
What are Cuban Teenagers Like?

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The very successful TV series "Calendario" has placed in the spotlight a sector of the population that in two or three decades will hold the reins of this country: Teenagers.

And, precisely in the context of the International Congress of Researchers on Childhood, Adolescence, and Youth, concluded on the last day of March, the volume Adolescents and Cuban youth in the Family and Couple Environment was presented. Systematization of an experience (2015-2019), by the authors Ana Isabel Peñate Leiva, Raida Semanat Trutie and Odette del Risco Sánchez.

Even when "Calendario" circles in red various problems of this age group, the aforementioned text -coinciding, as a trend, with the audiovisual product -, reveals scientific results, based on qualitative and quantitative inquiries, which with greater precision can serve as a beacon to decision makers, especially in the present, when science is key words for good governance.

Mom, the Confidante

The way in which Cuban adolescents communicate with members of their families, with parents in particular, was one of the issues addressed by the researchers, who worked with a population of just over 1,400 subjects, ages 12-34 years old, residents in the provinces of Artemisa, Havana, Ciego de Ávila, Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo.

The results that we reproduce here are those referring to the age groups between 12 and 14 years old and 15-19 years old, related to the stages of early adolescence and adolescence.

These are some of the results on how boys communicate with their relatives:

-The mother turns out to be the main confidant for both groups, although this declines as age increases. This may, experts comment, could constitute evidence about the different meaning of the different father figures for adolescents, in addition to possibly responding to the gender stereotype about the roles of motherhood/fatherhood. "Mothers, as the main "educators" of their offspring, with "more time" to devote to attending to and satisfying each and every one of their children's needs; they continue to be socially demanded for it", they say.

-Girls confess more to their mothers and fathers than boys, while adolescent boys (12-19 years old) exchange more with their fathers than their peers. This could show a certain distance between male parents and their daughters regarding the issues that concern them the most.

-27% of adolescents studied do not confide their intimacies and concerns to any member of the family. As age increases, the conversation with parents or other family members about their concerns, likes, needs, fears and dreams decreases. Which, scholars indicate, could point to the fact that the subsidiary figures are not, for some reason, their main interlocutors.

You listen to me, you respect me

-Most adolescents -and of the entire sample as a whole- recognized that they did not live with manifestations of violence. This is stated by 67.2% of early adolescents and 62.5% of the rest of adolescents.

-However, those who do live with this type of behavior reported that shouting and punishment are the main manifestations to which they are subjected.

-Given the differences of opinion with adolescents from 12 to 14 years old, the reaction of the family is usually to impose their criteria (in 38.6% of the sample); while the discussions are the main way (39.1%) to resolve the difference in criteria with the group of 15-19 years. "The rights to freedom of expression and decision-making of adolescents in situations that are related to them are frequently violated," comment the authors of the study.

-The main situations that generate conflicts between family and adolescent:

For the 12-14 years old group and according to them they refer: my group of friends (26%), my way of speaking (23.7%), my lack of interest in studying (15.3%) and the way I dress (13.6%).

For the 15-19 years old group: my way of speaking (18.8%), the difference of opinions (17.8%), my group of friends (14%), many people living in my house (14%) and my lack of interest in studies (13.7%).

As evidenced by the investigation, and surely not a few families of adolescents have verified, the way in which they dress and express themselves is a frequent cause of friction. Perhaps their elders forget that "It's through fashion that youth consumption finds one of its spaces to express itself. Young people give clothing a high symbolic value to the extent that it constitutes an information vehicle", according to the sociologist and Master in Social Development Yeisa B. Sarduy,

Just as "Calendario" suggests and as this research confirms, the family continues to be the most important thing in the lives of adolescents. For this reason, as the book that served as a source for this text has done, and the recently concluded International Congress of Researchers

on Childhood, Adolescence and Youth in Havana, it's very necessary to continue investigating this population group, its satisfactions and anxieties, to help make them happier and because the future of this country now walks the streets with them, with their cell phones and many expectations in their pockets, and with freckles on their faces.

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
