بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Secularism's Nurturing of Materialistic 'God-Free' Societies has Fueled the Epidemic of Mental Health Problems in Children

News:

Earlier this month, a *Guardian* article stated that over a quarter of a million children in England are receiving mental health care for problems such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. According to the piece, based on figures from NHS Digital, the UK's health service's statistical arm, almost 12,000 boys and girls aged 5 and under are amongst those getting treatment; over 53,000 were aged between 6 and 10; just over 100,000 were between 11-15; and 70,000 were 16-18 years old. The data covered only 60% of mental health trusts in the country. The true figure therefore of children affected by mental health issues in England is estimated to be much higher. The UK children's charity Childline reported that there had been a significant increase in the calls it had received from children affected by mental health problems in recent years, including a record number of those experiencing suicidal thoughts. It had been contacted by almost 20,000 young people in 2015/16 with thoughts of ending their life – more than double the number 5 years ago. This amounts to an average of over 50 suicide counselling sessions everyday across the UK, or 1 every 30 minutes. Professor Dame Sue Bailey, Chair of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition and former president of the UK's Royal College of Psychiatrists stated that unless urgent action is taken to help today's children, *"we are going to have a tsunami of children with mental health problems being taken into adulthood."* Bailey also said that 55% of headteachers in the country are reporting large numbers of pupils suffering with anxiety and distress and that rates for self-harm are at a 5 year high.

Comment:

The causes of mental health problems in children, as with adults, are complex and multifactorial, and include possible underlying physical medical conditions. However, it is undeniable that the soaring increase and epidemic scale of these problems in children in secular states such as the UK is due to the host of social, moral and economic problems afflicting these nations, caused by secularism's marginalization of religion within societies and detachment of God from the affairs of life.

For example, within secular capitalist states, materialism dominates societies such that value and status has come to be defined on the possessions and wealth of individuals rather than their good character and the goodness they bring to their communities. As a consequence, those youth who are unable to keep up financially with the latest trends in phones, clothes, or electronic goods can feel inadequate or are ridiculed, bullied or ostracized by peers which can have psychological consequences. This domination of materialism and the pursuit of superficialities has also created a spiritual void in people's lives.

Furthermore, within societies where man rather than God is sovereign, standards of success and the expectations and goals that individuals are supposed to aspire to and achieve are set by the limited and fickle minds of human beings rather than the All-Knowing, All-Wise Creator of the Universe (swt). Many of these expectations and measures of success are therefore irrational, unrealistic, and oppressive, and furthermore, the youth face huge pressures due to constantly seeking the approval of others in life. For example, many mental health problems in children have been attributed to the immense pressures they face by parents to excel academically due to success being defined by the educational grades and degrees achieved as well as the profession one enters. Many who are unable to meet these expectations feel like failures, often leading to depressive symptoms and even suicide attempts. In addition, 'social comparisons' that children make on Facebook and other forms

of social media between themselves and others can have an extremely detrimental impact on their self-esteem and confidence. Popularity and self-worth, for example, has become associated with the number of likes, shares, or followers one has on social media accounts. Additionally, children are made to feel inadequate due to comparing their lives to the so-called 'picture-perfect lives' portrayed by peers or others online which are a distortion of the true reality. This is especially true in regards to young girls comparing their appearance to the images of girls and women they see on social media, TV or in magazines and feeling ugly if they are unable to measure up to the unrealistic standards in beauty or fashion presented to them as the marks of success. Research by the organization *Girlguiding* found that girls in the UK were suffering from a crisis in body confidence; 40% aged between 7 and 21 were unhappy with their bodies; 15% said they felt embarrassed or ashamed by the way they looked; and 40% aged between 7 and 10 felt that they were not pretty enough. All this has a crushing impact on the self-worth of young girls and fuels eating disorders.

And finally, secularism's belief of detaching God from life, has eroded the concept of accountability to a Higher Power in one's actions. Individuals therefore resort to their own whims and desires to decide what's right and wrong, living for the here and now and seeing no consequence in the next life for the actions they engage in. Many youth who carry this mentality will therefore bully others if they feel like it gives them a sordid sense of pleasure or power – an issue which is a huge problem within many secular states. Infact half of child suicides in Britain are related to bullying, such as the recent tragic case of 11 year old Asad Khan who hanged himself due to being bullied at school. Additionally, individuals pursuing their selfish desires and sexual freedoms over accountability to a Creator has fueled the physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as well as the breakdown of family life – all of which has had a hugely detrimental effect on the mental state of the young and contributed to the burgeoning crisis of mental health problems in children.

In contrast to all of this, Islam places God as central in the life of individuals and society. Hence it defines success as gaining the Pleasure of the Creator rather than acquiring the superficial possessions or status of this life, or gaining popularity amongst the people. It also sets the realistic expectations of Allah (swt) as the goal of what to aspire to, liberating youth from the pressures of seeking approval from others or struggling to achieve the shallow unrealistic and changing expectations of human beings. And finally, it places accountability to God and the need to live life according to His Limits and Laws, as well as the concept of punishment or reward in the Hereafter for every action one performs, as a central belief in the mind of the believer. It is this mentality that creates the elevated personality who treats others with kindness and care, stands against injustice, and avoids any action that could oppress others, as well as one that guards his chastity and fulfils all duties to God, including taking care of all the physical and emotional needs of one's children. All this protects the family unit, the rights and wellbeing of children, and nurtures a healthy mental state and a safe and happy environment for the young.

﴿فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُم مِّنِّى هُدًى فَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَ هُدَاىَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَىٰ * وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِى فَإِنَّ لَهُ ۥ مَعِيشَةً ضَنكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ ۥ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ أَعْمَىٰ﴾

"So there will surely come to you guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, he shall not go astray nor be unhappy. But whosoever turns away from My Reminder (i.e. neither believes in this Qur'an nor acts on its orders, etc.) verily, for him is a life of hardship, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection." [Ta-Ha: 123-124]

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