social and political health of each individual country collectively shapes the global world order; of course, this dependence is also inverse. Consequently, the social well-being and mental well-being of each indivi-dual and of social communities, in general, is a remarkably important fac-tor in understanding the impact of the pandemic and has a significant predictive and protective effect in the search for recovery from this com-plex global situation. The pandemic has become a kind of personal chal-lenge for each individual, and how exactly an individual responds to this challenge, what social, psychological, and spiritual problems he/she faces,

and how he/she solves or how avoids these problems, constitutes considerable heuristic potential for future socio-philosophical, psychological and anthropological research.

In some cases, the pandemic has contributed to changes in people's worldview and anthropological and psychological coordinates; in particular, it has catalysed numerous psychological acute crises and latent depressions and has become a factor in changes in habitual human behaviour patterns. These stunning changes include increased anxiety in the respondents, a sense of loss of control over their lives, leading to obsessive-compulsive disorders, such as the desire to constantly check homes for cleanliness and disinfection, and the constant use of hand sanitiser (Vasileva A., 2020). This may also include an increase in domestic violence, depression and suicidal ideation, a feeling of permanent stress and – as a consequence – recourse to destructive practices to cope with it, such as drinking, gambling and substance use. Mental disorders, domestic violence and gambling addiction have increased in Ukraine over the quarantine period. There have also been cases of people resorting to criminal practices as a result of losing their jobs and livelihoods (Gerasimova I. et al., 2021; Urazaliev M., 2020). In addition, one of the altered patterns of behaviour was a tendency towards self-isolation and restriction of active social contacts for some people, even after the acute quarantine regime had been loosened. Widespread social practice and daily life show that after the relaxation of quarantine conditions, people rushed to make up for the gaps in their social contacts and sought active "live" communication: they met acquaintances, friends, relatives, started going on dates, etc. However, some people – on the contrary – have begun to shy away from such communication practices, preferring to remain alone, within the confines of their room/building (Wong M., 2020). Such systematic practices of seclusion with greater or lesser intensity and immersion into one's own inner world can rightly be classified as manifestations of the hikikomori subculture.

Thus, the aim of the study is to outline the markers of hikikomori in Ukrainian society as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and to identify factors of our compatriots joining the ranks of this social current.

In our scientific research we used theoretical research methods, namely the general scientific method of philosophical analysis and tried to divide the factors influencing a person's choice to conduct a hikikomori lifestyle into subjective-individual and objective-social ones, and tried to identify patterns in their influence on the recipient. The method of extrapolation was also used when analysing global factors influencing the choice of hikikomori strategies and factors of Ukrainian realities on a similar process in our country; the comparativist approach when com-

paring these social and psychological factors and analysing their action on the choice of hikikomori strategies by people in Ukraine and the world; the modelling method was applied when studying the influence of these two groups of factors in pandemic times and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The paper investigates which individual and social factors influence a person's choice to voluntarily become a hermit in a normal, 'non-pandemic' regime, and which factors provoke the adoption of hikikomori strategies in a pandemic regime, even if customary social communications are officially allowed. We investigate markers of hikikomori strategy in the pandemic regime among Ukrainian youths.

The statement of basic materials

The phenomenon of hikikomori was first explored by Japanese philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists. This scientific interest of Japanese researchers is quite logical, as this social phenomenon spread to the whole world from Japan. A key and one of the first works on the subject is the book by Saito Tomoki, "Social Relegation: Endless Youth". Saito Tomoki borrowed the concept of social withdrawal – English social withdrawal, Japanese shakaiteki hikikomori – from the standard classification of mental disorders developed by the American Psychiatric Association. In the American classification, social asceticism has been treated as just one of the symptoms that accompany certain mental disorders, while Saito Tomoki began to study it as a separate phenomenon. Today, the phenomenon of hikikomori is studied by researchers such as Mami Suwa (2013), Kunifumi Suzuki (2013), Mark Wong (2020), Noriyuki Sakamoto (2005), Rodger G. Martin (2005), Hiroaki Kumano (2005), Tomifusa Kuboki (2005), Samir Al-Adawi (2005), Takahiro A. Kato (2012, 2017), Masaru Tateno (2012), Naotaka Shinfuku (2012), Daisuke Fujisawa (2012), Alan R. Teo (2012, 2017), Norman Sartorius (2012), Tsuyoshi Akiyama (2012), Tetsuya Ishida (2012), Tae Young Choi (2012), Yatan Pal Singh Balhara (2012), Ryohei Matsumoto (2012), Wakako Umene-Nakano (2012), Yota Fujimura (2012), Anne Wand (2012), Jane Pei-Chen Chang (2012), Rita Yuan-Feng Chang (2012), Behrang Shadloo (2012), Helal Uddin Ahmed (2012), Tiraya Lerthattasilp (2012), Shigenobu Kanba (2012), Asuka Koyama (2010), Yuko Miyake (2010), Norito Kawakami (2010), Masao Tsuchiya (2010), Hisateru Tachimori (2010), Tadashi Takeshima (2010), Alexander Krieg (2013), Jane R. Dickie (2013), Alison F. W Wu (2019), Jinnie Ooi (2019), Paul W. C. Wong (2019), Caroline Catmur (2019), Jennifer Y. F Lau (2019), Lucia L. Liu (2017), Tim M. H. Li (2017), Maki

Rooksby (2020), Tadaaki Furuhashi, (2020), Hamish J. McLeod (2020) and others.

Ukrainian researchers, for their part, pay more attention to the term "seclusion" than to the term "hikikomori". It seems to us that this is primarily due to the fact that in Japan and other countries of the world this phenomenon has received its social publicity and started to be publicised; in Ukrainian realities, the issue of social seclusion for many years has been studied mainly by psychologists and philosophers; it was of purely professional public interest. Therefore, in the works of Volodymyr Kizima (2014), Oleksandr Tymchenko (2018), Tetiana Fedotova (2015), and Irina Frankova (2018), emphasis is placed on the terms "social self-isolation" and "seclusion" and psychological ways of correcting this condition are considered. The round table "Reclusiveness and loneliness in the life of the individual" was also held, where the coryphaei of Ukrainian psychological science took a comprehensive look at the phenomenon. However, the term "hikikomori" in the context of Ukrainian realities can be found in the works of Irina Frankova (2017). However, it should be noted that the analysis of the hikikomori phenomenon in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet scientifically sufficiently developed. This can be explained by the short period of time between the pandemic and the stage of comprehensive scientific reflection on the challenges it brought. This context again predominantly explores the purely psychological features of a person's response to a forced condition of self-isolation, which may subsequently turn into a voluntary choice (Wong M., 2020). At the same time, in our view, insufficient attention has been paid to the social-objective factors that the pandemic brings with it, which can also provoke the emergence of hikikomori tendencies in individuals. This "white spot" in scientific developments, on the one hand, can be explained by the novelty of the problems that have befallen any society, including Ukrainian society, and, on the other hand, by the secondary importance of the subject of hikikomori against the background of addressing the issue of preservation of human life. However, we understand that the layer of sociological and expense problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic is at the initial stage of its development.

In summary, hikikomori is a specific subcultural movement that originated in Japan in the 1990s but has subsequently spread to other countries around the world. Etymologically, the word consists of two parts: 'hiki' from Japanese 'to self-close and 'komori' from Japanese 'to be inside' (Kemmoku A., Kuznetsova E., 2020). The emergence of this subculture in Japanese society was due to the fact that part of the youth and adult population, who should be actively involved in social life, voluntarily shut them-

selves away in their rooms and played computer games, chatted, and watched anime shows and engaged in other practices. Some of these people had online jobs and provided the material basis for their livelihood. Some of them were supported by their parents and therefore did not face any domestic difficulties. However, in any case, these young and adult people did their best to limit their social contacts: they ordered online delivery of food and other necessary things, held meetings with colleagues and work partners exclusively online, and transferred communication with friends. in online chat rooms, etc. Researchers attribute the emergence of this subculture in Japan to a number of reasons. These reasons can be conventionally typified as those caused by subjective factors of the ontological development of an individual and those caused by systematic shifts in society. There are also reasons associated with the peculiarities of the purely Japanese mentality and Japanese culture, namely: the attitude towards the practice of seclusion as a specific spiritual development; the primacy of social coercion over the individual, the oppression of individual freedom, and a tolerant attitude towards situations where no one cares about the interests of the individual. Some scholars believe that the hikikomori phenomenon originated in Japan because of the stunning and even tragic mixing of traditional Japanese and pro-Western-liberal values, which made life in a rigid and dictatorial paradigm unbearable for young Japanese in the 1990s, and so they decided to remove themselves by locking themselves in their room space (Kato T. et al., 2012). Our anthropological-philosophical research will make the assumption that the phenomenon of hikikomori in contemporary Japanese society correlates with the long Japanese tradition of performing hara-kiri – ritual suicide to avoid disgrace, only in the case of the modern hikikomori suicide is the excluded that is socially dead. However, regardless of the approach to the interpretation of the reason for the first appearance of the social phenomenon of hikikomori specifically among representatives of the Japanese nation, we will not focus in our study on these specific nuances. Rather, we will try to analyse typical modern factors of a person's entry into the ranks of hikikomori, which can be distinguished both in Japanese and other societies of our heterogeneous, but in the same time global world.

In our opinion, all the factors that contributed to a person joining the ranks of hikikomori, not taking into account the specific cultural environment in which she was brought up, can be divided into subjective-psychological and objective-social ones. Subjective-psychological factors stem from an individual's unique life history, in which, however, when typifying cases of hiki-strategies, we can identify certain key, decisive events, and the choice of social recluse practices is one of the options to overcome the

consequences of these events. Among the many subjective reasons for an individual's propensity to exhibit hikikomori markers, researchers identify a key one: in almost every life history of a hikikomori there is an episode or series of episodes of certain social defeat. This could be expulsion from school, failing exams, not being able to go to university, not being able to get a stable job, bullying by an intimate circle and not being able to build strong interpersonal relationships, etc. In any case, there is a particular psychotraumatic situation from which the individual wants to escape within the walls of his or her room. Hikikomori syndrome can therefore be rightly described as a kind of variation of post-traumatic stress disorder that the individual cannot cope with on his or her own. The second most subjective reason for the propensity to practice hikikomori is also the orientation toward ideal images of oneself, and ideal visions of one's own future and prospects. Frequently this thirst for idealism is nurtured by parents and the environment. Consequently, the individual, feeling the constant underlying stress of not achieving the desired ideal, in reality, is inclined towards the attitude: "Better to do nothing than to be non-ideal; better to be nothing than the best version of yourself"; the former scenario succeeds less humiliating than the latter. There is a deep neuroticisation of hikikomori, an unhealthy desire for an ideal image of the self that is objectively impossible to achieve (Horney K., 2008). These two key subjective factors are interrelated and generally indicate that the individual does not allow himself or herself to commit a certain social error, either in real life or in the space of relating to himself or herself. In both the first and second cases, psychological help from a professional is essential. However, this help can only be effective if the hikikomori themselves take an interest in their own mental health. That is, the number of subjective reasons for joining the hikikomori is determined by one's subjective attitude to the problem and one's personal motivation to deal with psychological problems rather than avoid them.

In addition to subjective reasons, there are a number of social reasons that the individual cannot influence on his or her own. Among them is the level of technology, including visually-oriented technology, which until a few decades ago allowed the average person to immerse themselves in the world of their images, to devote time and attention to content developed for them while neglecting the real world, which no longer seems so attractive. However, researchers point out that the level of development of digital technology and Internet communication is still not the primary reason for the emergence of the social phenomenon of hikikomori (Suwa M., Suzuki K., 2013). Rather, we can speak of a paradigm shift in society. There has been a gradual shift in emphasis from a vision of a future that

can be achieved to images of fantasy in relation to that future that does not necessarily have to translate into reality. Reality has instead come to be presented as one possible variant of fantasy and not so vivid and burdened by certain patterns. Modern society, especially young people, has become accustomed to focusing precisely on the product of fantasy, rather than the limitation of the real world. Anime culture has played an important role in this paradigm shift.

Gradual but dizzying changes have also taken place in cultural patterns and patterns of social communication. Thus, researchers Mami Suwa (2013) and Kunifumi Suzuki (2013) note that while communication used to be based on emotional ties, hierarchy and solidarity, i.e., it implied interdependencies between people, now communication is networked, synchronous: it is based on common interests and inclinations, but it does not imply mutual responsibility and can be easily disrupted or changed if the environment in question is no longer satisfactory for some reason. Consequently, on the one hand, people's communication in digital technology greatly expands the variability of their interaction; on the other hand, such communication is not committed to anything in particular, and therefore one can simultaneously communicate with "the whole world" and simultaneously feel uninvolved in the lives of others, just as they are uninvolved in his / her life.

A third weighty social factor is the pressure of competition in modern society, which is quite harsh: a person must constantly prove to reference groups and to himself / herself that he / she is ready to occupy a certain social niche. Competition leads to a sense of ontological loneliness, psychological pressure and numerous neurotic disorders, so some people consciously refuse it, perceiving live off-line people as a source of problems for themselves. However, the situation is further exacerbated by the rapidly spreading phenomenon of the precarisation of modern labour practices. The Japanese economy was one of the first to face the factor of massive precarisation of the population during the economic crisis in the 1990s: a large proportion of young people who entered the labour market after training failed to find stable, legally protected jobs with career opportunities and long-term prospects. They found themselves working in the ranks of the unregulated precariat on short-term contracts or without a contract at all, in violation of current law. Some Japanese youth decided they would rather not work at all than work under such conditions (Wong M., 2020). Today, we can see the markers of precarious work, and hence the mass fallout of precariousness and uncalculated risks, in almost every country in the world (International Labour Office, 2015; International Labour Office, 2020).

With the spread of digital technology and hyper-competitive tendencies elsewhere in the world, the social phenomenon of hikikomori has begun to spread legitimately to other nations and other continents. This is how the global world paradigm works: if a social phenomenon or social problem arises in a particular part of the world, it is understood that if similar factors coincide in another part, we will get the same social phenomenon or social problem. Today, we can speak of the involvement of some youth and adults in the hikikomori ranks in countries such as China, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, USA, UK, EU countries (Spain, Italy in particular), Oman, Iran, Australia, etc. (Sakamoto N. et al., 2005; García-Campayo J. et al.,2007; Mangiarotti A., 2009; Kato T. et al., 2012). Consequently, the subculture of hikikomori – people who voluntarily consigned themselves to seclusion during their most productive years in life – has become a fairly familiar social phenomenon in many countries around the world. The problem has also been dubbed "the 2030 Challenge".

During the COVID-19 pandemic, under strict quarantine measures that included the requirement for self-isolation, already a large part of the world was living under the hikikomori regime. This transformation of customary social practices was, of course, for legitimate, objective reasons: staying at home and not going out – these precepts kept many people alive at a time of uncontrolled increase in the number of sick people and the lack of a vaccine (at the time). However, changes in mental states under the self-isolation regime have taken place and have had their own, sometimes delayed, but obvious effect.

As researchers of the psychological hikikomori syndrome Maki Rooksby (2020), Tadaaki Furuhashi (2020), Hamish J. McLeod (2020) have pointed out, the self-isolation regime may have provoked in people prone to the practice of seclusion or with certain psychological preconditions for displaying hikikomori markers, a desire not to leave the room, even when the opportunity arose. As we have already noted, such psychological preconditions can be considered, firstly, the neurotic desire to idealise those around them, the desire for them to react and behave in a certain way, with both the recipient himself and his environment never achieving this fantasy ideal (neuroticisation); Secondly, it is the psychological trauma of alienation from others and social failure, from which the recipient seeks to hide within the walls of his or her room. These two psychological factors push the individual to adopt hikikomori – style life trajectories for themselves. When self-isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic, these people were given a 'legal' opportunity to avoid contact with the traumatic outside world.

However, as we have already mentioned with the example of Japan, there are also objective social reasons pushing people to choose the life strategies of hikikomori. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these reasons and made them systemic. Let us explore these transformations.

1. A focus on the fantasy world rather than a focus on reality. The impact of digital technology. During the period of forced reclusiveness and self-isolation regime, people got used to practically round-the-clock use of the Internet and gadgets. With the help of these devices and visual tools of virtual and augmented reality, people worked, studied, spent leisure time, acquired new skills, etc. Virtually all social life has shifted from the plane of reality to the plane of virtuality, and consequently, people have begun to get used to the fact that the pictures in their heads are primary to what surrounds them. As the latest technology allows for the production of high-quality, vivid images, is attuned to the entertainment industry and often involves passive absorption of information, staying at home behind a black screen gadget has proved more appealing to some than real, less-than-perfect life (Manavis S., 2021).

2. "Synchronised" communication on Internet platforms and through gadgets has become almost the only means of maintaining established social ties for many people. Due to social networks, numerous online platforms, it was still possible to find like-minded people, to share one's experiences, to feel supported, to receive recognition from others. As a result of such communication, it was possible to get rid of the feeling of loneliness, the feeling that you would definitely not meet anyone within your four walls. Even vice versa, virtual acts of communication could take place almost around the clock, disrupting the traditional mode of communication tied to time and space coordinates (Wong A. et al., 2020). Consequently, the traditional Hiki worldview of being spatially and temporally alone but virtually in touch with "the whole world" became a kind of adaptive strategy for humans during the COVID-19 pandemic, prioritising "synchronous", virtual communication over traditional communication.

3. The spread of the precarity phenomenon. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a significant proportion of people either losing their jobs (especially if they are employed in services involving direct physical contact) and having to look for temporary freelance work or being sent to work remotely from home. Both the first and second employment scenarios involve a transition to practices: legislative insecurity, irregular working hours, blurred management-subordination working relationships, payment delays, etc. However, some people also reported that they had gained more freedom in relation to their time management, adapted their

physiological needs perfectly to the employer's requirements and organised an efficient work process themselves (Matilla-Santander N. et al., 2021; International Labour Office, 2020). In this way, some people became accustomed to excellent remote work and were given an additional incentive to lead a reclusive life.

Discussion

In general, we can say that the COVID-19 pandemic has become an integrating, social-systemic factor, which in itself has brought together three previously illuminated social reasons for people joining the ranks of hikikomori: an orientation towards a world of fantasy and probability; synchronous communication in gadgets; and a massive shift towards fine labour practices. Previously, however, these factors existed in isolation, but in the pandemic times, they came together in an objective totality from which it was no longer possible to escape, guided by one's own life choices. It can also be said that whereas previously the typical hickey self-isolated as a result of subjective (psychological) and objective (systemic-social) causes, now people have begun to self-isolate, and the pre-defined psychological and social causes have begun to contribute to keeping the person from leaving this state. Cause and effect have swapped places.
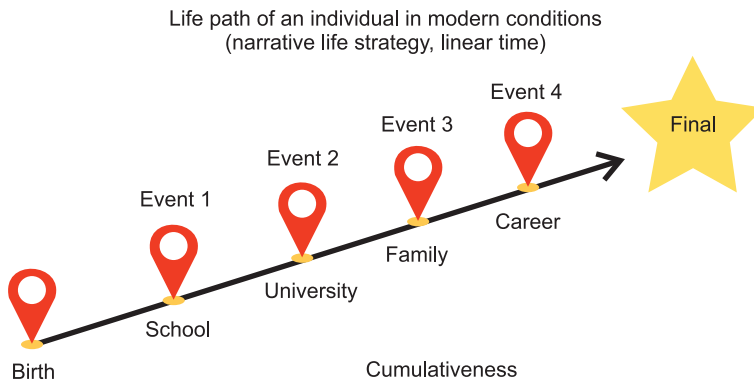
However, new reasons and motivating aspects for opting for hikikomori strategies have also emerged, even after the self-isolation regime has been lifted. One of these seems to us to be semi-objective-subjective and produces a complex ethical and psychological dilemma. Due to the fact that it is not known exactly who and under what circumstances can spread the coronavirus (the carrier of the virus can be someone who is asymptomatic, or has been in contact with a sick person and has not found out about it, etc., i.e., it is never known whether or not one is a threat to others) some people have started to fear for the health of their loved ones with whom they live in the same area. Especially young children and the elderly, people with certain illnesses constitute a risk group and are very susceptible to infection. Therefore, some have chosen the hikikomori strategy in order to minimise their social physical contact and not put their loved ones at risk. In choosing between their own freedom and the health of their family, they chose the latter (Holt-Lunstad J., 2020). This choice is not always easy. In this case, in the beginning, hikikomori is a forced state, but later the subjective-psychological and objective-social factors and prerequisites we have outlined beforehand can conserve a person within the four walls.
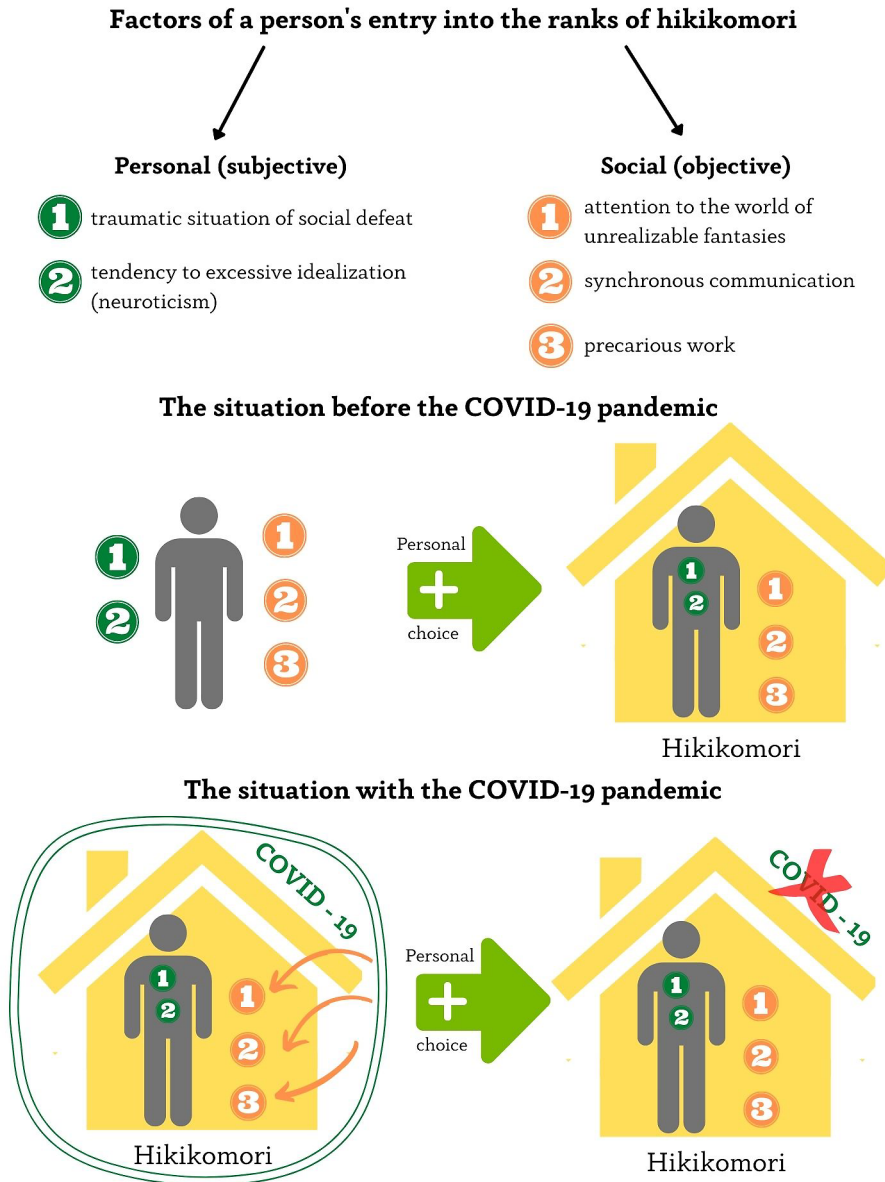
Scheme 1. Factors that lead a person into the ranks of hikikomori (Authors' own elaboration)

A second new factor may be a specific existential desire for refuge from a situation of profound ontological uncertainty and uncalculated risks. The fact is that the hikikomori's mode of life presupposes a specific orientation in time. Let us explain our thesis.

The common person of the modern age, given the stabilising factors in the society to which he/she belongs, has a linear outlook on life: life has certain milestones, such as birth, life in the parents' family, schooling, university studies, getting a stable job, getting married, having children, career development, etc.; the end of life is a summing up of each sphere, each is supposed to develop linearly and systematically, depends primarily on effort, motivation and the professional and moral virtues of the individual himself. Consequently, an individual is able to plan his life for the distant and long term and feels that he can control it. At the same time, each previous life stage is a natural springboard for the future stage, and in general, we can observe a cumulative effect, when the final life result is a manifestation of systematicness and coherence of all previous life 'milestones'.

Life path of an individual in modern conditions
(narrative life strategy, linear time)

Event 4

Event 3   Final

Event 2

Event 1   Career

University   Family

School

Birth   Cumulativeness

Scheme 2. The individual's path of life under modernity (narrative life strategy, linear time) (Authors' own elaboration)

In a postmodern paradigm, the perception of time changes from linear to mosaic. There is no longer a single well-trodden path of life with definite coordinates, guidance on what to do and what not to do in order to succeed in life. The systematic and cumulative nature of the lifeway is also being re-evaluated and no longer works. On the other hand, the "anything can happen at any time" orientation is at work in almost all spheres of society. Researchers call this the bifurcation point model and the synergetic principle of building complex social systems, where we observe already non--linear and unpredictable risks: a seemingly significant cause can cause little change; at the same time, a seemingly pathetic factor can lead to dizzying transformations. There is even an expression "postmodern irony" (Di Martino L., 2014). It captures, in our view, the specific worldview of the postmodern era quite well: life is becoming so unpredictable and absurd, and events are so defying formal logic, that there is no point in ma-

king long-term plans, calculating risks and coming up with plans "A", "B" and "C" anymore. The best thing to do is to either adapt to each event in the here-and-now mode, without drawing far-sighted conclusions and throwing all your resources at survival, or simply accept it and watch ironically as things slip into a bigger collapse. Such an attitude of life contributes to the chaos of social existence, but people who try hard to resist it run the enormous risk of wasting their efforts by trying to systematise on their own what can only be systematised in a collective, coordinated way. In this way, the circle is locked. Uncalculated risks and the chaotic operation of social institutions and relations contribute to and perpetuate a "mosaic perception" of the individual's social time.
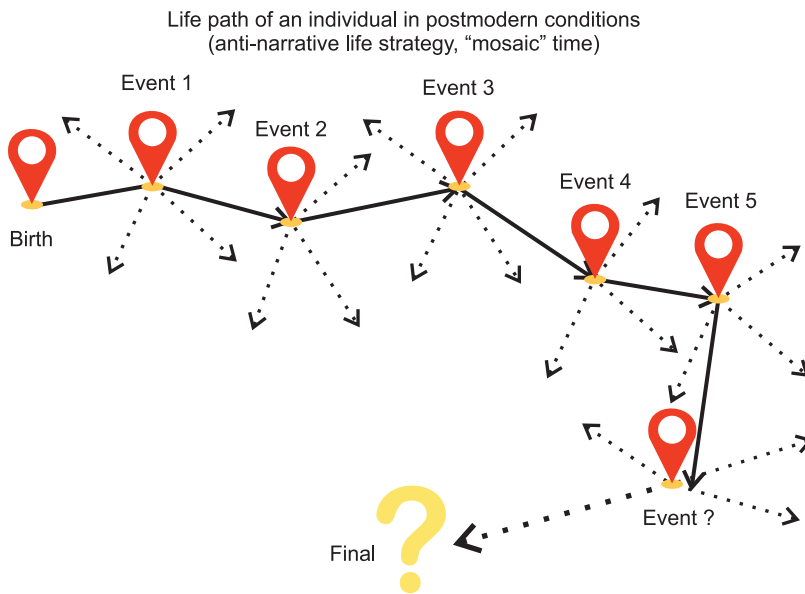
Scheme 3. The individual's path of life in the postmodern (anti-narrative life strategy, 'mosaic' time) (Authors' own elaboration)

The COVID-19 pandemic situation has become a powerful uncalculated risk and a global challenge to humanity, with a mosaic time paradigm of postmodern society that has split into multiple chaotic risks and contradictory political, economic, social solutions. These chaotic decisions have disoriented the common man, forcing him into a situation of anomie, where contradictory social norms are operating simultaneously. For example, in the Ukrainian reality, despite the state's requirement to observe quarantine measures and not to work in service areas with physical human contact, some workers were forced to violate state requirements and still work at risk to their own health because the state did not care about

their financial security during this period. Despite the announced ban at the height of the pandemic on visiting public places and using transport without a protective mask, this requirement was not respected by the vast majority of citizens, and its enforcement was not routinely monitored. These and numerous other systemic inconsistencies could, in our view, be catalysts for individuals to decide to lock themselves away within their flats in order to avoid onerous social dilemmas. In this way, it "preserves" its time and stays away from life choices in a society in which responsibility for every choice in life is placed on the shoulders of the individual, even if an adequate decision is a priori impossible due to the collapse of the current socio-political system.

Young people in Ukraine during the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine also began to show some willingness to lock themselves away within four walls, and we have devoted our work to investigating this issue. Firstly, let us emphasise the correct opinion of the Ukrainian researcher Tetiana Hud (Hudz T., 2020) and foreign scientists Maki Rooksby, Tadaaki Furuhashi and Hamish Mc Leod (Rooksby M. et al., 2020), who note that the very fact of self-closing in one's own room can have fundamentally different emotional colours and fundamentally different life decisions for a young person. The level of emotional intelligence plays a large role in this dizzying difference in attitudes towards involuntary, and later possibly voluntary, self-quarantine. Young people with high levels of emotional intelligence retained the ability and desire to engage in self-improvement and maintained strong emotional bonds with others even under harsh quarantine conditions; those with low levels of emotional intelligence fell into a maelstrom of diverse shades of feeling deeply existentially lonely. Consequently, the 'turning point' in a person's choice of one of the two outlined vectors of development is their deep inner desire to overturn the emotional 'bridge' to other people, to be involved in their being, to share it or alienate it mentally, focusing solely on their own inner world. On this side, the self-enclosure in one's own room is only an external manifestation of the existential state one is experiencing deep within oneself. Ukrainian researchers Oleh Chaban and Olena Khaustova also point out an interesting pattern – a kind of duality of human consciousness and subconsciousness (according to Carl Gustav Jung): if a person amazingly wants to be successful and neurotic about his achievements, then subconsciously he will gravitate to passivity and idleness; If it worships the cult of strength – it feels helpless and vulnerable to the core; if it seeks to be rational in all its manifestations – it is on the verge of containing its uncontrollable inner impulses (Chaban O., Khaustova O., 2009). In summary: the COVID-19 pandemic situation was a catalyst for hikikomori among

some Ukrainian youth, but the preconditions for a hikikomori worldview existed in them even before the pandemic events.

Quarantine as a stressful situation also triggers a number of mental defence mechanisms. Ukrainian researchers Taisiia Komar (2020), and Oksana Kyselova (2020) noted that as a result of the development of digital and Internet technologies significant changes have befallen the traditional adolescent lifestyle, in particular, led to an orientation towards an escape strategy from aggravating events and circumstances. By running away from reality, however, the young person concentrates on himself, on his own experiences, so he becomes prone to transmitting alienating behaviour, selfish motives and depression. Problems such as insecurity, loneliness, uncertainty, apathy, conflict, and problems in organising the living space within the family and social circle become accompanying phenomena in the young person's escape into their own inner world and use of internet technology for this purpose (Sliusarevskyi M. et al., 2020).

A big difference in reactions to seclusion can be seen in the weight given to whether this life decision was voluntary or forced. The compulsion to self-isolate is seen as psychological violence and oppression, generating a number of negative reactions such as hypochondria, the development of panic and depression, deviant behaviour, etc. Voluntary seclusion, on the other hand, does not produce frustration, but may indicate that a person is potentially committed to hikikomori strategies (Reclusiveness and loneliness in the life of the individual, 2020). Therefore, the phenomenon of self-isolation today can be viewed through different lenses: in terms of the psychological states, it generates, in terms of the internal and external motivation for seclusion, in terms of the psychological defence mechanisms involved and the frustration manifestations, etc. A big part of how a person will perceive a situation of self-isolation is their subjective position, and their own interpretation of what is happening to them. There are young people who perceive this social challenge as an encroachment on their individual freedom and feel oppressed; there are young people who use their free time resources for self-improvement practices; there is also a section of youth who gradually come to like seclusion practices, seeing them as a chance to escape and not deal with their current problems. Such young people can gradually move into the ranks of hikikomori, no longer subject to certain quarantine restrictions.

Changes in social development, difficulties in adaptation, emotional instability and low levels of motivation for action all contribute to the emergence of hikikomori markers in young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, subsequently, the state of hikikomori itself begins to produce these mental manifestations of deep social alienation, the above

mentioned, consolidates them, turns them into habitual patterns of behaviour and emotional reactions – and the circle closes. It is, therefore, necessary to increase heuristic interest in this problem in Ukrainian society, because young people are the future of any country, and our immediate prospects depend directly on the state in which they will be and with what psychological losses or achievements they will overcome the pandemic.

According to data published in "Hikikomori markers in adolescents under quarantine restrictions" (Chugueva I., Sakovskaya V., 2021), about 40% of young people show a high propensity to develop hikikomori markers. This is evidenced by the survey data, such as the inherent reversion of day-night mode, staying in one's own room almost all the time, leaving home for urgent matters, neglecting basic needs (adequate sleep) amid continuous internet activity (eating without taking a break from the gadget). At the same time, almost 11% of respondents show a very high propensity to develop hikikomori markers, and as a result, represent a cohort of those young people who can shut themselves away within the four walls of their room even after strict quarantine measures are lifted.

The study of the level and ways of personal self-actualisation allows us to determine which channels ensure the manifestation of the so-called psychological "self" of a certain psychological core, that which actually makes a person his or her own self. Interestingly, the scales of "autonomy" (7.6%), "auto-sympathy" (8.69%) and "contactiveness" (8.69%) – i.e., the scales of those indicators which are responsible for building the "I-You bridge" and act as specific protectors of a person's alienation from society – are on the lower levels of young people's self-actualisation. The spontaneity scale, on the other hand, has the highest rate at 21.7%. It should be noted that with simultaneous extremely low scores on the contactivity scale, it is likely to be assumed that this spontaneity is predominantly concentrated in the Internet space, where the natural difficulty before engaging in communication disappears. On the one hand, a person engaging in "one-click" internet communications gets a quick and vivid satisfaction of his or her needs in interacting with others; On the other hand, such interaction does not involve a full-fledged encounter with the Other, is an ersatz encounter and perpetuates the attitude of people towards each other as media avatars, and therefore promotes the adoption of hikikomori strategies.

A study of the mental defence mechanisms of young people during the COVID-19 pandemic found that projection was the dominant defence mechanism: 32.60% of respondents chose this method of coping with psychological pressures. This means that the individual perceives her/his own negative attitudes, feelings, and moods as external pressures on her/him from others. Consequently, there is a motivation to avoid this "imperfect

and evil world that does not understand her / him" within the walls of her / his room. The regression (18.47%) and displacement (16.30%) scales rank second and third respectively, consequently, it shows that young people tend to refer to stages of their psychological development that have already been traversed and pretend that there are no psychologically traumatic problems to deal with. This data indicates a motivation to run away from problems rather than solve them constructively, and hence also significant markers of the adoption of hikikomori strategies by Ukrainian youth.

Studies of the typical conflict behaviour of young Ukrainians also show us similar trends. So, the vast majority of young men (40.21%) tend to avoid conflict situations, which means that they are motivated to withdraw from an active life process, not to defend their own interests, and consequently perceive the world as evil and unfair, from which it would be logical to alienate themselves. The second significant cohort of young people (35.86%) tends to adapt to conflict situations, which means they do nothing constructive about their own psychological discomfort, only perpetuating it. Consequently, they are also specifically "running away" from the difficulties of finding their place in society and finding their place within it. The scales of compromise, rivalry and cooperation – indicators that speak to the respondents' active interaction with others – are significantly lower in percentage terms at 18.47%, 16.30% and 13.04% respectively.

The study of failure avoidance levels also shows us revealing data. 38.04% of respondents showed an average level of motivation to avoid failure and 27.17% showed a high level, indicating an attempt to prevent situations where the respondent would have to face real evaluation of their actions. There is the same neurotic idealisation of the image of one's phantom "I" that we wrote about earlier, and the orientation towards the inner attitude of "better not to do anything than imperfectly". Consequently, in their fantasies, a young person may think of themselves as professionally perfect/beautiful/smart/popular; the less the individual is inclined to take specific actions in each of these spheres in order to avoid in any way debunking this illusion. The fantasy world of who I am requires not an Encounter with the Other; you can only meet no one in the space of your own room. It should also be emphasised that the propensity to develop hikikomori markers and the level of motivation to avoid failure are directly correlated (established using the Spearman rank correlation criterion), in other words, the more a person is inclined to avoid failure – the greater the level of propensity to exhibit hikikomori markers he demonstrates.

To summarise: the central marker of young Ukrainians' adherence to hikikomori strategies is a tendency to avoid failure and idealisation their

own self-image. Taking into account Iryna Frankova's research (Frankova, 2017), notes that one of the most common factors for a young Ukrainian to join the ranks of hikikomori is also a factor of psychotraumatic situation, we summarize that representatives of Ukrainian youth today fully fall under the general pattern of a young person to join the ranks of hikikomori. When these two factors coincide in a young person's life history and psychotype, the risk of them voluntarily self-closing in the four states even after the COVID-19 pandemic is significantly increased.

Regarding current social realities, issues of potential involvement of Ukrainian youth in the hikikomori ranks are caused by the following moods of Ukrainian youth. First of all, there is a very high level of anxiety among young people about their future in the long term. According to the sociological survey "Young people in Ukraine during COVID-19", 42% of respondents had a moderate level of anxiety and 28% of respondents had a high level of anxiety. 80% of respondents were worried that they or someone close to them might fall ill with COVID-19. According to the survey, we can also identify a decline in interest in the needs and demands of the community: only 13% of respondents have increased interest in the state of their social environment, while at the same time 11% have rather decreased it and 38% of them remain unchanged, at a low level. The same tendency can be seen in relation to the specific actions of the respondents in relation to their communities: for 42% their own involvement in community life has remained unchanged, at a low level, and for 13% it has rather decreased. The involvement of young people in volunteer practices that integrated young people into their social environment and expanded their productive social connections also decreased: in quarantine, 27% of respondents were involved in volunteer practices and 36% in charitable ones; in quarantine, 21% and 27%, respectively. There are also markers of job precarity among young Ukrainians during the pandemic; for example, 43% of respondents indicated that their business was closed or in the process of being closed, and 41% lost their jobs in the informal employment sector. There is also a digitalisation of young people's communication practices, particularly in education and communication (Ostrikova A. et al., 2020).

Conclusions

In summary, the hikikomori problem, or the problem of the voluntary social hermit, which has symbolically been dubbed "The 2030 Problem", has gained a new meaning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

First introduced in Japan as a purely monocultural and specifically social phenomenon in the 1990s, it has gradually spread to the rest of the world as a kind of life strategy that young people have chosen. However, while a relatively small percentage of people belonged to the ranks of hikikomori in the "pre-pandemic" times (the largest number is still in Japan – 1% of the country's population), then, in the face of strict quarantine measures and the requirement for self-isolation by the population of almost the entire globe, it became necessary, in one way or another, to introduce the hikikomori way of life. This forced self-isolation has been a catalyst for the manifestation of markers of hikikomori strategies in people who have not previously demonstrated a desire to self-isolate within the confines of their room. Some researchers point out that the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the threat of contracting the coronavirus, also carries the threat of contracting the 'recluse virus', the effects of which could be just as stunning for people's mental health as their physical well-being.

Among the main factors for a person to join the ranks of hikikomori we can distinguish subjective-psychological and objective-social factors. The first includes the presence in the individual's history of a vivid personal social defeat or episodes which, as a psychotraumatic factor, have blocked the creative vitality of the recipient, as well as tendencies to idealise oneself and society, to expect people around me and myself to act in a certain way, to cultivate an unrealistic, idealised self (neuroticisation). Among the objective-social factors, we highlight the orientation towards a world of fantasy and probability, "synchronous" communication, which does not burden the recipient with long-term emotional ties with a number of obligations, and the primacy of precarious, unsecured and unprotected labour legislation with no long-term prospects in modern society. We emphasise that in a pandemic, objective-social factors have become an imposed given: at the beginning the individual is forced into isolation and forced into a world of fantasy images, maintaining "synchronic" communication and precarious, distant work. Once in these circumstances, one gradually gets used to them, adapts, and if a person had the subjective-psychological background to support hikikomori strategies, it is very likely that in future he/she will voluntarily lock him/herself within the four walls. The attitude to temporality under conditions of pandemic and enforced self-isolation also changes: the attempt to "conserve" that time in which complex ethico-social dilemmas arise, bringing psychological discomfort to the individual, is a great temptation. Time spent in four walls brings with it no visible change, so one is left with the illusion that one is "frozen in place" and can "sit through more than necessary" complex historical events.

Based on the example of Ukrainian youth, we have seen that intrapsychological preconditions for the maintenance of hikikomori strategies in young people exist; we call them markers of hikikomori. Among them are:

1. Low levels of autonomy (7.6%), auto-sympathy (8.69%) and contactiveness (8.69%), the qualities responsible for building the "I-You" communication bridge;

2. Prevalence of mental defence mechanisms such as projection (32.60%), regression (18.47%) and displacement (16.30%), which indicates a tendency either to attribute one's own negative attitudes to the outside world, or not to pay attention to or solve certain problems; this, in turn, reduces the motivation for contact with the outside world;

3. The choice of avoidance (40.21%) and adjustment strategies (35.86%) when conflict situations arise, and hence the cultivation of destructive emotions in oneself and fear of conflict; this also does not motivate to find common ground with the real people around;

4. High level of motivation to avoid failure – 27.17%, indicating a typical hikikomori attitude: "It is better to do nothing than to do imperfectly".

Overall, Ukrainian youth respondents demonstrated a high level of propensity to exhibit hikikomori markers – 40%, and 11% very high level.

Consequently, in reality of the Ukrainian pandemic, the propensity of some Ukrainian youth to join the ranks of hikikomori, even after quarantine requirements have been relaxed, is quite high. As the problem is gradually reaching a global level of prevalence, its solution, on the one hand, must be systematic and balanced, requiring the consolidated efforts of the global community; In particular, dealing with the subjective-psychological and objective-social factors of becoming a hikikomori, as we have described above. On the other side, in the realities of each country in the world, this problem will acquire its own specificity and therefore a specialised, unique approach according to the realities of each country is also necessary to deal with it effectively. To find out which specific realities of Ukrainian politics and social life are pushing young people to shut themselves away in their four walls, we will devote our next studies.

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