

Some young people may be spending all day, every day on the internet, closeted away from the outside world

Julia Horton

Thousands of Scottish teenagers are hiding away in their bedrooms for months or years and communicating only online – even with their parents, according to new research.

The so-called hidden youth phenomenon, which has been increasingly reported across Asia, has now been found in Scotland through a groundbreaking UK investigation.

A study at Glasgow University interviewed 20 young people north of the border and a dozen from Hong Kong, mostly teenage boys, who routinely spend all day, every day in their rooms gaming and on internet forums.

Many of the Scots youths said that they would rather interact with their parents via social networks too, instead of having face-to-face conversations in the family home.

The university's social policy expert Mark Wong said the hidden youth demographic in Scotland withdrew from traditional society because the youngsters felt "hopeless" about their prospects, as they faced exclusion from school and work in a time of austerity.

Wong, a lecturer in social and public policy who grew up in Hong Kong, said: "Young people in Scotland, especially those with lower qualifications, feel very pushed out by society, alienated and marginalised with low-pay, low-skill and short-term jobs making them pessimistic about the future."

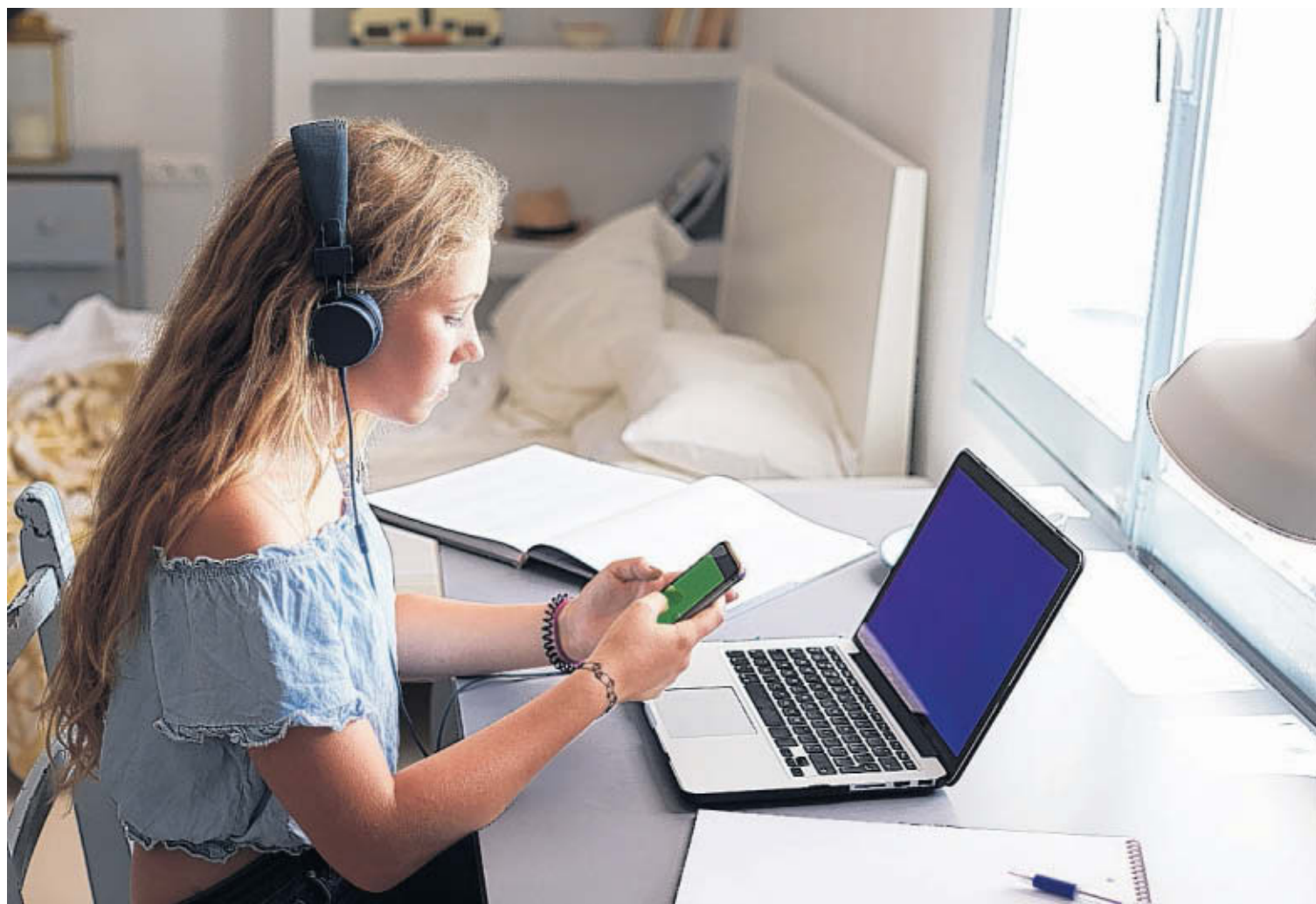
"A lot of them said they preferred to speak to parents and family members that they lived with online. They might be just downstairs, but the young person would prefer to communicate through a Facebook message to discuss things like what they want for dinner."

"It's hard to estimate but I'd suggest there are thousands of hidden youths in Scotland, given figures on how many are not in education, training or work. And everywhere I present this research someone puts a hand up and says they have a young person like that at home."

More than a million young people in Japan are reported to be hiding away, with numbers in Hong Kong estimated to have more than doubled from 18,500 in 2007 to more than 41,000 by 2014.

While previous studies raised concerns about the reclusive nature of hidden youth, Wong said young Scots described finding a real sense of community and solace through technology and

GETTY



There are concerns that Scottish teenagers who feel marginalised have retreated to an online world in the comfort of their bedrooms

Fears for Scotland's 'hidden teenagers'

social networks, which he said were a consequence rather than a cause of their behaviour.

Young people also learnt valuable social and work skills online, such as teamwork from gaming, said Wong. He urged authorities and families to help the "digital native" generation re-engage by communicating more with them online, suggesting parents tried to build on messages about daily routines such as meals to develop broader conversations.

Scottish psychologist Cynthia McVey warned that the behaviour was unhealthy mentally and physically. She

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Young people feel pushed out

said: "It sounds almost like a depression to me. If they are solely interacting with others online and have no physical contact, not even a consoling or celebratory hug, they might miss the physical and visual cues which people use to convey emotion. Even using something like Skype, they will not quite get the real feel for a person."

McVey was sceptical that the problem was widespread here but said that the "interesting" study called for further research to find out.

Nearly one in every 10 young Scots is not in education, training or employ-

ment (8.9%) – equating to about 19,000 (8.9% of 217,490)

The umbrella body the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, said that councils took their responsibilities to young people "very seriously" and supported them in "many different ways dependent on their needs and circumstances".

The Scottish government said the wellbeing of young people was an "absolute priority" and it continued to take action to provide every young person with the support needed to "reach their full potential".

SNP to launch latest economic case for split

John Boothman

The SNP is to set out a new economic case for Scottish independence with the long-awaited publication this week of the work of a growth commission led by former RBS economist Andrew Wilson.

The report, commissioned 18 months ago and repeatedly delayed, aims to help the nationalists make a more credible case for Scotland going it alone than the vision that failed to win majority support in the 2014 independence referendum.

On the crucial issue of currency, Nicola Sturgeon has ruled out Scotland using the euro, with other options including sticking with sterling or creating a Scottish pound. The commission will also set out proposals to boost the Scottish economy using existing devolved powers after decades of sluggish growth and a structural deficit.

While the SNP has long

pointed to the examples of Norway and Ireland to inspire Scots, the commission is said to have looked closely at New Zealand as a model.

Insiders say it is the most expensive piece of research commissioned by a party in Scotland, costing more than £120,000 of SNP funds.

Conservative finance spokesman Murdo Fraser said: "There's a huge burden of expectation. But from the past 11 years in office, there's no evidence that the SNP understands the economic problems or possesses the boldness to deal with them."

Labour's economic spokeswoman Jackie Baillie said: "Nicola Sturgeon has backed herself into a corner over how she has handled questions of a second referendum. The commission will not deliver a credible economic case for independence; the question Nicola Sturgeon really cares about is if it will reduce the internal pressure she is under in her own party."

Rich need record £100m to get on list

Ian Coxon

A fortune of £100m, the highest on record, is now needed for an individual to be one of the 100 wealthiest people in Scotland.

The entry point for The Sunday Times Scottish Rich List 2018, published online today, is up by £18m, or 21.9%, from the previous record of £82m last year.

This year the combined fortunes of the 100 wealthiest Scots total £34.53bn, up 5% on the 2017 record total of £32.86bn. There are 13 newcomers, all male, in the

2018 Scottish Rich List, with combined wealth of £1.7bn.

The richest new entrant, ranked 28th and worth £262m, is James Watt, aged 36, co-founder of the Fraserburgh brewery BrewDog.

Among the highest ranked of the 12 women in Scotland's richest 100, at 21st, is 35-year-old Oban-born Susie Wolff who shares a £322m motor sport fortune with her husband Toto, 46.

Find Scotland's richest 100 at thesundaytimes.co.uk/scottishrichlist



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