

LONDON — British children are trapped in a cycle of compulsive consumption as parents shower them with gifts to make up for their long working hours, **a UNICEF report concluded Wednesday. The study, commissioned after British children were ranked by the United Nations as the unhappiest in the industrialised world, blamed the results on a culture of "brand bullying" and a lack of family interaction.**

"Parents in the UK almost seemed to be locked into a system of consumption which they knew was pointless but they found hard to resist," said Agnes Nairn, the report's author.

"While children would prefer time with their parents to heaps of consumer goods, parents seem to find themselves under tremendous pressure to purchase a surfeit of material goods for their children," she added.

The report's researchers quizzed hundreds of children in Britain, Spain and Sweden to discover what made them happy.

"This compulsive consumption was almost completely absent in both Spain and Sweden," Nairn noted.

Children told researchers that their happiness relied upon spending time with family and friends and having "plenty to do outdoors".

The report blamed British parents for using television "as a babysitter" and for allowing children to play computer games for long periods, depriving them of fresh air.

Children's Minister Sarah Teather said: "We share UNICEF's concerns about the rise of consumerism among children, and it's worrying to see that in some cases parents are under the same pressures. "We are clear this needs to be tackled and are currently working with businesses and regulators to implement the recommendations from (Chief Executive of the Mothers' Union) Reg Bailey's review on commercialisation and sexualisation of children," she added.

### **Parents 'need to spend time not money'**

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A charity has called for a ban on TV advertising aimed at under-12s, following a study that found many parents feel under pressure to buy their children expensive clothes and gadgets.

The study for Unicef, which was conducted on 250 children from Spain, Sweden and the UK, found that UK parents spend the least amount of time with their children, due in part to long working hours. In contrast, in Spain and Sweden, family time is prioritised and parents do not feel such a need to own material goods, the study found.

In light of the findings, the charity has urged the Government to adopt the Swedish model of banning television advertising aimed at children, whilst encouraging parents to work fewer hours.

They also issued a warning to councils against closing children's playgrounds and other local facilities. Unicef UK's executive director David Bull said: "Right now politicians are grappling with the aftermath of the riots and what they say about our society, culture and families.

"It is vital that those in power listen to what children and their families are saying about life in the UK.

"They need to make sure parents earn enough to spend fewer hours in work and more time with their children, protect children's play facilities from spending cuts and consider reforming the laws controlling advertising to children."

*In response, Children's Minister Sarah Teather said: "We know strong, stable families are the bedrock of a successful society. We want to make sure all families have the help and support they need.*

*"That's why we are consulting on plans to help parents better balance work and family life through more flexible and generous parental leave and flexible working. We are also looking at ways to give families better access to advice and support on parenting.*

*"We share Unicef's concerns about the rise of consumerism among children, and it's worrying to see that in some cases parents are under the same pressures."*

## **Long Hours Cause Materialistic Parenting**

A report by a worldwide charity into European parenting, has claimed the increase in working hours in the UK have caused a "materialistic culture" as parents don't spend enough time with their families. The report, published on Tuesday evening, involved speaking to hundreds of families in the UK, Sweden and Spain. It found that parents in the UK said they felt "tremendous pressure" from society to buy goods for their children; most acutely in low-income homes.

Although the report said UK parents were committed to their children, they lost out on time together as a family due in part to long working hours.

"They often try to make up for this by buying their children gadgets and clothes," the report said. *The findings of the report confirm the views of commentators who attributed this year's London riots to "out of control" consumerism and materialism.*

*In August, a leading City broker and global head of research at international brokerage firm Tullett Prebon, Tim Morgan, blamed an "out-of-control consumerist ethos" for the rioting, saying: "The dominant ethos of 'I buy, therefore I am' needs to be challenged by a shift of emphasis from material to non-material values."*

*The Unicef report supported the idea that the riots, which saw thousands of London teenagers engage in unprecedented looting, could have been caused by over-consumerism.*

"Right now politicians are grappling with the aftermath of the riots and what they say about our society, culture and families," said David Bull, the Unicef UK Executive Director. "The research findings provide important insights, and it is vital that those in power listen to what children and their families are saying about life in the UK."

The report added: "Consumer culture in the UK contrasts starkly with Sweden and Spain, where family time is prioritised, children and families are under less pressure to own material goods and children have greater access to activities out of the home."

In light of its research, Unicef UK said it was calling on the UK Government to encourage businesses to pay a living wage, so parents didn't have to take on several jobs, insist local authorities assess the impact of public spending cuts on children, and follow Sweden's ban on advertisements being shown before, during or after programmes aimed at under-12s.

The research by Ipsos MORI for Unicef UK was a follow up to the charity's report in 2007 that ranked the UK bottom in child well-being compared to other industrialised nations.



## Parents spoiling their children with toys and designer labels By John Bingham in London Wednesday September 14 2011

Parents are trapping their children in a cycle of "compulsive consumerism" by showering them with toys and designer labels instead of spending time with them, a UN report has found.

The report by Unicef warns that materialism has come to dominate family life in the UK as parents "pointlessly" amass goods for their children to compensate for their long working hours.

*The children themselves said that spending time with their families made them happier.*

Unicef suggested that the obsession with consumer goods was one of the underlying causes of the riots and widespread looting which gripped England last month.

The organisation called for the British government to ban advertising aimed at children under the age of 12 and to encourage parents to work fewer hours and spend more time at home.

It also warned against closing playgrounds and other facilities.

The study, which was jointly funded by the UK Department for Education, was commissioned after an earlier Unicef report ranked Britain the worst country in the industrialised world to be a child. It prompted David Cameron to coin the expression "broken Britain" and fuelled calls for new family-friendly policies.

*In the latest study, researchers asked hundreds of children in the UK, Sweden and Spain, about their ideas of happiness and success. They found that children in Sweden and Spain, where consumerism was less deeply embedded, were significantly happier. In those countries, family time is prioritised and people feel less pressure to own material goods, the study found.*

Parents in the UK work longer hours and are simply "too tired" to play with their children.

Dr Agnes Nairn, the author of the report, said: "Parents in the UK almost seemed to be locked into a system of consumption which they knew was pointless but they found hard to resist.

*"While children would prefer time with their parents to heaps of consumer goods, their parents seem to find themselves under tremendous pressure to purchase a surfeit of material goods for their children. This compulsive consumption was almost completely absent in both Spain and Sweden."*

[Sarah Teather](#), the British Children's Minister, said: "We share Unicef's concerns about the rise of consumerism among children, and it's worrying to see that in some cases parents are under the same pressures." She said the government was working to implement earlier recommendations on the issue.

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- John Bingham in London