

Consumerism absent among Swedish children

Written by Johan Nylander / AFP

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- [Children in Sweden have best lives](#)

LONDON (AFP) - 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.

Researchers found that consumerism was less deeply embedded in Sweden and Spain, which rank significantly higher for the wellbeing of children.

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.

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In Sweden family time was embedded into the "natural rhythm" of daily life with parents sharing mealtimes, fishing trips, sporting events or evenings in with their children.

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.