

Study: 8.1% of Japan secondary school students may be 'Internet addicts'

A government panel said Thursday that 8.1 percent of around 100,000 junior high and high school students polled nationwide are suspected of being "Internet addicts."

Based on the finding, the panel under the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry estimates that some 518,000 students in schools nationwide suffer from the addiction, which can trigger health-related problems, including sleep disruptions.

The first-ever national study on Internet addiction among junior high and high school students was conducted between last October and March.

The research team, led by Nihon University professor Takashi Oida, sent questionnaires to around 140,000 students nationwide through their schools to ask how they use the Internet. The team received about 98,000 responses.

Generally, junior high school students range in age from 13 to 15, while high school students are aged between 16 to 18.

Team member Susumu Higuchi, an authority on addictions and director of the state-run Kurihama Medical and Addiction Center in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture, warned that Internet addiction can cause health problems, including sleep disruptions, and can also have negative mental effects.

Based on international criteria to measure Internet addiction, the team asked eight questions, including whether the respondents have ever felt they need to extend the number of hours to use the Internet to gain satisfaction, whether they have ever failed to stop using the Internet, and whether they have faced difficulties maintaining good relations with family or friends because of their Internet use.

Of the respondents, the 8.1 percent who were judged "addicted users" numbered 7,952.

Among them, 23.2 percent said they had difficulties falling asleep, while 15.6 percent said they wake up during the night.

To a multiple choice question regarding what kind of Internet services they use, about 69.2 percent of the entire respondents said they look for random information and news, while 64.4 percent said they check YouTube and other video sites. Some 62.5 percent said they send and receive emails, while 33.4 percent said they check Facebook pages and Twitter. A total of 28.2 percent said they read and write blogs or message boards, while another 20.2 percent said they use online games.

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