

# **First Steps to Healing the South African Family**



**South African Institute  
of Race Relations**

**A research paper by the South African Institute of  
Race Relations sponsored by the Donaldson Trust**

**March 2011**

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Published by the South African Institute of Race Relations  
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## OVERVIEW

This report presents research by the South African Institute of Race Relations into the state of South African families and youth. The first part will describe the situation and structure of families, from orphans and child-headed households, through to absent fathers and single parents, as well as the effect of poverty on the family. The second part will look at South African youth in relation to social breakdown in families. It will include a discussion of education and youth unemployment, HIV/AIDS, attitudes to sex and teenage pregnancy, youth violence and crime, drug and alcohol use, and mental health and self-perceptions. In December 2010 the Institute held a seminar inviting representatives of child welfare, youth, and family organisations to provide feedback on our preliminary research and to give us insight into their experiences working on the ground with the issues covered by the research. Some of the points raised at the seminar have been included in this report. This research would not have been possible without sponsorship from the Donaldson Trust, to whom we here record our thanks.

# Fractured families: A crisis for South Africa

**The effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on families is reflected in the increasing numbers of orphans and child-headed households. More and more children are growing up with absent fathers, and in single-parent households. Children growing up with one parent, or without their fathers, are at a significant disadvantage. Poverty exacerbates the impact of family breakdown on children.**

Family life in South Africa has never been simple to describe or understand. The concept of the nuclear family has never accurately captured the norm of all South African families. Thus when we speak of South African families, we talk not only of the nuclear family, but also of extended families, as well as caregivers or guardians.

In South Africa, the 'typical' child is raised by their mother in a single-parent household. Most children also live in households with unemployed adults.

South Africa has a number of unique circumstances that affect the structure and situation of families. They include its history of apartheid, and particularly the migrant labour system. Poverty greatly affects family life. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also profoundly affected the health and well-being of family members, and has consequently placed an added burden on to children.

Our research aims to highlight how family life in South Africa affects the prospects of children. The research includes often under-acknowledged influences on children and young people that affect many issues in South Africa – from violent crime, through to entrenching a cycle of poverty, as well as the values and norms South Africans hold. We also seek to describe the environment in which children grow up and through which socialisation occurs, in order to understand the

influences and effects of social breakdown on families and communities, and ultimately on South Africa as a whole.

## Orphans and child-headed households

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has had a profound effect on family life in South Africa and the sub-Saharan region of the African continent. Nowhere is this more striking than in the increase in orphans and child-headed households.

Of the 9.1 million double orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2005, around 5.2 million (almost 60%) had lost at least one of their parents to AIDS. Without AIDS the total number of double orphans in sub-Saharan Africa would have declined between 1990 and 2010.<sup>1</sup>

In South Africa itself, there were 859 000 'double orphans' (children both of whose parents have died), 2 468 000 paternal orphans, and 624 000 maternal orphans in 2008. Levels of violent deaths could help to explain the prevalence of paternal orphans over maternal orphans. More than a third (11 314) of non-natural deaths in 2007 were caused by violence, 87% of which were male.<sup>2</sup> However, this alone cannot explain the high number of paternal orphans, some of whom may also be accounted for by children whose fathers have never been known.

A total of 3.95 million children had lost one or both parents by 2008, an increase of about a third since 2002. The number of double orphans increased by 144%.<sup>3</sup> Almost half of all orphans, and two-thirds of double orphans, were between the ages of 12 and 17 years.<sup>4</sup>

The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) estimated that in 2007, some 2 500 000 children in South Africa had lost one or both parents due to all causes. Of these children, more than half had lost one or both parents as a result of AIDS. Some 510 000 children had lost both parents as a result of all causes.<sup>5</sup>

By 2015, some 5 700 000 children would have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Some 3 100 000 children under 18 years would be maternal orphans, and 4 700 000 would be paternal orphans, according to the Medical Research Council in 2002.<sup>6</sup>

Although the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa has stabilised, and the infection rate is now starting to decline, the number of orphans will continue to grow or at least remain high for years, reflecting a time lag between HIV infection and death.<sup>7</sup> This means that although HIV infections are decreasing, the people that are already infected will continue to die once they progress from HIV to full-blown AIDS.

Orphaned children are at a significantly higher risk of

missing out on schooling, living in households that have less food security, suffering from anxiety and depression, and being exposed to HIV infection.<sup>8</sup>

These risks are higher if a mother, rather than a father, died. Widowed mothers were more likely to assume responsibility for the care of their children than widowed fathers – making children who have lost their mothers less likely to live with the surviving parent, compared to those who lost a father.

Survival of the youngest children – those aged 0-3 years, was at stake when mothers were dying or had recently died. Such children were nearly four times more likely to die in the year before or after their mothers' death than those whose mothers were alive and healthy.<sup>9</sup>

A study by the University of Cape Town on the impact of orphanhood on school performance followed children over a number of years. It found that those whose mother had died were less likely to be enrolled in school, had completed fewer years of education on average, and had less money spent on their education than children whose mothers were still alive.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship to the caregiver is very important after the death of one or both parents. A study by Unicef showed that the closer children remain to biological family, the more likely they are to be well cared for, and the greater the chance that they will go to school consistently, regardless of their poverty level.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Department of Basic Education, in 2008 some 481 994 'double orphans' were enrolled in ordinary schools. Another 1 661 275 children whose mother or father had died (single orphans) were enrolled in school.<sup>12</sup>

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN FAMILY AT A GLANCE

Number of registered civil marriages <sup>a</sup>	Down from 176 521 (2004) to 171 989 (2009)
Number of registered customary marriages <sup>a</sup>	Down from 20 301 (2004) to 13 506 (2009)
Number of published divorces <sup>a</sup>	Down from 31 768 (2004) to 30 763 (2009)
Divorces with children <sup>a</sup>	17 214 (56%)
Double orphans <sup>b</sup>	859 000
Paternal orphans <sup>b</sup>	2 468 000
Maternal orphans <sup>b</sup>	624 000
Total orphans <sup>b</sup>	3.95 million
AIDS orphans <sup>c</sup>	1.4 million
Number/proportion of children in child-headed households <sup>b</sup>	98 000 (0.5%)
Proportion of children with absent, living fathers <sup>e</sup>	Up from 42% (1996) to 48% (2009)
Proportion of children with present fathers <sup>e</sup>	Down from 49% (1996) to 36% (2009)
Proportion of children with present fathers <sup>a</sup> :	
— African	30%
— Coloured	53%
— Indian	85%
— White	83%
Proportion of children with absent fathers <sup>e</sup> :	
— African	Up from 46% (1996) to 52% (2009)
— Coloured	Up from 34% (1996) to 41% (2009)
— Indian	Down from 17% (1996) to 12% (2009)
— White	Up from 13% (1996) to 15% (2009)
Children (0-17) living with both biological parents <sup>b</sup>	35%
Children (0-17) living with mother only <sup>b</sup>	40%
Children (0-17) living with father only <sup>b</sup>	3%
Children (0-17) living with neither biological parent <sup>b</sup>	23%
Children (0-17) living with grandparents <sup>a</sup>	8%
Urban single parents in each race group <sup>f</sup> :	
— African	54%
— Coloured	30%
— Indian	7%
— White	24%
— All	44%
Urban single parents by age <sup>f</sup> :	
— 16-24 years	13%
— 25-34 years	33%
— 35-44 years	24%
— 45-64 years	23%
Proportion of female urban single parents in each race group <sup>f</sup> :	
— African	79%
— Coloured	84%
— Indian	64%
— White	69%
Proportion of children (0-17) living in a household with an employed adult <sup>b</sup>	34%

Note: Discrepancies between any of the figures here or elsewhere in the article may be due to the fact that data has been taken from various sources.

a Stats SA 2009

b UCT 2008

c UNICEF 2007

d Department of Social Development, April 2007–March 2008

e HSRC 2006; Stat SA 2009

f TGI 2007

The number of children receiving the foster child grant increased by 88% between 2005 and 2009 from 271 817 to 511 479. The grant was increasingly used to provide financial support to caregivers looking after children whose biological parents have died of AIDS. In 2010 this grant was R710 a month.<sup>13</sup>

The experience of orphanhood was compounded for some children who did not have care-givers, and lived in child-headed households.

In 2008 some 98 000 children (0.5%) were living in child-headed households (where all members are younger than 18 years old). This figure has declined since 2002, when 118 000 (0.7%) were living in such households.<sup>14</sup> Between April 2007 and March 2008, some 23 898 child-headed households received services such as psycho-social support; linking children with relatives and family; or facilitating access to official documents, social grants, and food parcels, from the Department of Social Development.<sup>15</sup> This means that not all children living in child-headed households were receiving assistance from the department.

One assumes that children living in child-headed households do not have either of their parents' alive. However an article in the journal *AIDS Care* found that 62% of children living in child-headed households in 2006 were not orphans. Altogether 92% of the approximately 122 000 children living in child-headed households had one or both parents alive. Some 81% of children in child-headed households had a living mother.<sup>16</sup> The article said that the most likely explanation for this was that parents were leaving their children to travel to other provinces to find work. However,

alcoholism and drug abuse among parents were also possible explanations of this trend.

Children living in child-headed households are also assumed to have much lower school attendance rates than children living with parents or other caregivers. However, *AIDS Care* found that rates of school attendance were not significantly lower for child-headed households – 95% for child-headed and 96% for mixed-generation households.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless – and unsurprisingly – levels of poverty were higher among child-headed households, 47% of them having a monthly household expenditure of less than R400 compared to 15% of mixed-generation households.<sup>18</sup>

### Single-parent households

Only 35% of children were living with both their biological parents in 2008. Some 40% were living with their mother only, and 2.8% with their father only, which leaves 22.6% of children who were living with neither of their biological parents.<sup>19</sup>

A breakdown of single parents in urban areas showed certain trends. In 2007, some 44% of all urban parents were single. Some 52% of African urban parents were single, as were 30% of coloured parents, 7% of Indian parents, and 24% of white parents.<sup>20</sup>

An age breakdown of urban single parents showed that 13% were between the ages of 16 and 24 years, 33% between 25 and 34, 23% between 45 and 64, and 24% between 35 and 44.<sup>21</sup>

Some 31% of African urban single parents were unemployed, as were 25% of coloured, 14% of Indian, and 5% of white parents.<sup>22</sup> Some 79% of African urban single parents were female, as were 84% of coloured, 64% of Indian, and 69% of white such parents.<sup>23</sup>

Thus urban single parents were overwhelmingly African, female, and between the ages of 25 and 34 years. Unemployment rates among urban single parents were also high.

These figures are similar to those in the 1998 South African Demographic and Health Survey, which showed that 44% of first-born children were born before their mother had been married.<sup>24</sup>

Thus it seems as though the marital status of the parents is very important as to whether the children will have both parents in the household. Children born to unmarried parents are more likely to live in single-parent households, than those with married parents.

Research conducted in the United Kingdom by the London-based Social Policy Justice Group shows that single-parent households were two and a half times as likely to be living in poverty as couple-parent households.<sup>25</sup>

The 2001 South African census showed that only 43% of children aged 0-4 years had both parents in the household, as did 42% of children aged 5-13 years, and 42% aged 14-19 years.

Once again there were significant differences between racial groups. In the age group 0-4 years, 38% of African, 56% of coloured, 85% of Indian, and 86% of white children, had both parents in the household.<sup>26</sup> Similar trends were evident in the age groups 5-13 years, and 14-19 years.

The 2001 census showed that 76% of households were made up of nuclear or extended families. The proportion of households that were made up of nuclear families decreased between 1996 and 2001, from 46% to 40%, while the proportion of households made up of extended families increased from 32% to 36% over the same period.

All race groups saw a rise in the proportion of households with extended families over this period. Among Africans there was a decline in the proportion of single-parent households, but an increase in the proportion of single parents living with relatives.

For all race groups excluding white people, there was a decrease in the proportion of households comprising a couple and children. All race groups saw an increase in the proportion of households with couples, children and relatives between 1996 and 2001.<sup>27</sup>

Rates of marriage and co-habitation also differed significantly between population groups. In 2003, some 21% of Africans were married or co-habiting, compared with 36% of coloured people, 51% of Indians, and 58% of white people.

### Absent fathers

What is evident from the above data is that South Africa has many single-parent households. Although HIV/AIDS has had a profound affect on the number of single parent households, there is another worrying trend – the increase in the number and proportion of absent, living fathers.

International research echoed by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on the effect fathers have on their children's development suggests that the presence of a father can contribute to cognitive development, intellectual functioning, and school achievement. Children growing up without fathers are more likely to experience emotional disturbances and depression.

Girls who grow up with their fathers are more likely to have higher self-esteem, lower levels of risky sexual behaviour, and fewer difficulties in forming and maintaining romantic relationships later in life. They have less

likelihood of having an early pregnancy, bearing children outside marriage, marrying early, or getting divorced.

Boys growing up in absent-father households are more likely to display 'hypermasculine' behaviour, including aggression.<sup>28</sup>

These findings correspond with research from the United States, where it was found that the absence of fathers when children grow up was one of a variety of factors associated with poor educational outcomes, anti-social behaviour and delinquency, and disrupted employment in later life.

Ms Linda Richter of the HSRC has said that the influence of a father is both indirect and direct. The indirect influence includes support for the mother as well as influencing all major decisions regarding health, well-being and education of children – for example, access to health services, nutrition, as well as the length of time spent in school.<sup>30</sup> A father's influence is direct in terms of educational level or length of time spent in school, educational achievement, self-confidence, especially among girls, as well as adjustment and behaviour control among boys.<sup>31</sup>

Research published in a journal, *Adolescence*, in 1999 found that South African secondary school pupils with their fathers present outperformed pupils with absent fathers in all subjects.<sup>32</sup>

However, Mr Robert Morrell of the HSRC has argued that data about absent fathers can tell us only so much, as physically absent fathers may still be emotionally present in their children's lives while physically present fathers can be emotionally absent.<sup>33</sup> Thus the emotional availability and involvement of a father in a child's life can be more important than the physical presence of fathers in the household on a day-to-day basis.

Another view was found in an ethnographic study in Botswana. It concluded that, 'children are not necessarily disadvantaged by the absence of their father, but they are disadvantaged when they belong to a household without access to the social position, labour, and financial support that is provided by men.'<sup>34</sup>

Whether the parents of children are married or not also plays a role in whether the father will be absent or present. A study in Soweto and Johannesburg found that only 20% of fathers who were not married to their child's mother at the time of its birth were still in contact with their children by the time they were 11 years old.<sup>35</sup>

The latest available data about fathers in South Africa, shows that the proportion of fathers who are absent and living increased between 1996 and 2009, from 42% to 48%.<sup>36</sup> Over the same period the proportion of fathers who were present decreased from 49% to 36%.<sup>37</sup>

A racial dimension was evident in trends of absent fathers. African children under 15 years had the lowest proportion of present fathers in 2009 at 30%, compared to 53% for coloured children, and 85% for Indians, and 83% for whites.<sup>38</sup>

The proportion of African children under the age of 15 years with absent living fathers increased between 1996 and 2009 from 45% to 52%.<sup>39</sup> There was also an increase for coloured children (from 34% to 41%), and for white children (from 13% to 15%).<sup>40</sup> The proportion of children with absent living fathers decreased only among Indians (from 17% to 12%).<sup>41</sup>

A rural-urban dimension was also evident, with 55% of African rural children under the age of 15 having absent living fathers compared to 43% of African children in urban areas.<sup>42</sup>



In 2002, some 33% of African children under 15 in rural areas had present fathers, compared to 44% of African children in urban areas.<sup>43</sup>

What is particularly of concern is that both the number and the proportion of children with absent, living fathers are increasing in post-apartheid South Africa, particularly among Africans, when one would assume that they would decrease as a result of the end of the migrant labour system. The numbers and proportions of children with absent living fathers are increasing among all race groups except Indians.

Moreover, out of all countries in southern and eastern Africa, South Africa had the lowest proportion of maternal orphans living with their biological fathers. This was at 41% compared to 65% in Zambia, which has the highest proportion, according to data from 1995 and 1996. In contrast, nearly 80% of paternal orphans were living with their mother.<sup>44</sup> This means that compared to all countries in southern and eastern Africa, South Africa had the lowest proportion of fathers looking after their children once their mother had died.

In South Africa, it was estimated by Ms Richter of the HSRC that around 54% of men aged 15-49 years were fathers, but that nearly 50% of these fathers did not have daily contact with their children.<sup>45</sup> The failure of men to acknowledge and/or support their children, together with high rates of sexual and physical abuse, which is perpetrated mainly by men, points to a situation of 'men in crisis' in South Africa.<sup>46</sup>

Poverty and high rates of unemployment may contribute to large numbers of fathers failing to take responsibility for their children because they are financially unable to do so. Dr Mamphela

Ramphela said in a book, *Steering by the Stars: Being Young in South Africa*, that, 'Desertion by fathers is often prompted by their inability to bear the burden of being primary providers. The burden of failure becomes intolerable for those who lack the capacity to generate enough income as uneducated and unskilled labourers. Desertion is not always physical, it can also be emotional. Many men 'die' as parents and husbands by indulging [in] alcohol [or] drugs, or becoming unresponsive to their families'.<sup>47</sup>

### Legacy of apartheid/ migratory labour system

One important factor to take into account regarding the situation of 'men in crisis' in South Africa is the long-term effects of the migrant labour system, to which Africans but not

#### Focus on the family

**During the apartheid era, the Institute played a leading role in providing both factual information and commentary about the impact of the pass laws and the migratory labour system on family life. In the last few years we have again focused on family life, an aspect of South Africa about which there is too little information. Our annual *South Africa Survey* has published some of the statistics that are available. We have also highlighted some of this data in our annual *South African Mirror* slideshow presentations. The November 2007 issue of *Fast Facts* contained an article suggesting that the family was a critical institution for the transmission of values essential to inculcating the culture of self-restraint necessary to reduce the crime rate. The July 2009 issue of *Fast Facts* provided several pages of statistics, along with commentary suggesting, among other things, that the absence of family life for millions of South Africans might well be one of the biggest risks facing the country. The present issue of *Fast Facts* and the one to be published in April are a further attempt by the Institute to highlight the problems confronting South African families.**

other races were subject. Men had to come into cities and towns to seek work, and were separated from their families, who were forced to stay behind in homeland areas.

In 1970, a doctor living in rural KwaZulu-Natal wrote: 'Economic or even social analysis of migratory labour will fail to reveal the full picture of its cost in terms of human misery. To learn this you must listen to the lonely wife, the anxious mother, the insecure child... It is at family level that most pain is felt, and we cannot forget that African cultural heritage enshrines a broader, more noble concept of family than that of the West... Migratory labour destroys this by taking away for long months together, the father, the brother, the lover and the friend. Each must go, and no one fools themselves that these men can live decent lives in a sexual vacuum. The resultant promiscuity is but one aspect of the mood of irresponsibility. For your migrant is concerned with nobody but himself; his own survival is the only survival that he can influence by any act that he performs.'<sup>48</sup>

Although the laws establishing the migrant labour system have since been repealed, migrancy still exists. In 2001, some 15% of households in South Africa received remittances from migrant workers as a source of income. Moreover, 39% of female-headed households received remittances as one of their sources of income, suggesting that there are still high numbers of men living and working away from their families.<sup>49</sup>

### Poverty

Not only are many families disrupted in one way or another, but many live in households facing poverty.

About 5.6 million children aged between 0 and 17 were living in overcrowded households in 2008, just under a third of all children in this age category. An overcrowded household is defined as one in which there are more than two people for each room in the house (excluding bathrooms but including communal living areas such as sitting rooms and kitchens). This figure has risen by about a third since 2002.<sup>50</sup>

Only 34% of children under the age of 18 were living in households with an employed adult in 2008.<sup>51</sup> In other words, two thirds of children are growing up living in households in which nobody works. Despite this, both the number and the proportion of children living in households where there is reported child hunger decreased between 2002 and 2008, from 5.2 million (30%) to 3.3 million (18%).<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the proportion of children living in income poverty has fallen from 77% in 2002 to 64% in 2008.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the roll-out of the child support grant (CSG) has helped to alleviate poverty for many families who do not have employment. In 2009/10, some 9.4 million children received the CSG. In 2010 children under the age of 16 qualified for this grant, but the age threshold will be extended to the under-18s in the next two years. It has been calculated that according to the means test of caregivers' incomes, 82% of children aged 0-13 years were eligible for the grant in 2007.<sup>54</sup> The child support grant is currently R250 per month and is available to caregivers whose income is less than ten times the amount of the grant.

There is significant evidence to suggest that outcomes for children growing up in poverty are

worse than for those who have enough. Research in the UK has found that pregnancy rates among teenage girls living in the most deprived areas are six times higher than among those living in the most affluent areas.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, 73% of 18-35 year-old South Africans who had a childhood where there was not enough money for basic things such as food and clothes had never had a job, compared to 41% of those who had a childhood where their family had extra money for things such as luxury goods and holidays.<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

Many South African children are not growing up in safe and secure families. Some are affected by poverty, while others are burdened by the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This pandemic has resulted in an epidemic of orphanhood and child-headed households, which has left many children having to fend for themselves.

Single-parent households are the norm in South Africa, with the majority of children growing up with one parent – most likely a mother. Increasing numbers of fathers are absent, and a 'crisis of men' in South Africa seems to be perpetuating patterns of abuse and desertion that will most likely continue with future generations.

A racial dimension is evident in many of the trends associated with family life. African families are more likely to have single parents and absent fathers than other race groups, particularly Indian families. The long-term effects of apartheid policies such as the migrant labour system may be part of the explanation, although this would not explain why some trends are worsening even as the distance in time between the

enforcement of this system and the present increases. Socio-economic dimensions are also important. Families living in poverty and those who experience unemployment are more likely to have dysfunctional family environments.

In South Africa, urgent questions need to be raised about why these trends seem to be on the increase. Difficult issues such as attitudes to parental responsibility and attitudes to monogamy and commitment to relationships need to be publicly discussed, and addressed by broader society. Why do parents, particularly fathers, fail to acknowledge their children? If this is seemingly acceptable to broader society, why is this so? What values are being passed on to children?

Due to the availability of data, this research has focused on the presence of mothers and fathers in children's lives, but many children are growing up with extended family members. Some 8% of children live in 'skip-generation' households with grandparents or great aunts or uncles. More research needs to be done into the effects on children of extended family parenting. Are grandparents stepping in to provide the support children are not getting from their parents, or are they ill-equipped to deal with the burden of parenting?

It is evident that familial breakdown is circular, where children growing up in dysfunctional families are more likely to have dysfunctional families themselves. The second part of this report which follows, discusses the implications of broken families for the youth. It will show how youth who come from dysfunctional families and communities are more likely to engage in risky behaviour and contribute to social breakdown.

## Broken families breaking youth

**G**rowing up in a stable family is an impossible dream for many young people. This section documents the challenges and risks faced by many young people growing up in a country where living with two parents is the privilege of a minority. The section discusses the impact of family breakdown on education, youth unemployment, teenage pregnancy, youth attitudes to sex, HIV/AIDS, youth violence and crime, and the mental health of young people.

**M**any children in South Africa are growing up in fractured families. Millions grow up living without one or even both of their parents. Poverty and unemployment take their toll on family life, while many are increasingly concerned about the state of public education. The consequences for young people – the country's future workers, entrepreneurs, and leaders – may be dire.

### Education

Research in South Africa and elsewhere suggests a strong link between educational success and growing up in a stable family with both parents present.

A study conducted in South Africa and published in the journal *Adolescence* in 1999 found that secondary school pupils living with their fathers on average scored higher on a scholastic achievement test in all subjects than pupils with absent fathers.<sup>1</sup>

American research has also found that the absence of fathers when children grow up is one of a variety of factors which are associated with poor educational outcomes, anti-social behaviour and delinquency, and disrupted employment in later life.<sup>2</sup> According to the London-based Social Policy Justice Group, children not brought up by both

parents in the UK are 80% more likely than others to experience educational failure, and nearly 40% more likely to be unemployed or receiving state welfare support later in life.<sup>3</sup>

It is perhaps common sense that children with parents who provide emotional and practical support – help with homework, subject choices, and later career guidance – are likely to fare better at school and when entering the job market. Fractured families may therefore play a role in the educational outcomes of South Africa's youth.

Matric pass rates have been declining in recent years, from a high of 73% in 2003 to 61% in 2009, although in 2010 the matric pass rate rose again to 68%.<sup>4</sup> Of the 1 million students who enrolled in Grade 10 in 2007, only 51% sat matric in 2009, only 31% passed matric in 2009, and only 10% gained their senior certificate with university exemption. Some 9% of 16 year-olds, 15% of 17 year-olds, and 28% of 18 year-olds were not in school in 2006.<sup>5</sup> The rate of completion is not much better in higher education. Of the 138 000 students who

### SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUTH AT A GLANCE

Population under the age of 18 (2008)	18 771 000
Number of pupils who passed matric (2009)	364 513
Unemployment rate for 15-24 year-olds (2010)	51%
Number of young people not in education, employment, or training	3.3 million
Proportion of 12-22 year-olds who have ever had sex	39%
Proportion of sexually active youth who have had four or more partners	32%
Proportion of sexually active youth who are consistent condom users	38%
Number of births per 1 000 women aged 15-19 years (2008)	58
Number of pupils who fell pregnant (2007)	49 636
HIV prevalence rate among 15-24 year-olds (2008)	8.7%
Proportion of HIV-positive children receiving ART (2007/08)	37%
Proportion of young people who have been physically punished by teacher/principal	52%
Proportion of young people who have witnessed violence in their community	51%
Proportion of the total prison population under the age of 25	36%
Proportion of 12-22 year-olds who have ever drunk alcohol	31%
Proportion of 12-14 year-olds who said they have easy access to alcohol	62%

enrolled at universities in 2002, 52% dropped out and 15% were still studying after five years.<sup>6</sup>

**Unemployment**

It should therefore come as no surprise that youth unemployment in South Africa is staggeringly high. In 2009 the unemployment rate for 15-24 year-olds in sub-Saharan Africa was 12%. The region with the lowest youth unemployment rate was East Asia, at 9%, and that with the highest was North Africa at 24%.<sup>7</sup>

The unemployment rate for 15-24 year-olds in South Africa in the same year was 48%,<sup>8</sup> and by 2010 it had risen to 51%.

The unemployment rate is highest among young African women, at 63%.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, some 68% of 18-35 year-olds surveyed in 2003 had never had a job, according to the Status of the Youth survey conducted by the Usombomvu Youth Fund. Of those who had had a job, some 32% started off working in the informal sector.<sup>10</sup>

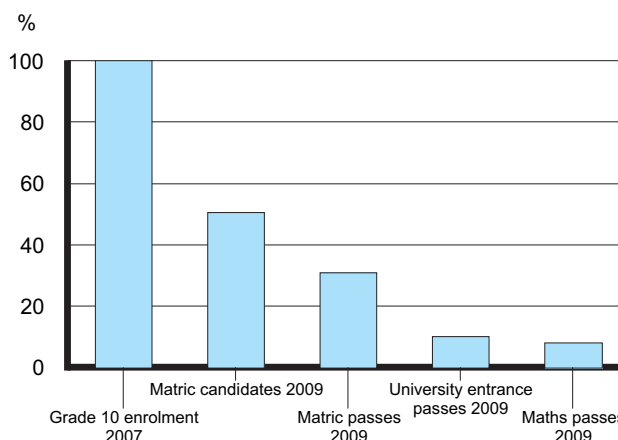
In addition there are 3.3 million 15-24 year-olds (33%) not in employment, education, or training (NEET),<sup>11</sup> also not a surprise when only 56% of young people surveyed in 2003 received career guidance at school. The youth fund study indicated that only 50% of African pupils received career guidance at school compared with 91% of white pupils.<sup>12</sup> It was reported at the seminar held by the Institute that career counselling is poor at both schools and universities and that initiatives to invite successful alumni to speak to current students and pupils about sensible subject and career choices could help to bridge this gap.

The effects of so many young people being without something to occupy them on a daily basis, be it

education, training, or work, are likely to be significant. Combined with the effects of growing up in

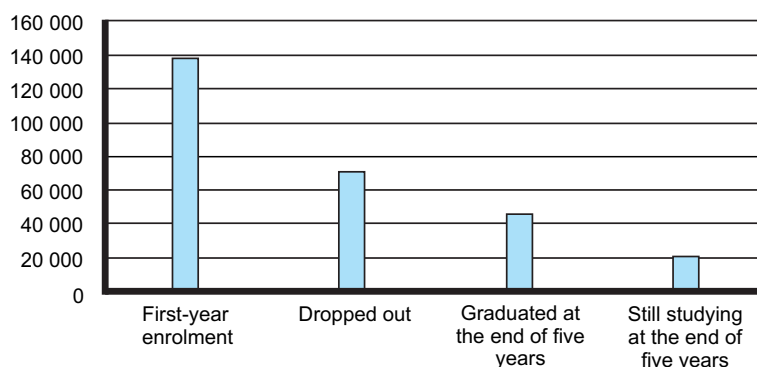
broken families, problems such as teenage pregnancy, HIV/ AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, and

**THROUGHPUT, 2007–2009**



Source: Department of Education, as cited in SAIRR, *South Africa Survey 2009/10*, p424

**TERTIARY THROUGHPUT RATE, FIRST-YEAR CLASS OF 2002**



Source: Answer to parliamentary question, 19 February 2010, as cited in SAIRR, *South Africa Survey 2009/10*, p457

**YOUTH<sup>a</sup> UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY REGION, 2008–2009**

	2008	2009
Developed economies & European Union	13.1%	17.7%
Central & South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) & CIS <sup>b</sup>	17.3%	20.8%
East Asia	8.6%	8.9%
South-East Asia & the Pacific	14.5%	14.7%
South Asia	10.0%	10.3%
Latin America & the Caribbean	14.3%	16.1%
Middle East	23.3%	23.4%
North Africa	23.3%	23.7%
Sub-Saharan Africa	11.9%	11.9%
World	12.1%	13.0%
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>44.5%</b>	<b>48.1%</b>

Source: International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends for Youth*, August 2010, p63 SAIRR, *South Africa Survey 2008/09*, p236

a 15-24 year-olds.

b Commonwealth of Independent States including Russia and neighbouring countries.

crime, are at risk of becoming more prevalent.

### Sex

More risky sexual behaviour, including unprotected sex with multiple partners, is one potential outcome of large numbers of unoccupied young people having grown up in dysfunctional families. Once again, the absence of a parent when growing up can have a significant effect on a young person's attitude to sex and relationships.

International research has thus found that girls who grow up with their fathers are more likely to have higher self-esteem, lower levels of sexual risk behaviour, and fewer difficulties in forming and maintaining romantic rela-

tionships later in life. They are less likely to have an early pregnancy, bear children outside marriage, marry early, or get divorced.<sup>13</sup> British research has further found that teenage sexual activity is much more widespread among children from divorced, separated, and single parent homes.<sup>14</sup>

The *2008 National Youth Lifestyle Study* published by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention found that 39% of 12-22 year-olds reported ever having had sex, and the Children's Institute's *Child Gauge* recorded that 43% of those aged between 15 and 19 years had had sex.<sup>15</sup> While these figures are not alarmingly high, the sexual risk behaviour of those who are sexually active may be more worrying.

Some 32% of the youths who reported that they had had sex in the lifestyle study had had four or more sexual partners in their lifetime.<sup>16</sup> Another study, of Grade 8-11 pupils, found that 41% of those that were sexually active had had three or more sexual partners, and 52% reported having had more than one sexual partner in the three months before the study.<sup>17</sup>

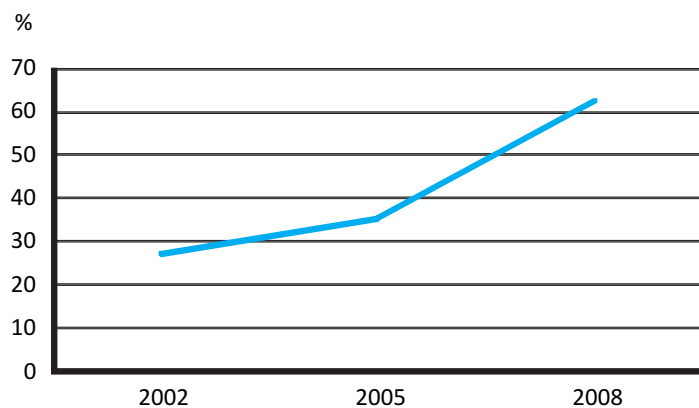
Many young people are also starting to have sex at a very young age. Some 55% of sexually active respondents in the lifestyle study had sex before they were 15,<sup>18</sup> although figures published by the Children's Institute are somewhat lower at 28% for men and 16% for women.<sup>19</sup> In addition, a significant proportion of the sexually active young people in the lifestyle study reported using alcohol or drugs before having sex – 17%.<sup>20</sup>

Tracking this behaviour is important as research by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention has found a link between alcohol and drug use prior to sex as well as early initiation of sexual activity and lower rates of consistent condom use.<sup>21</sup>

The lifestyle study found that just 38% of the sexually active sample were consistent condom users. However, other surveys have found higher rates of condom use among young people when asked about the last time they had 'high-risk sex' (ie not with a spouse or co-habiting partner), although rates are always lower for women than for men. Among 15-19 year-olds the rate of condom use has been estimated at 74% for men and 49% for women,<sup>22</sup> and the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) has reported that among 15-24 year-olds it is 72% for men and 52% for women.<sup>23</sup>

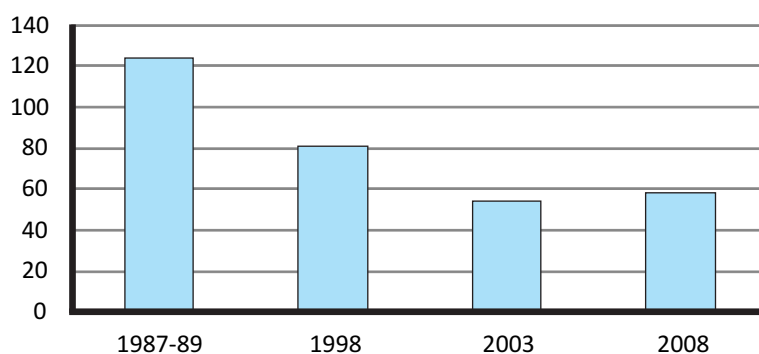
There is further evidence that messages about condom use may be getting through to young

**CONDOM USE AMONG ADULTS, 2002–2008**



Source: SAIRR, *South Africa Survey 2009/10*, November 2010, p524

**BIRTHS PER 1 000 WOMEN AGED 15-19 YEARS, 1987–2008**



Source: HSRC, *Teenage pregnancy: rethinking prevention*, Keynote address at the 5th Youth Policy Initiative Roundtable on Teenage Pregnancy, March 2008; *The World Bank*, World Development Indicators 2010, April 2010

people. The youth fund survey found that condom use among 15-24 year-old men stood at 57% compared with 27% for 25-49 year-old men, and 8% for men aged 50 years and over.<sup>24</sup> Condom use among all adults (15 years and over) has been increasing over the last few years, from 27% in 2002 to 62% in 2006.<sup>25</sup>

### Teenage parenthood

Keeping track of levels of condom use is important for devising strategies to bring down levels of HIV transmission and unwanted pregnancy among young people.

Contrary to common perceptions, teenage fertility rates have declined overall since the late 1980s. In 1987-89 the average fertility rate among 15-19 year-olds was 124 births per 1 000 women, a rate which fell to 81 in 1998 and again to 54 in 2003.<sup>26</sup> In 2008 the fertility rate for this age group rose to 58, however.<sup>27</sup>

The number of teenagers falling pregnant is nevertheless high. While South Africa's adolescent fertility rate is half that of the average for sub-Saharan Africa, it is three times higher than the average rate in East Asia and four times higher than the average European rate.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, statistics from the Department of Education suggest that pregnancy in schools is becoming more of a problem. In 2007, nearly 50 000 pupils fell pregnant while in school, a 151% increase since 2003. Some 53 pupils in Grade 3 got pregnant during 2007.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, 39% of girls surveyed in 2001 cited becoming pregnant or having a baby as the most important reason for leaving school before matriculating. This was the most common reason given by girls, ahead of being unable to pay school fees.<sup>30</sup> School drop-out as a result of pregnancy is not an issue facing girls only: some 54% of 14-22 year-old

young men surveyed in KwaZulu-Natal said that they had left school because of fathering a child.<sup>31</sup>

However, teenage pregnancy among schoolchildren does not give us the full picture of teenage pregnancy. Girls aged 17-19 account for 93% of pregnancies among 15-19 year-olds and research cited by LoveLife has suggested that teen pregnancy is much more likely to occur after school drop-out.<sup>32</sup>

In the midst of the debate on teenage pregnancy it has been suggested that the Child Support Grant (CSG) is serving as an incentive for young women to become pregnant. The fact that the teenage fertility rate has declined since the CSG was introduced in 1996 might serve as evidence against such a theory. Some 70% of women aged 18-35 who had ever been pregnant said that their pregnancy was unplanned.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, abortions among under-18 year-olds rose by 124% from 4 432 in 2001 to 9 895 in 2006.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear that more research needs to be done into the many possible factors — among them reduced stigma, increased sexual activity at a young age, and the availability of abortion — that contribute to large numbers of young people becoming parents before they have completed their education or entered the job market. When 65% of children grow up not living with both of their parents, research also needs to be done into the effect this has on young people's relationships and sexual activity.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) has warned, 'Young mothers begin a lifelong trajectory of poverty for themselves and their children through truncated educational opportunities and poor job prospects.'<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the problems facing teenage parents are likely to be

passed on to their children, as research in the UK shows that women born to teenage mothers are twice as likely to have a child as a teenager themselves.<sup>36</sup>

### HIV/AIDS

High numbers of young people falling pregnant indicates that many young people are having unprotected sex, which has a bearing on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. (Only Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland have higher youth HIV prevalence rates than South Africa.) The incidence of HIV is much higher among 15-24 year-old women than men — 12.7% compared with 4.0%.<sup>37</sup>

Despite this, the HIV prevalence rate among 15-24 year-olds has decreased from 9.3% in 2002 to 8.7% in 2008.<sup>38</sup>

Of the HIV-positive children in need of treatment under the age of 15, the proportion receiving antiretroviral treatment has increased from 2% in 2002/03 to 37% in 2007/08.<sup>39</sup> At the end of 2008 Unicef estimated that this figure was even higher at 61%.<sup>40</sup>

Correct knowledge about prevention of the transmission of HIV among 15-24 year-olds has actually gone down from 66% in 2005 to 42% in 2008.<sup>41</sup>

Despite high levels of sexual risk behaviour among young people, in which they risk teenage parenthood, HIV infection, and other sexually transmitted diseases, a large proportion of young people (77% of men and 80% of women) believe that people should wait until they are married to have sex. Around 80% also said that sexually active young men and women who are not married should have sex with only one partner.<sup>42</sup>

Many young people also appear to live in fear of sexual violence with 55% of women aged 12-22 years saying that they are afraid of being raped or sexually assaulted. Just over one in 25 people in the

same age group had been sexually assaulted or raped in the last 12 months when surveyed in 2005, and 42% of these assaults occurred either at school or at home. In only 11% of these cases did the respondent say they had reported the assault to the police.<sup>43</sup>

A third of schoolgirls surveyed in southern Johannesburg had experienced sexual harassment.<sup>44</sup> It is not uncommon for stories of young people being sexually assaulted at school, by teachers or fellow pupils, to feature in newspapers.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, some 40% of police dockets on rape in Gauteng indicate that the victims are children. The majority of cases with child victims were perpetrated by men known to the victims.<sup>46</sup>

There is also a link between other delinquent behaviour, such as youth crime, and attitudes to sex, particularly among young men. A survey asking young offenders about their attitudes to sex found that 31% thought it was acceptable for a man to force a woman to have sex with him if she is wearing revealing clothing. Some 20% thought that if a young man gets an erection it is a sign that he must have sex with someone, and 11% of the young offenders thought that buying someone a drink or taking them on a date entitled them to have sex with that person.<sup>47</sup>

### Violence and crime

Many young people are exposed to sexual violence, perpetrate violence against their partners and peers, and at the same time are

particularly vulnerable to being the victims of crime. A recent study into violent crime described the normalisation of violence in South African society which has contributed to a culture of violence.<sup>48</sup>

Families play an important role in socialising young people, and if large numbers of families are dysfunctional in one way or another, it may be that many young people are growing up seeing verbal and physical fighting as a normal way to interact.

Violence between young people in romantic relationships seems to be surprisingly common. In a study of Grade 8-11 pupils in Cape Town, 21% of respondents reported perpetrating violence against their partner, and 16% said they would use violence against their partner in future if angered.<sup>49</sup> Approximately half of all respondents in a survey of Grade 9-12 pupils at seven high schools in Eldorado Park (Johannesburg) said they had been either the perpetrator or the victim of violence in a romantic relationship in the last 12 months.<sup>50</sup>

In the lifestyle study some 26% of those who had been assaulted had been attacked by their boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>51</sup> The same study found that 7% of 12-22 year-olds had been hit, slapped, or physically pushed by their romantic partner, a rate which is higher in the older age groups – 11% of 18-20 year-olds and 10% of 21-22 year-olds.<sup>52</sup>

It is possible that many young people are learning violent

behaviour from domestic violence they have witnessed when growing up. Of those surveyed in the lifestyle study, 53% of young people had often seen family members lose their tempers, 24% had been physically punished by their parents, 18% had family members who argue a lot, 11% had witnessed family members intentionally hurting one another, and 7% said they had family members who hit one another when angry.

Some 32% of physical attacks in the home were with a weapon and over half of incidents of domestic violence witnessed by young people were preceded by the consumption of alcohol or drugs. However, violence in the homes of young people seems to have declined slightly in the last few years.

Not only are many children and young people growing up witnessing violence in their homes, but they are also exposed to it at school.

Nearly one in five Grade 8-11 pupils in a survey of over 5 000 schools in Cape Town and Durban reported having been the victim of bullying. Nearly one in ten admitted they had bullied other pupils.<sup>53</sup> The lifestyle study found that 8% of primary school pupils reported being the victim of some sort of assault in the last 12 months, and in 51% of these cases, teachers were found to be responsible.<sup>54</sup>

A survey of Gauteng high school pupils revealed that 48% reported that there had been serious incidents of violence in their school, and 61% said that pupils sometimes bring weapons to school.<sup>55</sup> Some 14% of 12-22 year-olds have reported feelings of fear when travelling to and from school, while 10% reported feeling unsafe at school. School toilets and playing fields were the areas at school most feared by young people.

### VIOLENCE WITNESSED BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR HOMES, 2005–2008

	2005	2008
Family members argue regularly	26%	18%
Family members become physical when they are angry	12%	7%
Young people physically punished by family members	27%	24%

Source: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, *How Rich the Rewards?*, pp30,35; *Running Nowhere Fast*

Physical punishment appears to remain common in schools, with 52% of respondents in the lifestyle study having been physically punished by teachers or principals, despite its having been outlawed by the South African Schools Act of 1996.<sup>56</sup>

As well as at school and at home, many young people also grow up witnessing violence and criminal activity in their communities. Some 51% of young people participating in the lifestyle study said they had witnessed people in their communities intentionally harm one another. In 83% of cases where young people had been the victim of assault, the perpetrator was known to them – in 40% of cases it was a community member. Over half of all respondents described their neighbourhood as having a lot of fights (54%) and a lot of crime (50%).<sup>57</sup>

Some 34% of 12-22 year-olds were personally acquainted with somebody in their community who had committed a crime and 33% knew somebody in their community who made a living out of criminal activities.<sup>58</sup>

One in six youths in the lifestyle study had family members who had been in jail, while nearly one in ten reported having adult family members who had done something to get them in trouble with the police in the 12 months

preceding the study. Nearly 4% had family members that used drugs and 2% had family members who dealt or sold drugs. Some 44% knew community members who had been to jail.<sup>59</sup>

The close proximity in which many young people live to criminal offenders makes it unsurprising that young people are at risk of being the victims of crime. The youth victimisation rate is almost double that of adults. Overall two out of five South Africans between the ages of 12 and 22 were the victims of crime between September 2004 and 2005. More than three quarters of young victims of assault received no support or counselling after being attacked.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the fact that youth victimisation has declined over the last few years (in line with general victimisation rates),<sup>61</sup> growing up knowing people engaged in crime, witnessing criminal activity, and being the victim of crime are likely to be risk factors causing young people to turn to crime themselves.

Although many young people witness violence in their homes and communities, 74% of those questioned in the lifestyle study said that they believed adults and others set a good example for them to follow.<sup>62</sup> Are young people growing up seeing nothing wrong with violence and crime?

The lifestyle study found that young people who had seen family members intentionally hurt one another were three times more likely to have carried weapons, two times more likely to have been in a fight, and four times more likely to have threatened or injured someone with a weapon than youths who had not been exposed to violence at home.

Those who had witnessed violence in their community were three times more likely to have carried weapons and been in a fight, and four times more likely to have threatened someone with a weapon. Those who had been victims of crime also reported significantly higher rates of perpetrating violent behaviour. Young people who had ever been assaulted were 12 times more likely to have been involved in physical fights, seven times more likely to have threatened or injured someone, and four times more likely to have carried weapons in the past year.<sup>63</sup>

A third of young people think that it would be acceptable to physically attack somebody who had assaulted them in the past if the opportunity arose.<sup>64</sup>

Violence within families appears to be a major contributing factor to youth crime. In a South African study which compared young offenders and young non-offenders, 27% of the offenders said that people in their family sometimes hit each other compared with 9% of the non-offenders.

Some 21% of young offenders had adult family members who had sold drugs compared with 5% of the non-offending sample, and 37% of offenders said that someone in their family had done something that could get them in trouble with the law compared with 10% of non-offenders.<sup>65</sup>

Being a victim of crime or violence can also affect the likelihood that young people will commit a crime.

**FACTORS DIFFERENTIATING YOUTH OFFENDERS FROM YOUTH NON-OFFENDERS**

	<i>Offenders</i>	<i>Non-offenders</i>
Family members sometimes hit each other	27%	9%
Adult family members who have sold drugs	21%	5%
Family members had done something that could get them in trouble with the law	37%	10%
Completed Grade 12	4%	12%
Physically punished by teachers	73%	56%
Threatened, scared, harmed, or hurt at school	26%	11%
Victim of a crime	77%	28%
Family members had been the victim of a crime	57%	35%

*Source:* Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, *Walking the Tightrope*, pp34-39, 60, 62, 73



Young offenders were significantly more likely to have experienced victimisation at school than non-offenders. For example, 73% of offenders reported having been physically punished by teachers compared with 56% of non-offenders, and 26% of offenders reported being threatened, scared, harmed, or hurt at school compared with 11% of non-offenders.

Some 77% of young offenders had been the victim of crime, compared with 28% of non-offenders. In addition, 57% of the offenders' family members reported being the victims of crime compared with 35% of the families of non-offending youth.<sup>66</sup>

Exposure to criminal and violent role-models in a child's family is not the only factor contributing to youth crime. Research in the US suggests that young people with a resilience to crime – those who are at least risk of committing crime – are more likely to come from a home environment 'characterised by supportive and affectionate parents or caregivers who closely supervise and regulate where and how their children spend their time'.<sup>67</sup>

The finding of the South African study comparing young offenders with non-offenders supports this, with offenders being significantly less likely to have received emotional and financial support from their fathers or to have spent a lot of time with their mothers than non-offenders. The largest proportion (24%) of

parents of offenders said that they spent no time with their children on a daily basis, whereas the largest proportion (37%) of parents of non-offenders said that they spent four hours or more a day with their children.<sup>68</sup>

Education also plays a role in the likelihood that young people will turn to crime: only 4% of young offenders had completed Grade 12 compared with 12% of non-offending young people.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast, the study found that poverty is not a factor in youth resilience to crime. Non-offending young people experienced similar levels of poverty when growing up to those who went on to offend.

Moreover, the explanation that young people turn to crime because they have nothing else to do was questioned by the findings of the study. With the exception of libraries and shops, young offenders were more likely than non-offenders to use various facilities within their area, including sports grounds, places of worship, community halls, and shebeens or pubs. Young offenders were also significantly more likely to participate in social groups such as youth groups, sports teams, and choirs than young non-offenders.<sup>70</sup>

It is important to understand the reason why so many young people turn to crime. Some 36% of the total prison population (including those awaiting trial) is under the age of 25,<sup>71</sup> and there may be many more young offenders not included in these statistics because

they are given non-custodial sentences. Those aged 18-24 years account for about 14% of the population, yet according to a study of arrestees, 31% of those arrested at 146 police stations across the country in 2000 were in this age category.<sup>72</sup>

Of course many young people are not criminals, but crime affects young people disproportionately. In six areas with high rates of murder, 62% of murders between 2001 and 2005 had both victims and suspects that were aged 15-34 years old.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, one in two non-natural deaths of 15-24 year-olds in South Africa is the result of violence.<sup>74</sup>

### Drug and alcohol use

The use of drugs and alcohol has strong links to youth crime and rates of victimisation. Some 57% of young offenders were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they committed the offence they were imprisoned for and research has shown a significant difference between alcohol and drug use among young offenders and young non-offenders.<sup>75</sup>

In addition, 11% of young people were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they were the victim of assault.<sup>76</sup> Therefore many young people are voluntarily engaging in activities that put them at risk of being the victim (or perpetrator) of a crime. Some 31% of those surveyed in the lifestyle study reported having had alcohol. While that may sound relatively low considering the age range was 12-22 years, 35% had their first drink aged 14 or younger. Some 20% said they drank to relieve boredom, 18% did so because their friends drank, 14% because they wanted to get drunk, and 3% because they were addicted to alcohol.<sup>77</sup>

#### DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE AMONG YOUNG OFFENDERS AND YOUNG NON-OFFENDERS

	<i>Offenders</i>	<i>Non-offenders</i>
Alcohol	82%	31%
Marijuana	61%	5%
Cocaine	14%	0.3%
Mandrax	29%	0%

*Source:* Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, *Walking the Tightrope*, p69

More than one in twenty young people had used marijuana. Some 27% of those who had used drugs said they had done so because their friends did, and 8% had used drugs to forget their troubles.<sup>78</sup> Some 7% of secondary school students admitted to using mandrax at some point in their lives, 7% to using cocaine, and 6% to using heroin.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, 73% of young people said they had easy access to alcohol, 36% to marijuana, 9.1% to crack cocaine, and 4.7% to tik (crystal methamphetamine). Some 62% of 12-14 year-olds said that alcohol was easily accessible, 26% said marijuana was easily accessible, 8% said crack cocaine was easily accessible, and 5% said they could easily obtain tik.<sup>80</sup>

Some would assume that alcohol and drug use is more prevalent in communities living in poverty but this link appears to be less than clear cut. Although a crude measure, looking at alcohol and drug use among the different race groups can give some indication of the lack of any clear link between poverty and the use of drugs and alcohol given that only 4% of white people live in poverty compared to 15% of Indians, 36% of coloured people, and 64% of Africans.<sup>81</sup> A study of university students found that the use of all types of drugs was significantly higher for white students than for students of other races.<sup>82</sup>

Rates of marijuana use in the lifestyle study were higher among whites, while different race groups had different levels of ease of access to various substances. Alcohol was most easily accessed by Africans, marijuana by coloured people, crack cocaine by Indians, and tik by coloured people. White youths were most likely to have consumed alcohol in the last month, but binge drinking was most prevalent amongst black youths.<sup>83</sup> In other words, it is likely that drug and alcohol use affects young people

across all races and backgrounds in one way or another.

While many young people use drugs or alcohol, many are also aware of its harmful effects. Some 95% of respondents in the lifestyle study said that drinking too much was harmful to one's health, 92% thought drinking makes people violent, and 83% thought that drunk people are unpleasant to be around. Yet significant proportions of young people do use drugs and alcohol and significant proportions believe they can have beneficial effects, such as to calm nerves, help them relax, and help them forget their troubles.

There is clear evidence that the abuse of alcohol and drugs has a negative effect on young people, and that it is likely to contribute to victimisation rates, youth offence rates, school drop-out rates, and mental health problems. For example, a study of just over 1 500 Grade 8-10 pupils in Cape Town found that those who reported using tik had higher rates of aggression, depression, and generic mental health problems.<sup>84</sup> It may also be that mental health problems such as depression are causing young people to use alcohol and drugs.

### **Mental health and self-perceptions**

Mental health problems affect a small but significant proportion of young people. Some 17% of Indian, 11% of African, and 8% of white university students reported considering ending their life in the last six months, according to the youth fund survey.<sup>85</sup> A survey conducted in the Western Cape found that 17% of children and adolescents suffer from psychiatric problems, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (5%), major depressive disorder (8%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (8%).<sup>86</sup>

The lifestyle study confirms that significant proportions of

young people suffer from mental health issues and low self-esteem. Some 26% of those surveyed said they have felt so sad or depressed for long periods of time in the past year that they stopped doing their usual activities. Rates of depression or sadness were higher among 21-22 year-olds at 37%. One in 20 of those who had been sad or depressed had considered suicide. Of those who had considered suicide, three quarters had devised a plan for their suicide attempt, 46% had attempted suicide once, and 32% had attempted suicide two times or more. Respondents who had experienced violence in their homes or communities were significantly more likely to feel depressed or suicidal.<sup>87</sup>

A study of about 2 000 15-26 year-olds in the Eastern Cape found 21% of young women and 14% of young men had depressive symptoms. Notably, the study also found strong links between depression and sexual risk behaviour, and recommended that HIV prevention efforts need to include the promotion of adolescent mental health.<sup>88</sup>

It is possible that disrupted family life contributes to mental health problems among children and young people. Academic research conducted in South Africa suggests that young people living without their mothers are more likely to be depressed,<sup>89</sup> and a study of young people in the Eastern Cape found that undisclosed paternal identity caused adolescents significant emotional distress.<sup>90</sup>

### **Young citizens**

Young people are South Africa's future generations of workers, entrepreneurs, and leaders. However, civic engagement among young people seems to be relatively low. In 2008 only 22% of 18-24 year-olds were registered to vote.

Significant proportions of young South Africans are disillusioned with their country. In a survey of Gauteng high school pupils on civic engagement, 32% said that they agreed with the statement, 'I wish that we still lived in the old South Africa'. Some 29% of African pupils agreed with this statement, compared to 44% of white students.

A quarter of African respondents said they would like to leave South Africa because they do not like the way the Government is run.

Some 45% of all respondents said that they felt other race groups had more advantages than they did. Only 20% of respondents said that they could usually trust other people. Some 43% agreed with the statement, 'Government does not care what you think', and 61% thought that 'the people who run the country are not really concerned with what happens to you'.<sup>91</sup>

There were also high levels of disillusionment with economic prospects, with 77% saying that they would find it hard to find a good job, no matter how educated they were. Some 61% felt that young people leaving school in 1990 would have found it easier to find jobs than they would, and 47% reported being worried that members of their family that were employed would lose their job in the next year.<sup>92</sup>

### The way forward

Many young people in South Africa grow up taking many risks, in their sexual behaviour, in their use of drugs and alcohol, and in their resort to violence and crime. They also face many challenges, including high unemployment, poor education, and poverty. While not all these problems can be explained by family breakdown, both local and international

research provides evidence that growing up in stable families with both parents present can make a significant difference to the future outcomes of young people.

When only 35% of children grow up living with both of their biological parents, we should be alert to the risk that dysfunctional families are damaging the prospects of our younger generations. Moreover, there is evidence that people from broken families are more likely to go on to have relationship problems and create fractured families themselves. This is a cycle that needs to be broken.

The seminar held by the Institute with organisations working with families and young people produced a number of policy suggestions that could be adopted by both the Government and the non-profit sector to address the causes and effects of family breakdown. These included:

- Tackling unemployment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a lot of men do not take responsibility for their children because they are financially unable to do so. Significantly reducing unemployment (which the Government has pledged to do) could allow many more men to be financially and emotionally involved in their children's lives.
- Improved research on aspects of family breakdown and its effects. The Institute's research has been limited by the amount of available up-to-date data and research on the causes and effects of family breakdown in South Africa. The family needs to be given greater importance in research and policymaking.
- More social workers. Many participants cited a scarcity of social workers as a barrier to addressing the different facets of family breakdown, particu-

larly in rural areas. In addition, many social workers practice privately because they can earn more than they would in the government and non-profit sectors.

- Initiatives to encourage older men to support young men in the absence of fathers. Schemes supporting grandmothers in caring for children already exist, but such initiatives ignore the potential for grandfathers and male elders to play a role in filling the gap left by absent parents.
- Sex education that includes education about personal responsibility and the responsibility of being a parent, alongside information about safe sex and contraception.
- Greater importance given to the transmission of values to children and young people by individuals, in schools, and through government policies.

Despite the many challenges faced by young people, most remain driven and hopeful of achieving their goals. Some 94% of 12-22 year-olds have a good idea of where they are heading in life, 99% had specific goals they want to achieve, and 97% believe that their own actions and efforts would determine whether they met their desired goals. Over 90% of young people also feel that they will be able to cope with difficult situations in life.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps this just shows that many young people are not aware of the odds that are stacked against them living healthy and successful lives, but it does show what South Africa's young generations might be able to achieve if they are given the chance to grow up in stable families and communities, free of violence, and with the opportunity of a decent education.