

# Child rights in the uk



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Children's rights are poorly served in the United Kingdom. The recent UNICEF report has deemed UK as the worst place for the brought up of children and adolescents. UNICEF studied about the well-being and safety of children, adolescents and youths in the wealthy western countries. The reports were heartbreaking and imply that the present 'electronic world' (particularly the UK) is no longer a better place for children and adolescents. In spite of the attempts of children welfare societies and other children care initiatives, children are loosing their basic rights even and are getting sunk into drugs, sex and other wrong activities. Children are aliens to the developed world (Brooks, 2006) <sup>[1]</sup> .

British children are more likely to use drugs and have sex, compared to the children of any other country (Freeman, 1996) <sup>[2]</sup> . There is an increasing lack of security and contentment for children and adolescents in the UK. There is big difference between the ways and experiences of UK children and the children of other developed countries. Only US may surpass UK in the total number of crimes related to children. The government of UK neglected all these reports, calling them 'outdated' and 'historic', and also commented that these report are based on the situation that existed before the implementation of the Children's Act 2004 (Freeman, 1996). However a careful look would make anybody understand that the state of children is not better in Britain even now. Numerous other studies, like the one initiated by *Save the Children and the Nuffield Foundation, Institute of Public Policy Research* , and other organizations clearly stated the same trend and confirmed that children and adolescents are deprived of even their basic rights. Children in the UK still remain in poverty, oppression, and distress and

the problem doubled to what it was in 1979 (Freeman, 1996). Britain has the highest teenage birth-rate compared to other developed countries of Europe (Freeman, 1996). Reports say that this degradation of the quality of the children and adolescents is not just because of computer games, fast food and other aspects of the modern period. Poverty and other sufferings equally contribute to this plight of children and adolescents. Cultural factors also play a major role in this big crisis.

The society in the UK does not really value their children. Right from the Victorian era children are least valued in the society and are corralled into classrooms and left without necessary guidance. These children when they become young do not contribute directly to the economy and have zero voice in the political process. Children are easily criminalized (as per the status assigned to them by the media) and are never given proper guidance to bring them to the mainstream of the society (Brooks, 2006).

The more the children are exploited the more panicky their behaviour is. The UK is disastrously infected with materialism and modernity that has furnished a hell for children in this nation (Freeman, 1996). Parenthood and its values have disappeared from the society. Society is now ruled by modern 'no child' theory that supports the selfhood, freedom and autonomy of selfish couples. Begetting children has become a choice as childless family is found to be economically stronger. Families are encouraged to have kids just for filling future jobs in the nation. Education has become a mere investment for earning money. Schools are grounds of competitions. Modern teaching methods create more losers than winners. Children report nothing

but depression, failure and worries and opt to run towards the path that give them temporary relief and satisfaction (Brooks, 2006).

Research reports say that Britain's children are the unhappiest children in the West (Freeman, 1996). They drink most, smoke most and have sex at very early age. They hate schools, neglect their health, and are least satisfied in their life. They never eat meals with their parents and are always out of their house. They lack good company and guidance. According to Professor Bradshaw (from a children welfare association), " Between 1979 and 1999, children were relatively neglected in Britain, child poverty rates rose rapidly, those living in workless households soared and the numbers not in education or training also rose" (Brooks, 2006).

Children in the UK are least confident about the path in which they are moving; their own perception itself is poor. When a group of teenagers were asked to rate their own health, majority of them rated it as fair and poor. They also opined that they are not enjoying their school life and personal life. On an assessment about the welfare of children in the countries of Europe, various factors like child safety, relative poverty, educational achievement, relationships with parents, drug misuse were considered. Netherlands and The Czech Republic were found to be in top position for child well being, with Britain occupying the bottom position. Britain topped in teenage pregnancy rate and teenage drug addiction rate (Freeman, 1996). The government of the UK missed its target to cut short child poverty in the year 2004-05 (with respect to the 1998-99 levels). The plans to eliminate child poverty by 2020 are also not seriously considered. Even though there are not many children

who live in absolute poverty there are thousands of young ones who are still in relative poverty (Brooks, 2006).

A research was conducted to analyse adolescent drug misuse and parental conflict among black and ethnic minority groups in the UK. The research consisted of personal interviews, surveys, questionnaire answering and other sections for collecting first hand data from adolescents (from various places, schools, colleges etc). After the initial data collection, data was analyzed for getting the exact level of adolescent drug misuse among the racially and ethnically backward groups residing in UK. Data was collected from adolescents of age group 18-20 years. Adolescents were given questionnaires to fill in. Questions are prepared in such a way that the answers would reveal how adolescent drug misuse is related to the parental conflict. The study also included surveys for adolescents about their habits and traits, assessing their family background and relationships. The research brought out the result that adolescent drug misuse is directly related to parental conflict in the UK. The study confirmed that family problems are the real reason behind the drug misuse among adolescents of lower ethnic groups. Many children said that the kinds of relationship they maintain with their parents are too poor. They had experienced physical as well as mental assault or torture in their early childhood life. This reveals the ill-privileged condition of children in the UK.

Children are mistreated and oppressed by parents, relatives, caretakers and others. Mistreatment is mental as well as physical. Children undergo torture, sexual abuse and emotional abuse at younger age. In some families, children are not given proper care and they are not treated properly (Vittachi, 1989)

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[3] . Parents are preoccupied with their works or are under various malpractices, and seldom give any time for their children. There are cases when children are completely neglected. This is when the parents or the caretakers fail to offer necessary care, food, clothing, shelter and other requirements for the child. For some parents, drugs are more important than their kids. Such people may also make their children use these drugs (compelling children to use drugs). Children are nuisances for another group of parents. All these results in severe child abuse issues. In many families in UK, parents get divorced; children stay with one of the parents or with relatives or other caretakers (Brooks, 2006). They undergo physical and mental abuse and even big assaults. Such children are deprived of parent's love and care and lose a good family environment. Relatives and caretakers are least bothered about their welfare and torture them to maximum. These abused and neglected children suffer from various mental and physical problems that lead them to wrong paths. Some children are exposed to drugs in their childhood itself since their parents use drugs. Children who are brought up in families where there are frequent fights will naturally have fighting mood or other bad characteristics (Brooks, 2006). Also if parents are having criminal background and other unlawful practices, children who are brought up in that environment also will have criminal characters and behaviours. Children are abused in different ways and are made deprived of all their childhood happiness and privileges. They are troubled and exploited and are subjected to mental and physical exploitations. There were incidents in which children were beaten, burnt and killed even (Vittachi, 1989). In a particular case, a petition was filed in Waukesha County Juvenile Court in order to keep 3 girl children in protective custody as their drug-addicted

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father troubled them making them accompany him during a crack cocaine binge. In another incident in 2004, a 9-month-old boy died accidentally and later doctor's testified that the child's injuries were as a result of smothering and other physical assaults (Vittachi, 1989). The physician who did the autopsy came with the conclusion that his head and neck were affected with smothering and blunt force trauma. The child was found breathless and blue as a result of consistent physical tortures (Vittachi, 1989). His health status was so bad that he suffered from brain haemorrhages and retinal haemorrhages and died in a hospital. The child's parent was charged for ill-treatment and aggravated battery of the child which lead to the child's death.

It is high time that UK listen to the complaints of their children (Archard, 1993) <sup>[4]</sup>. Children must be given a coherent social identity that would make them have a good involvement in the real world. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child reported (five years back) that the UK is an absolute failure in their child welfare programs (Franklin, 1995) <sup>[5]</sup>. The committee put forth few recommendations out of which very few were implemented. All the 76 recommendations of the committee should be put in action and a right-based approach should be adopted for the welfare of the children (similar to that undertaken by Sweden). All legislations must be assessed to ensure that they do not bring any negative impact on children (Franklin, 1995). Children must be diverted away from antisocial behaviour and must be given protection from physical punishment like adults. Alcohol, drugs and other similar things must never be sold cheaply so that children will have less access to it (Franklin, 1995). Persuasive advertising and sex ads must be

rooted out from the society. Sex education must be open as it is in countries like Netherlands. Britain should carefully look into the underlying causes of their failure to raise happy, healthy children. Children who suffer abuses in collapsed families should be saved from their homes and must be placed in a safe environment. Shelter must be offered to such ill-fated children, providing them all the necessary care and protection. They must be kept away from their parents unless it is safe for them to stay with their parents (Brooks, 2006). Children must be kept in healthy environments, away from disturbances and abuses. Social workers, advocates and law enforcement officers must help government in implementing these measures. The abused children will suffer from various physical and psychological problems (Franklin, 1995). They must be evaluated and treated accordingly, assessing their physical and mental health. They need to be kept in healthy environment where they can interact with other children. The concerned officers (or social workers) should monitor the children, concerning their health needs and other needs. Children must also be given good counselling, advices and classes that will help them come out of the shock they suffered. The concerned officers should also proceed with other legal formalities of the child's custody. Efforts should also be taken for reuniting the child's family if it is possible (Brooks, 2006). All these measures would help upgrade the rights of children in the UK.

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## Footnotes

[1] L. Brooks, The Story of Childhood, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2006.

[2] M. Freeman (ed), Children's Rights: A Comparative Perspective, Dartmouth, 1996.

[3] A. Vittachi, Stolen Childhood: In Search of the Rights of the Child, Cambridge: Polity, 1989.

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[4] D. Archard, *Children, Rights and Childhood*, London: Routledge, 1993.

[5] B. Franklin (ed), *Handbook of Children's Rights: Comparative Policy and Practice*, London: Routledge, 1995.