

Survey shows cost-of-living crisis making record number of UK youngsters prone to exploitation



London, July 3 (RHC)-- A new poll shows a record number of British youngsters are at risk of being exploited by criminal gangs this summer as the country's cost-of-living crisis has rendered families unable to afford holiday activities for their children.

The grave warning was issued by Barnardo's, which is the UK's largest children's charity, The Guardian reported. It said the poll results show that 60 percent of British parents are having a hard time either affording youth clubs, where their children could spend their time during the summer, or taking time off work to go on family outings over the six-week school break.

This makes the youngsters prone to exploitation by sexual predators online and criminal gangs on the street, the charity added. "Children are particularly at risk this summer. Through our frontline work, we know that the cost-of-living crisis is increasing the risks of child exploitation," said chief executive of Barnardo's, Lynn Perry.

"At the moment, the easiest way for the [young people I support] to get extra money to have a bit of food, hot water, [and] put the electric on, is doing drug dealing," as the cost-of-living crisis continues to push families into poverty, said a frontline worker for the charity.

The new revelation came after another survey of 1,191 parents and 729 children aged between 11 and 17 found one in 10 were worried about encountering criminal gangs in their area over the holiday period.

Meanwhile, Jess Edwards, the charity's senior policy adviser for childhood harms, said youngsters often do not recognize when they are being exploited and "a seemingly simple offer of gifts, food or drink at a time of need can quickly be leveraged by criminals into a cycle of debt or exploitation."

According to the report, the closure of a large number of centers offering free or affordable youth services also plays a part in fostering the crisis.

"Since 2010, 760 youth centers have closed, and real-terms expenditure by councils on youth services has fallen by more than 70%. In some areas, such funding has been obliterated entirely, with seven councils admitting that no money had been allocated to youth services in 2020–21," Barnardo's said.

It cited one young person as saying that the issue could be remedied with more youth clubs, adding, "That's what we need. Youth clubs used to be sick (cool) and then one day they disappeared...they just want the kids to be on the street now."

According to the British government data, more than 16,000 children face sexual exploitation in England every year, and at least 27,000 are at risk of being exploited by organised crime gangs. Experts, however, believe that since exploitation is generally hidden, such data reveals only the tip of the iceberg, with thousands more children suffering.

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/327270-survey-shows-cost-of-living-crisis-making-record-number-of-uk-youngsters-prone-to-exploitation>



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