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(This article was written four years ago. If I get a chance to add something to it, I will certainly mention about the 2011 riots in the UK and the increasing crime by the youth of this country. Dr. A. Kumar)

WHERE OUR TEENAGERS ARE GOING?

What happened to the British teenagers? Perhaps they are among the most badly behaved in Europe. Of course, it is not only the opinion of the British elderly but a study by think-tank the Institute for Public Policy Research also suggests the same.

It is an admitted fact now that in Britain we fear our teenagers: the yobs, the hoodies and the street gangs who leaves no stone unturned in terrorising the neighbourhoods. "Kids hanging around" is now regarded as the greatest social nuisance of our age. As the new IPPR report puts it: "Commentators fear that British youth is on the verge of mental breakdown, at risk from anti-social behaviour, self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse. These concerns are, to an extent, borne out."

Why? Isn't it true that today more British teenagers leave school with good qualifications and go to university than ever before? That the youth unemployment has fallen dramatically in the last 25 years as per the government statistics. That today's parents are richer than ever before in this country? That young people have access to an extraordinary range of activities and opportunities which were never available to the older generation? Then why the mental well-being of our teenagers and adolescents is among the worst in Europe: one in 10 teenage girls has self-harmed. Not only that, in terms of general health, the child obesity is increasing. Our youngsters are more consumerist in their outlook than the Americans.

It has always been the concern of the older generations to take care of the adolescents and the teenagers, but what this research does is put the UK's experience in an international context - and the conclusions are very distressing. European comparisons, put our youngsters at the top of bad behaviour, and it has been concluded that the causes are cultural. Southern European nations with a strong Catholic tradition and a focus on the family do not share the same level of delinquency. Most of the Scandinavian countries with a large welfare state and a strong sense of civic engagement also perform much better on the scale of behaviour. But in the UK, where we have seen big changes in family structures - rising rates of divorce and single parenthood - and where the state traditionally resists intervening in domestic life, young people have been left to their own ways and means.

An average UK teenager believes in "Hanging out with mates". In contrast to their European counterparts, they spend far more time with their peers than with adults where they miss out on the cultural lessons on personal and social development.

Remember the days of young men leaving school at the first opportunity to hunt for a job, to support his or her family have all but disappeared. Those young men today are struggling to cope in a world which demands high levels of socialisation. The IPPR report claims that social skills are as important, if not more important, than the academic qualifications our children are urged to achieve. The key is that youngsters grow up in a warm, nurturing environment with plenty of adult interaction. It is also true and statistically proved that children brought up by two married, biological parents do better than those from single-parent families, people cohabiting or the foster parents et al. The IPPR report amounts to is a challenge of traditional youth policy. It points out that youngsters who go to a youth club are 6% more likely to smoke in adulthood, 1% more likely to be a single parent, 1% more likely to be a victim of crime and 5% more likely to have no qualifications than those who don't. By contrast, those that went to structured sports or community centres are 3% less likely to be depressed; 5% less likely to be single, separated or divorced; 3% less likely to be in social housing and 2% less likely to have no qualifications.

We know the causes, we are familiar with all the truth and the facts, we understand more about the values and traditions, then what exactly is stopping us to show our youngsters the right path. The conclusions are obvious - but far from easy. We need to repair the damage done by a lot of freedom; socially as well as legally, the elders should stop looking at their own personal and sexual life priorities so that the gap between the adolescents and the adults is minimised. That is not going to happen in a hurry but as the IPPR report puts it: "Young people who do not have access to the factors that develop their non-cognitive abilities are increasingly vulnerable to failure, while their better socialised peers will increasingly succeed."

Too much consumerism, the rate race for money and other materialistic possessions, the unchecked and unregulated TV channels and print media, the menace of pornography available 24 hours and several such other social factors will have to be streamlined by the Social scientists added with the political will to make changes, get the best out of our teenagers so that the future of Britain is secure.

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