

PROFILE of The Week

By Dr. DHANPAUL NARINE

Youths: Challenges for the Future!

There was a time when there was no television. The radio was plugged into a battery and its programs ended at ten in the night. Daily distractions were minimal. The people were poor but they prized education as it was the passport to a better life. Books changed hands and the 'dog ears' were smoothed to make reading easy. There was respect for teachers as parents and the schools worked together to enforce discipline. The community celebrated success of the children.

This statement could be applied to just about any developing country where there was a constant battle to meet basic needs. In Guyana and the Caribbean, not so long ago, education standards were comparable to the best in the world. But times have changed. There is the argument that our teenagers are not as focused as they used to be and it is a cause for worry. What are some of the problems affecting the teen population and how can they be resolved?

In fairness, it must be pointed out that there are exceptions to this statement. Many teenagers are doing what is right. They go to school, listen to their teachers and parents are helpful to others, and follow directions. They are a joy to have around. But there are teens that follow the wrong crowd, get into trouble and generally lack focus. It is not easy to point out the exact reason for this as situations will vary but there can be no question that the addiction to technology is a factor.

We often hear about multitasking. Teenagers argue that one of the differences between them and their parents is the fact that they can multitask. But teens would do well to follow the advice of Lord Chesterfield. In 1740, he wrote a note to his son saying that, 'there is time enough for everything in the course of the day, if you do but one thing at once, but there is not enough time in the year, if you do two things at the same time. This steady and un-dissipated attention to one object, is a sure mark

of superior genius; as hurry, bustle and agitation, are the never-failing symptoms of a weak and frivolous mind.'

Christine Rosen points out that during the period 1990 to 2000 the gadgets that were invented were aimed at multitasking. In the following decade teens have become adept at playing video games, surfing the net, shopping online, chatting with their friends, texting, and skyping with their mobile phone in one hand and the laptop in the

smokers.'

We live in an age in which we want to miss nothing. The social media is geared to give us instant news. We are familiar with teens doing their homework sitting in front of a computer while their ears are plugged with wires speaking on their smart phones and following the game on television at the same time. The textbooks are lying somewhere nearby.

It is interesting to note what the world's youngest doctor had to say on multitasking. Dr. Murali Ambati became a doctor at the tender age of seventeen graduating from Medical School in the United States. In speaking to a group of teenagers he said,

average of twenty minutes. It is estimated that these interruptions cost the US economy around \$ 650 billion annually in productivity.

As far as teenagers are concerned it is argued that multitasking is a poor response to learning. The functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans show that when people are engaged in switching tasks the flow of blood to particular regions of the brain is affected and this makes learning difficult. In a recent discussion on National Public Radio the conclusion was that 'we're built to focus and in multitasking we're driving ourselves to be less efficient.'

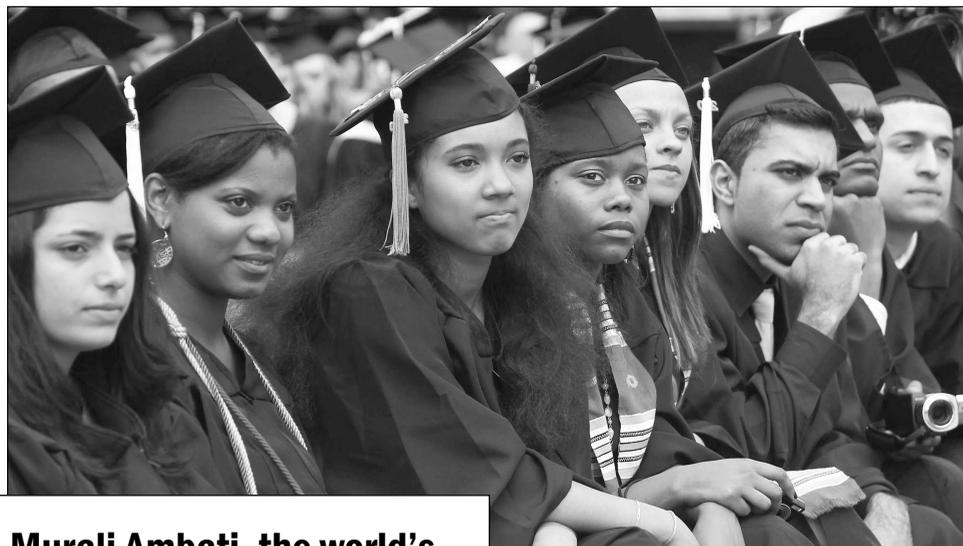
The point is that teenagers

are most likely to commit suicide than females, but what is striking is that females are most likely to attempt it.

A proper study of suicide requires a more in-depth analysis but we can discuss briefly some of the myths of suicide and what action can be taken to deal with it. One of the faulty views is that once someone decides to kill him or herself nothing can stop the person. Another is that if you talk about suicide you are putting the idea in a person's mind. In addition, some believe that a failed attempt will deter a person from committing it.

There is also the mistaken view that suicide runs in the family and once depression goes away the person will be okay.

Suicide ideation, or the plan to do it needs to be studied and it should be made clear that suicide is never the best solution to a problem. The warning signs should be recognized such as depression, conversations about it, changes in mood, withdrawal, sleeping too much or



Advice from Dr. Murali Ambati, the world's youngest doctor: "You have to stay focused on your studies and for that matter anything that you do. Once you have completed the task you then have time for other things. Discipline is an important key to success."

other. In their job applications young people delighted themselves in mentioning that they 'multitasked.' But by 2015 these connoisseurs of the keyboard have come to find out that multitasking carried severe consequences.

There is legislation in some states in the US that has made it an offence to drive and be on the mobile phone or to text. Multitasking is discouraged in many places as it is said to affect concentration on the job. In 2005 the Institute of Psychiatry at the University of London made a rather telling observation. It found that, 'workers distracted by email and phone calls suffer a fall in IQ more than twice found in marijuana

"I only watched one television show for half hour every week and it was related to medicine. You have to stay focused on your studies and for that matter anything that you do. Once you have completed the task you then have time for other things. Discipline is an important key to success.'

Dr. Edward Hallowell in his book 'CrazyBusy' calls multitasking a 'mythical activity' in which people think that they can do more than one task at a time and then realize that they cannot. Multitasking is affecting the economy as well. The University of California in its research has found that the interruptions by workers to answer emails and phone calls amount to an

and older youths will have an affinity for technology but it must be healthy since addiction can be harmful. One way to lessen the harmful impact of technology is for parents to work with their children and be involved in their lives. Apart from multitasking another problem affecting teens is the exposure to violence. This comes in different ways. It can be in the form of cyberbullying or violence in the home or in school or the community. It is said that one of the reasons that teens become violent is that they are exposed to violence at home.

The signs of violence should not be ignored and steps should be taken to report it to the authorities. It should be noted that verbal abuse is also a form of violence and this too should be reported. There is no good reason for staying passive. One of the biggest problems affecting teens is suicide. According to many studies young males

too little, anxiety, rage, acting recklessly, talk about being a burden to others and so on. Young people should realize that help is around the corner and talking to a trusted colleague is a good start. There is also 1800-273 8255 or 911 to call in case help is needed.

It is argued that we live in a violent culture whether it is at home or in the wider community. Parents need to become proactive and take steps to monitor their children. There are issues that involve bullying, including cyberbullying, substance abuse, eating disorders, and the inability to fit in the group. What is to be done? A number of suggestions have been advanced. Parents should pay attention to behaviors of their children and they should actively listen, and provide support.