

The best years of our lives? We don't think so  
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## Teenage girls & boys find the pressures of modern life too much – and adults are not helping, reports Sarah Womack

Depression and insecurity caused by pressures at home, at school and in their social lives, are blighting the lives of young teenage girls & boys, say figures published today.

Their problems are compounded by parents who often provide poor role models and inflict their confused lives on their children, it is claimed.

A survey of 2,000 girls & boys aged 14 and 15 found that they feel under pressure from all sides and are struggling to cope.

Almost four in 10 come from broken homes, and lack of parental support coupled with schoolwork, the availability of alcohol and drugs, bullying and the pressure to look good leaves many depressed.

Six out of 10 feel insecure, with one in 10 describing themselves as "an emotional wreck". Only 41 per cent are reasonably confident.

Nine out of 10 have felt depressed – 42 per cent "regularly" – and more than a third say they are unhappy or miserable. An alarming six per cent feel "life's not worth living". Of the 14 per cent who have had sex, half wish that they had not.

Dorothy Eimon, a senior lecturer in psychology at University College, London, said: "Teenage years were never easy but nowadays the pressure to look right is huge.

"I can remember standing in front of a mirror when I was 13 and thinking, 'Oh God' and deciding the only good thing was that I had wonderfully blonde hair. When I look at photographs of me at that age now I think, 'You were gorgeous'.

"The problem for teenagers nowadays is that the media is full of people who have been reconstructed by cosmetic surgeons to look like Barbie dolls. You don't get to be skinny with such big breasts.



Vicki Chapman feels a 'huge, huge pressure' over exams

"People can also be very unpleasant because it is much more normal to speak your mind, and that has quite damaging effects.

"If you go back 100 years, everyone knew their place and it may have been a depressing thing but it was also a comforting thing."

Tina Radziszewicz, a psychotherapist, said many teenagers had bad role models in their parents.

"We live in a society where adults deal with the stresses of modern life by misusing alcohol and drugs and jumping from one sexual partner to another. Sadly young people are copying what they see around them."

The main reasons teenagers give for feeling worried are "too much pressure to succeed academically" (62 per cent), "too much homework" (84 per cent), a "rise in broken families/divorce" (52 per cent) and "drugs and alcohol too readily available" (42 per cent). They also think there is "too much pressure to look good" (94 per cent).

Four out of 10 come from broken homes (37 per cent) or single parent families and only 32 per cent feel "greatly loved by their parents", according to the Teen Emotional Health Survey 2005 commissioned by Bliss magazine.

Lisa Smosarski, the magazine's editor, said: "Teenagers are expected to cope with a cocktail of broken homes, endless school work, emotional pressures and the availability of drink and drugs. It's a cocktail that is seriously damaging the psyche of teenagers. Adults have inflicted their confused world on children.

"Many teenagers end up acting as relationship counselors to their parents who turn to them for comfort when their relationships fail or they feel disappointed with life.

"Taking on this adult role makes it hard for teenagers to 'be the child' and they no longer feel they can turn to their parents for advice and support without burdening them further."

She said parents were often oblivious to the damage being done to their children. "Ultimately the majority of teenagers with separated parents wish they were still together."

Half of those surveyed whose parents had separated or divorced said their parents' separation had "knocked them emotionally" (44 per cent) and a further one in 10 said they had found it devastating (11 per cent). Four out of 10 say they have not got a happy family.

Yet money is not a problem. Only one per cent of teenagers think their family is poor.

Unsurprisingly, school is a major source of stress. Many teenagers think they are expected to over-perform academically.

Bullying is also a major issue. Two in three say they have been bullied because of their physical appearance (65 per cent), because they are intelligent (33 per cent) or because of where they live (nine per cent).

When they feel upset, teenagers say they turn to their friends, because they are the only ones who will listen, or to their diaries.