



SA YOUTH

2022: South African Youth at a Glance

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PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH UNIT

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Introduction

The concept of youth may be applied differently according to culture and context to define the period of transition and growing independence from childhood to adulthood. It is often referenced as the age group in which individuals may leave compulsory education and find their first employment.¹ This latter age limit has been increasing, since higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. This also sets, depending on particular contexts, new interpretations and delimitations of the age group. The United Nations, for statistical consistency across regions, defines “youth” as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member States.²

In South Africa, youth is defined as persons between the ages of 14 to 35 years.³ Youth do not constitute a homogeneous group; their socio-economic, demographic and geographical situations vary widely both within and between provinces. However, in general, youth face challenges deriving from limited access to resources, education, health, training, employment, and broader economic and social development opportunities.

The country has officially dissolved all Covid-19 regulations, however the aftermath of Covid-19 has left a significant mark on the economy and education system, leaving a growing number of young people jobless. While there has been good progress on youth transformational in South Africa, there are still persistent trends. Youth are disproportionately affected by high unemployment. Young people require more and relevant education and training to adequately manage the realities of an ever-changing local and global labour market. Increasing violence suffered and committed by youth, particularly men, has a significant impact on the social and economic fabric of the country. Increasing vulnerabilities of youth, in particular those that are affected by poverty has left many young people without access to access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. With the added pressures of a global pandemic, it is imperative that health of young people is prioritized, this includes sexual and reproductive health, and mental health and well-being.

This document provides a review of key issues affecting the lives, futures and prosperity of youth. The issues raised are not an exhaustive list, but are reflective of challenges affecting youth at a global, national and local scale. It includes issues related to sexual and reproductive health, education, employment, food security, substance abuse, and mental health.

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2019). Implementation strategies for youth mainstreaming in sustainable development processes.

² United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2019). Implementation strategies for youth mainstreaming in sustainable development processes.

³ National Youth Development Agency Act 54 of 2008.

Unemployment

In any economy, employment growth at faster rates than economic growth is essential in reducing unemployment levels and facilitating economic development. Employment creation is one of the main cornerstones of any economy. Globally, new employment has been difficult to achieve, especially within a low economic growth environment.⁴ At present, South Africa has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world particularly among young people.

Youth make up a significant proportion of the population, they can therefore not be overlooked when considering creating an inclusive and transformed society. Changes in the economic and political landscape of the country will always have an impact on the lives of the over 20 million youth who currently live in South Africa. The need to address high levels of unemployment amongst youth is therefore essential to the growth and development of the country at large.

According to Statistics South Africa (2022), there are two definitions of unemployment used to describe form of unemployment: the official definition and the expanded definition of unemployment.⁵

Unemployed persons according to the official definition are those (aged 15–64 years) who:

- a) Were not employed in the reference week; and
- b) Actively looked for work or tried to start a business in the four weeks preceding the survey interview; and
- c) Were available for work, i.e. would have been able to start work or a business in the reference week; or
- d) Had not actively looked for work in the past four weeks, but had a job or business to start at a definite date in the future and were available.

Unemployed persons according to the Expanded definition are those (aged 15–64 years) who:

- a) Were not employed in the reference week; and
- b) Were available to work but did not look for work either because they are discouraged from looking for work (see definition of discouraged work-seeker) or did not look for work for other reasons other than discouragement.

Youth in South Africa continue to be disadvantaged in the labour market with an unemployment rate higher than the national average. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) for the first quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate was 63,9% for those aged 15-24 and 42,1% for those aged 25-34 years, while the current official national rate stands at 34,5%.

⁴ Meyer, D.F. (2017). An Analysis of the Short and Long-Run Effects of Economic Growth on Employment in South Africa.

⁵ Statistics South Africa (2022). Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 1: 2022

Despite a marginal increase (0.8%) in employment since the end of 2021, these statistics are alarming and has a devastating impact on the lives of young people. The Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2022 Quarter 1 report highlighted that South Africa has over 10 million young people aged 15-24 years and, of these, only 2,5 million were in the labour force, either employed or unemployed. The largest share (7,7 million or 75,1 %) of this group of young people are those that are out of the labour force (i.e. inactive). The main reason for being inactive is discouragement, i.e. they have lost hope of finding a job that suits their skills or in the area they reside.⁶ Furthermore, Statistics South Africa revealed that in the first quarter of 2022, unemployment among young graduates aged 15-24 declined from 40,3% to 32,6%, while it increased by 6,9 % to 22,4% for those aged 25-34.

Economic and social disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis have particularly affected younger people, and therefore policy should respond with measures, programmes and initiatives targeted at this population group.⁷ In a response to youth unemployment, South Africa has established an intervention spearheaded by the Presidency called the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI).

The PYEI is a direct response to the challenge that too many young people are not transitioning from learning to earning.

- The intervention sets out priority actions which together seek to:
- Stimulate and aggregate demand
- Provide a seamless mechanism for young people to be linked to the opportunities generate
- Receive support appropriate to their context and pathway

According to the National Youth Development Agency (2022), the intervention has already begun to increase levels of alignment across government and create space for innovation in ways that accelerate delivery and catalyse further actions. However, it is too soon to measure the impact this intervention has had on youth unemployment.



⁶ Statistics South Africa (2022). Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 1: 2022

⁷ International Labour Organisation (2022). Promoting youth employment during COVID-19: A review of policy responses.

Education

In South Africa, education is governed by two national departments, namely the Department of Basic Education (DBE), which is responsible for primary and secondary schools, and the department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which is responsible for tertiary education and vocational training.⁸

Tertiary education is both the aspiration of more and more young people around the globe and a fundamental requirement for employment in the industries that drive the global knowledge economy. As such, tertiary education provides unique opportunities for individual development and equality of opportunity as well as promoting shared prosperity.⁹

Providing quality early learning and basic education has its own challenges, keeping children in the education system to complete their education (Matric), is another. Just over a quarter of South Africa's cumulative cohort drop out of school before the end of Matric – the majority of whom are from poor areas and vulnerable to numerous barriers to education. Data shows that learner drop-out becomes a serious problem after grade nine, but that the underlying causes build up during earlier grades. This inequality of access is worsened by a gender inequality that impacts young girls especially.¹⁰

KEY STATISTICS FOR YOUTH IN EDUCATION ¹¹	
Youth literacy rate(aged 15-34)	95.7%
Adult literacy rate (aged 35-64)	85.8%
Upper secondary completion rate (aged 25 and older)	71.9%
Secondary school completion rate (Age 15 and older)	68.3%
Post-secondary completion rate (Age 25 and Older)	18.8%
Tertiary education income covered by tuition fees	31.6%
Average rise in the cost of education:2021	4.1%

While literacy rates are high, secondary completion rate is significantly low. This is reflected in the findings released by Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, in a study on the social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people in the Post School Education and Training (PSET) Sector. The study noted that although the education levels of the South African population have increased significantly over the past decade, only 6% of adults have a degree.¹² In this regard, South Africa fares very poorly in comparison to other middle-income countries, thereby compromising its international

⁸ Statistics South Africa (2021). Education.

⁹ The World Bank (2021). World Bank Education Overview: Higher Education.

¹⁰ UNICEF (2022). Education

UNICEF is committed to ensuring quality learning for every child.

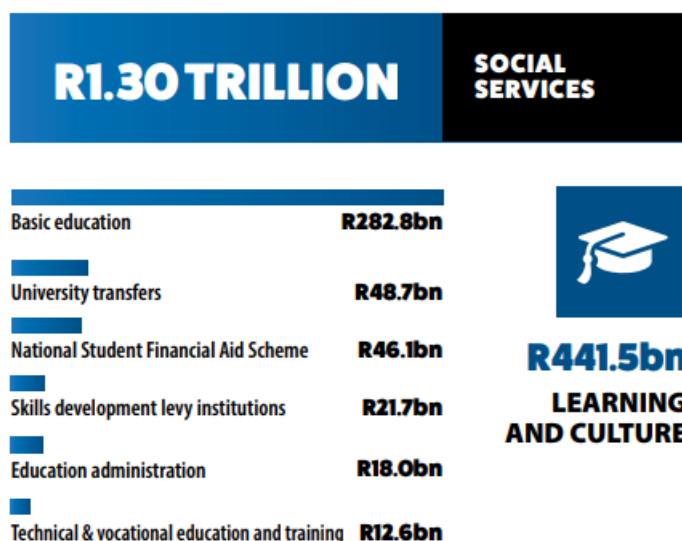
¹¹ Derived from the General Household Survey 2019 and Statistics South Africa 2022

¹² Khuluvhe, M., Netshifhefhe, E., Ganyaupfu, E., and Negogogo, V. (2021). Post-School Education and Training Monitor: Macro- Indicator Trends.

economic competitiveness. Among those South African adults who have degrees, many more females than males are degree holders (52.3% versus 47.7%).¹³

In an effort to improve the quality of and access to education, South Africa has appropriated a substantial proportion of its national budget to learning and culture.

In 2022, South Africa has allocated over R1.3 trillion on social services, this included a budget of R 441.5 billion for learning and culture. While South Africa's education system requires improvement, its budget allocation is indicative of the importance of education and learning in the country. This budget was drafted and adopted in line with the National Development Plan.



In 2011, the government released the National Development Plan (NDP) for 2030, a blueprint to guide the future development of South Africa. The NDP set ambitious targets for higher education and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects in particular:

- Increase university science and maths entrants to 450,000;
- Increase graduation rates to more than 25% by 2030 – this involves a significant increase of graduates in STEM fields; and
- Produce more than 100 doctoral graduates per million per year by 2030 – most of these should be in STEM.

Meeting these goals may have a direct impact on decreasing the youth unemployment rate.

¹³ Khuluvhe, M., Netshifhefhe, E., Ganyaupfu, E., and Negogogo, V. (2021). Post-School Education and Training Monitor: Macro- Indicator Trends.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services (SRHS) are important for young people, more so for young women. Benefits to accessing SRH services extend beyond health. Positive health interventions such as contraception and access to accurate information prevent, for example, early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections - when young people are able to freely access these services, they are able to delay pregnancy, early marriage, curb the spread of disease/infections and avoid possible related stigmatisation. This in turn leads to options for greater educational achievements, and subsequently improved career and employment opportunities.



Obiezu-Umeh et al (2021) indicate that the utilisation of SRH preventive and treatment services among youth remains low. This is partly explained by multiple barriers in accessing SRH services including lack of awareness on where to get services, fear of lack of confidentiality and privacy, parental consent, cost of services, distance, and negative provider attitudes.¹⁴ In addition, “various social factors – such as peer pressure, intimate partner violence, rape, a lack of knowledge about SRH and barriers to contraception – also contribute to high rates of unprotected sex. This places a substantial proportion of South Africa’s youth at risk of unwanted pregnancies, sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV infection. Young women bear a disproportionately high burden of sexual and reproductive ill health and are disproportionately affected by the risk of sexual violence.”¹⁵

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that COVID 19 has resulted in wide-spread losses in access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. Findings from a survey of young people indicate that more than a third of young people felt more vulnerable to harassment, sexual physical emotional or financial abuse than before COVID-19, while one third of young people were not able to access family planning services they needed. This has put already marginalised populations of women at greater risk.¹⁶ The South African Medical Research Council reports that the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown had a devastating effect on the lives, health, and access to health care of adolescent girls and young women. Based on their responses to a survey on combination HIV prevention interventions, regarding access to health care, 22.5% of participants were unable to go to a clinic or doctor when they needed, 34.9% said they were unable to get the medicines they needed, 22.5% said

¹⁴ Obiezu-Umeh C, Nwaozuru U, Mason S, Gbaja-Biamila T, Oladele D, Ezechi O and Iwelunmor J (2021), Implementation Strategies to Enhance Youth-Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review

¹⁵ South African Child Gauge, 2015, Youth health and well-being: why it matters (Cooper, D, De Lannoy A and Rule, C)

¹⁶ United Nations Population Fund (2021) Studies show severe toll of COVID-19 on sexual and reproductive health, rights around the world

they were unable to get the contraceptives they needed, and 21.0% reported challenges accessing condom because of COVID-19 and the lockdown.¹⁷

One of the key consequences of the pandemic has been increased rates of teenage/youth pregnancy. Media reports indicate that there has been an increase in teenage and youth pregnancies during higher COVID-19 lockdown levels as a result of the closure of educational institutions and the inaccessibility of sexual and reproductive health services. Reports also indicate that young women may have been more susceptible to sexual exploitation during lockdown.¹⁸

Shocking Stats SA report shows 33 000 teen mothers in 2020, 660 of them younger than 10 years old

Research by Barron et al (2022) looking at teenage/youth births in the public sector between 2017 and 2021 indicate that there have been marked increases in births among girls and women aged 10-19 years. While the population growth rate for young women aged 15-19 years between 2017/18 and 2021/22 was 2.9%, the number of deliveries for this age group increased by 17.4%. This means that in 2021/22 nearly 58 women aged 15-19 per 1000 were pregnant.¹⁹

So why the high pregnancy rate in this group when contraceptives (are supposed to be) readily available?

In a national survey conducted in 2017, among South Africans of all ages, condom use was found to be highest among people aged 15–24 years, but was still suboptimal - a quarter of survey respondents aged 15–24 years had never used a condom with their most recent sexual partner, and less than half (49.8%) of women aged 15–24 years reported condom use at last sex. In addition, rates of condom use in this age group appear to be declining, with each year showing progressively lower use of condoms for sex among South Africans aged 15–24.²⁰

In the same survey young women and men also provided reasons for engaging in unprotected sex. Getting a girl pregnant was described by male participants as a symbol of prestige, and sexual maturity for young men. Condomless sex was associated with concepts of manhood and masculinity; male respondents suggested that male celebrities and respected role models do not use condoms. Many young women indicated that it was difficult to negotiate condom use with their partners as they were confronted with accusations of cheating or were afraid of being dumped.

¹⁷ South African Medical Research Council, 2022, HERStory 2 Study: Process evaluation of the combination HIV prevention intervention for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), Global Fund grant period 2019 to 2022, <https://www.samrc.ac.za/intramural-research-units/HealthSystems-HERStory>

¹⁸ <https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/teenage-pregnancies-in-africa-rocket-during-covid-19-lockdown-6fe93e4>

¹⁹ Barron et al, 2022, Teenage births and pregnancies in South Africa, 2017 - 2021 – a reflection of a troubled country: Analysis of public sector data, South African Medical Journal

²⁰ Duby et al, 2021, “Condoms Are Boring”: Navigating Relationship Dynamics, Gendered Power, and Motivations for Condomless Sex Amongst Adolescents and Young People in South Africa, International Journal of Sexual Health, Vol.33

Mental Health

The right to health care is a basic human right guaranteed by Section 27 of the South African Constitution. According to the Constitution, the State must ‘respect, protect, promote’ and fulfil this right-this includes mental health. However, mental health is one of the most neglected areas of health. Despite the impact of mental health conditions on individuals, families and society, there has been little investment in mental health, particularly in community-based services. Countries spend on average only 2% of their health budgets on mental health; the average spent by other sectors is unknown but expected to be a tiny fraction of that.²¹



The World Health Organisation (2022) defines mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. It is also crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.²²

Statistics on mental health in South Africa is limited. However, a poll conducted by UNICEF in 2021 in South Africa stated the following.²³

65 per cent of young people with mental health related issues
did not seek help – UNICEF

Mental-health conditions, which include behavioural and mental-health problems e.g. depression, anxiety disorders (including post-traumatic stress disorder), and disruptive behavioural disorders (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mood disturbances, substance use, suicidal behaviour, and aggressive/disruptive behaviour) are the leading causes of adjustment problems in adolescents and young people worldwide.²⁴

²¹ United Nations (2020). COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health

²² World Health Organisation (2022). Mental health: strengthening our response.

²³ UNICEF (2021). U-Report poll findings and #OnMyMind campaign launched to galvanize action to improve mental health support for young people in South Africa.

²⁴ United Nations (2014). Mental Health Matters: Social Inclusion of youth with mental health conditions.

Mental-health conditions have a significant impact on the development of over a billion youth and their social and economic integration, including employability.²⁵ High youth unemployment rates therefore further exacerbate pre-existing mental health concerns.

The latest Mental State of the World report has identified South Africa as the lowest-ranked country based on mental wellbeing. It also revealed how the mental health of younger generations has plummeted; growing up in an internet-dominated and inequitable world. ²⁶

The mental health of young people has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Prevalence of symptoms of anxiety and depression has risen dramatically among young people and remains higher than pre-crisis levels even with the re-opening of the economy. The worsening of mental health can be attributed to disruptions to access to mental health services, the wide-ranging impacts of school closures, and a labour market crisis that is disproportionately affecting young people. With adequate support and timely intervention, young people experiencing mental distress may be able to bounce back as we recover from the COVID-19 crisis. This will require a scaling up of existing mental health support in education systems, workplaces and health systems, and comprehensive policies to support young people to remain in education, or to find and keep a job.²⁷

In an effort to bolster services related to mental health in South Africa, Deputy Minister Sibongiseni Dhlomo emphasized mental health as a priority during the budget vote speech in 2022.

He noted that the Department of Health will be scaling up mental health promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation interventions. He added that the Department has put various interventions in place to improve mental health services including, and this include building capacity for planning and mental health system strengthening at district and primary health care level by establishing district specialist mental health teams to plan, coordinate and facilitate integrated mental health services across the priority programmes.

The following is a list of mental health related policies and legislative documents in South Africa

- ⚖️ Constitution of RSA, Bill of Rights
- ⚖️ Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998
- ⚖️ United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- ⚖️ White Paper on Rights of Persons with Disabilities

²⁵ United Nations (2014). Mental Health Matters: Social Inclusion of youth with mental health conditions.

²⁶ Mental Health Million Project (2022). Mental Health State 2021. Data for the study uses an online assessment tool called the Mental Health Quotient (MHQ), which comprises 47 elements including both problems and assets. With over 11 887 respondents, South Africa had the lowest MHQ score of 46%.

²⁷ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2022). Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis.

- ⚖️ National Health Act 61 of 2006
- ⚖️ National Patient Rights Charter
- ⚖️ UN Policy Brief: COVID-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health
- ⚖️ National Mental Health Policy Framework 2013-2020
- ⚖️ Disability Rights Charter
- ⚖️ Mental Health Care Act 17 of 2002
- ⚖️ Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000

Substance Abuse

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlights that around 269 million people used drugs in 2018, up 30 per cent from 2009, with adolescents and young adults accounting for the largest share of users. More people are using drugs, and there are more drugs, and more types of drugs, than ever.²⁸



Centralised information on substance abuse in South Africa is limited. A study was undertaken by SACENDU, the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use to monitor alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse treatment admissions in South Africa during 2018/19. The findings from the study relates to persons who sought treatment - given the fact that not everyone is able to or opts to receive treatment, the scale of the problem is possibly much greater.

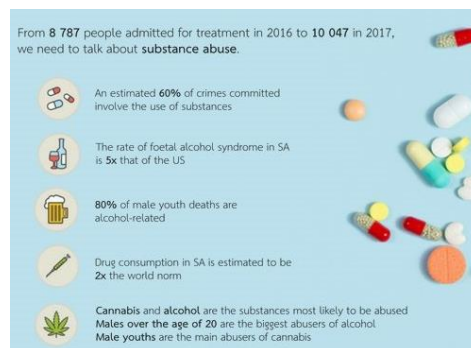
According to SACENDU, cannabis and alcohol are the substances most likely to be abused. Males over the age of 20 are the biggest abusers of alcohol while male youths are the main abusers of cannabis. It's estimated that up to 60% of crimes committed involve the use of substances and 80% of male youth deaths are alcohol-related. Oladeinde et al. (2020) note that substance use is linked to many forms of crime and violence, suicide, HIV/AIDS, and premature death, particularly among youths.²⁹ A recent media article highlighted the increased use of nyaope in communities – many young men interviewed indicated that they are willing to attend rehabilitation programmes but believe that they will relapse due to high unemployment and lack of youth development opportunities.³⁰

²⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) World Drug Report 2020: Socioeconomic Characteristics and Drug Use Disorders.

²⁹ Oladeinde et al (2020) Building cooperative learning to address alcohol and other drug abuse in Mpumalanga, South Africa: a participatory action research process

³⁰ <https://ewn.co.za/2021/06/16/nyaope-addiction-has-sa-been-sitting-on-a-pandemic-all-along>

- Alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive substance in the country. In South Africa, about 58% of deaths on South African roads can be attributed to alcohol consumption.
- Each year, approximately 5,000 young people under the age of 21 die as a result of underage drinking; this includes about 1,900 deaths from motor vehicle crashes, 1,600 as a result of homicides, 300 from suicide, as well as hundreds from other injuries such as falls, burns, and drownings.
- Cannabis is by far the most used illicit drug on South African streets, specifically among youth. This is a mixture of mandrax and marijuana which is street named White Pipe and is a widely used drug in South Africa; and
- Nyaope/whoonga, a mixture of heroin and cannabis as well as methamphetamine (tik) use has gained popularity among adolescents, with far-reaching effects on users, families and communities.³¹



Rummage (2019) states that “many communities are distressed due to diverse socio-economic challenges which include poverty, joblessness and consequently, the problem of illegal drug abuse is heightened...poverty and unemployment and the lack of any recreational facilities leave young people with a feeling of hopelessness and worthlessness. If they see no prospect of ever getting a decent job and enough income to live a normal life, seeking oblivion through drugs and/or other substances becomes a tempting escape route.”³²

Boredom can be a problem if you have nothing to do during the day and as a result you can end up abusing drugs. (Blessmore, 22 years, 30 May 2018)

You see, like me, I do not have a job, I am at a rehab and when I get out, I will stay at home, get bored, nothing to do, it is making me use [drugs]. (Praise, 24 years, 30 May 2018)

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Poverty and unemployment are identified as fundamental drivers of substance abuse – the study undertaken by Oladeinde et al (2020) finds that there was consensus among participants that disenfranchised and disillusioned youths and adults visiting taverns to while away time are drawn into alcohol and other drug abuse. School-leavers were seen as particularly vulnerable with many accounts of substance use and abuse among children to relieve stress from hardship and poverty, and of prostitution among women and girls.

³¹ <https://www.dsd.gov.za/index.php/latest-news/21-latest-news/378-social-development-commemorates-international-day-against-drug-abuse-and-illicit-trafficking>

³² Rummage, I (2019) Perceptions of Illegal Drug Use in South Africa: A Qualitative Literature Review, Malmö University: Faculty of Health and Society, Department of Criminology

³³ Sibanda, A & Batisai, K (2021) The intersections of identity, belonging and drug use disorder: struggles of male youth in post-apartheid South Africa, International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 26:1, 143-15

Sibanda and Batisai (2021) argue that exclusion and isolation contribute significantly to drug use among young people in South Africa. Many young people find themselves trapped in unstable family environments and discriminating school environments as well as marginalising post-apartheid opportunities that exacerbate the alienation of the youth. Young people yearn to be valued, noticed and have stable and meaningful connections within their social and home environments which provide structural support and appropriate bridging relationships critical in helping them develop a sense of belonging. When these structures fail, young people often seek new ways and create their own spaces for forming and expressing their identity and forging their own meanings of belonging. For instance, some young people resort to anti-social forms of recognition, such as drug use, as they perceive the consequences of delinquent behaviour better than feeling isolated and lonely.³⁴

Torun and Coskunal (2020)³⁵ identify youth substance abuse as a hidden epidemic in the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people's lives have changed tremendously – the transition to online classes, limited to no social interactions and lack of physical contact could lead to a rise in drug disorders and substance as they find mechanisms to cope with feelings of loss and anxiety.

In addition, the UNODC has highlighted that increased unemployment and limited opportunities as a result of the pandemic are likely to affect the poorest, vulnerable and most marginalised including women and youth, making them more vulnerable to drug use, cultivation and trafficking.³⁶

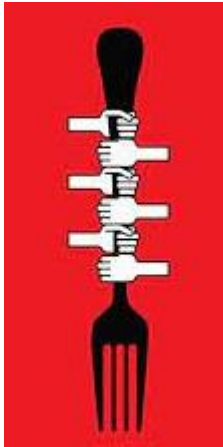
³⁴ Ibid. at 38

³⁵ Torun, H.O., & Coşkunol, H. (2020). Lessons learned from a pandemic: Covid-19 and substance use

³⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) World Drug Report 2019: Global overview of drug demand and supply

Food Security

“Food security is defined as meaning that all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life.”



Achieving food and nutrition security is not only about producing enough food for a country's needs, but also about access, affordability and many other factors that influence the way food is produced, prepared and consumed in different parts of the world. achieving food and nutrition security is not only about producing enough food for a country's needs, but also about access, affordability and many other factors that influence the way food is produced, prepared and consumed in different parts of the world.³⁷

Food insecurity is often rooted in poverty and has long term impacts on the ability of families, communities, and countries to develop.

Nearly 1.6 billion people are between the ages of 10 and 24, making up 24% of the global population. This ever growing population of young people is particularly vulnerable during a hunger crisis. Malnourishment, stunting, starvation and struggling to achieve major life milestones in the face of climate change, violent conflict and food insecurity - this reality creates entire generations of individuals who are born into disadvantage and face a steeper climb to self-reliance than their parents.³⁸

811 million	2.4 billion	6 out of 10	80%
PEOPLE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH FOOD.	PEOPLE DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD.	PEOPLE FACING ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY ARE IN COUNTRIES PLAGUED BY CONFLICT.	OF PEOPLE LIVING IN HUNGER ARE IN AREAS PRONE TO NATURAL DISASTERS AND EXTREME WEATHER.

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United Nations projections are that the global population will increase by 2 billion people to around 10 billion people by 2050 - the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) indicates that a 50 percent increase in food production will be necessary to meet the needs of this growing population.

³⁷ Human Sciences Research Council, 2020, Tackling hunger and malnutrition: It's about coordination, empowerment and sustainability

³⁸ The Hunger Project (2022), World Hunger Day 2022: #YouthEndingHunger, <https://thp.org/news/world-hunger-day-2022/>

³⁹ <http://www.worldhungerday.org/>

By 2030, it is expected that the youth (under the age of 18) will make up 60 percent of urban populations, which presents both challenges (e.g. in terms of high youth unemployment in urban areas) and opportunities (e.g. youth engaging in urban agriculture) in regard to providing sufficient access to nutritious foods to rapidly growing urban populations.⁴⁰

In Africa, the number of youth is growing rapidly. In 2015, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa, accounting for 19 per cent of the global youth population. By 2030, it is projected that the number of youth in Africa will have increased by 42 percent. Africa's youth population is expected to continue to grow throughout the remainder of the 21st century, more than doubling from current levels by 2055.⁴¹ Many young people have faced significant challenges with regard to food security even before the onset of COVID-19. With limited opportunities for employment as well as the closure of tertiary institutions to limit the spread of the virus, many youths experienced food vulnerability.

The NIDS-CRAM Survey⁴² found that between May/June 2020 and February/March 2021 both hunger and lack of money to purchase food increased. The survey findings note that this is worrying and lays bare an economy that was already in dire straits with worryingly high food insecurity and economic decline prior to the pandemic. Given the high rate of youth unemployment, it can be expected that high numbers of youth are also experiencing food insecurity.

A study undertaken by Youth Capital and Open Dialogue on what it costs young people to look for work



found that the majority of young people who participated in the study, lived in households that are food insecure and rely on social grants, and food insecurity has only worsened as a result of COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns. A whopping 84% of survey respondents indicated that they had to choose between searching for employment and buying food.⁴³

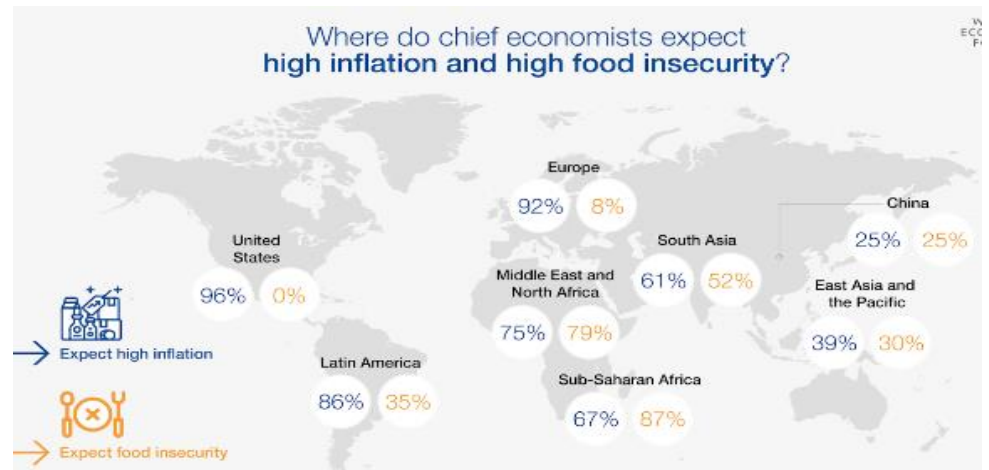
⁴⁰ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2020) The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets

⁴¹ United Nations (2015) Youth population trends and sustainable development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

⁴² National Income Dynamics Study Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey

⁴³ Youth Capital and Open Dialogue, 2022, Beyond the cost

This challenge is further compounded by economic outlooks which predict that higher inflation across the globe will exacerbate food insecurity.⁴⁴



Youth involvement and participation in the agricultural sector is important for sustainability. Haruna et al. (2019)⁴⁵ highlight that the need to emphasis youth participation in agricultural education to enhance food security cannot be overemphasized. This is because the future of agriculture in most developing countries might be bleak if the bulk of the production efforts were relinquished to the aged farming population. A 2018 panel discussion on the involvement of youth in the agricultural industry notes the following.⁴⁶

- Farmers are ageing - the average age of a South African farmer is estimated at 62.
- Young people are interested in agriculture, but not enough of them make the leap.
- Not enough vocational training institutions are efficiently producing skills needed for agriculture today -part of the reason is the disjoint between the agricultural industry and training institutions.
- There is a need for platforms where youth aspiring to get into the industry can get information and guidelines on how to participate in the industry.
- Young people must be integrated into the productive side of the agricultural value chain instead of seeing them only as a consumer market.
- There are a plenty of opportunities in agriculture beyond actual primary production. More opportunities are available in the entire value chain.
- Organised agriculture should get involved in the running of training institutions so that graduates obtain relevant qualifications and direct access to the industry. This will help end the painful phenomenon of unemployable graduates.

⁴⁴ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/global-economy-inflation-food-security/>

⁴⁵ Haruna et al, 2019, Challenges and enhancement of youth participation in agricultural education for sustainable food security

⁴⁶ Sihlobo, W, 2018, How does the youth see agriculture in South Africa/, Agricultural Economics Today, <https://wandilesihlobo.com/2018/05/18/how-does-the-youth-see-agriculture-in-south-africa/>

- Young people with a passion for farming must not wait for land – they must find avenues to access training in the meantime so that they are better equipped for when the land becomes available. This must include approaching farmers directly for experience on farming.
- There is a need for increased funding for research and development – especially with the changing nature of the industry.
- The image of agriculture must change so that young people don't regard it as retrogressive.

Sixty percent of Africa's unemployed are youth, even more are underemployed, and youth unemployment rates are double those of adult unemployment in most countries. The formal labour sector cannot provide enough jobs for the millions of young people entering the workforce each year. Most youth in developing countries will need to rely on self-employment, micro-entrepreneurship or mixed-livelihoods (i.e. earning income from multiple activities) to earn their livelihoods.⁴⁷

The rising youth population is increasingly better educated, and there is an unprecedented opportunity for economic and social development if the talents of this generation can be tapped.⁴⁸ The challenge however is that youth are often unaware of opportunities that exist in the agri-food system beyond, apart from farming/food production, there are also areas like processing, packaging, distribution and marketing. It is therefore essential that greater awareness of the employment opportunities in the agri-food system is created, as well as on corresponding areas of school and post-school education. Youth must be empowered to take up these opportunities – agriculture studies and related activities must be promoted among young people.

It is therefore clear that youth participation in the agricultural sector could have the dual role of reducing unemployment and addressing food insecurity. Glover and Sumberg (2020) state that “from a development perspective, today's youth generation is on the front line: it will have to cope with the effects of environmental and climate change, which are likely to accelerate and intensify during their lifetimes and those of their children.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Schmall, A (2018) Increasing youth engagement in Feed the Future, Agrilinks, https://www.agrilinks.org/post/Increasing_Youth_Engagement_in_Feed_the_Future

⁴⁸ Allen et al, 2017, Agrifood Youth employment and engagement study, Michigan State University

⁴⁹ Glover D and Sumberg J (2020) Youth and Food Systems Transformation. Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 4:101.doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2020.00101

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