More than 6,00,000 Japanese people over 40 are living in complete isolation from society, staying at home for more than six months without social interaction, the government estimated on Friday.

The phenomenon is so widespread in Japan it even has its own name — *hikikomori* — defined as someone who does not go to school or work for six months and does not interact with anyone outside his family during that time.

The figure is higher than the estimated number of *hikikomori* under the age of 39, thought to be around 5,41,000 according to a similar government survey published in 2016. Many of the *hikikomori* are thought to be financially dependant on their ageing parents.

Rika Ueda, who works for a non-profit group that supports parents of *hikikomori* children, said she was not surprised by the survey. “The government data backs our own survey showing there are many older *hikikomori*,” said Ms. Ueda. “But we were unaware that there are those in their 60s,” she said. “It shows that Japanese society is tough to live in. *Hikikomori* people would rather stay at home without meeting anyone,” she said.

Ms. Ueda argued that high-pressure, conformist and workaholic Japan places a huge amount of pressure on individuals.