

Conclusion

This report highlights some of the essential findings from Census '96 about the youth of South Africa. The report singles out the youth as an important but often neglected sector of society. Some of the problems faced by the youth in South Africa are of a unique nature and have major implications on the nature and scope of service delivery in the country both presently and in the future. It is therefore important that such problem areas be foregrounded to facilitate proper planning and implementation of developmental policies.

Youth form a large constituency (40%) within the population of South Africa and their proportion, particularly among Africans, is on the increase. Figures on the age of mothers at first childbirth point to one of the major population concerns in South Africa namely, adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive behaviour.

Twelve per cent of all young females in South Africa became mothers between 12 and 16 years of age. This highlights the seriousness of the problem of unwanted and unplanned pregnancy, particularly among teenagers of school-going age. A related problem is the inaccessibility of proper health care facilities and education on reproductive health and contraceptives.

Added to this, is the devastating impact of HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases, particularly on the youth in South Africa. Because of 'the deprivation trap' a large percentage of youth live in poverty. Their households do not have adequate money for basic needs and as a result youth, particularly females, become vulnerable to abuse and prostitution. Under such circumstances, youth are often left powerless regarding decisions and choices pertaining to the quality of their own lives.

Education is a very valuable means through which people are empowered. This report highlights the differences in educational achievement, with particularly low levels among African youth in non-urban areas. A large percentage of African youth (8%) indicated having had no formal education at all, while only a small minority (5%) of African youth acquired post-matric qualifications, compared to a larger proportion (28%) of white youth.

Without proper qualifications, the chances of getting a job are remote. Also, the type of jobs available for those with inadequate qualifications is at an elementary level. A large percentage of female youth (21%) worked as domestic workers in private households and, on average, 26% of youth held jobs at elementary level in 1996. This includes 25,7% of African youth, while the proportion is as low as 2,4% among white youth.

The repercussions of the differences in the industries in which the youth are employed and their occupational levels are notable in their monthly incomes. Many employed youth, particularly females both in urban areas (83,2%) and non-urban areas (94,3%), live in conditions of poverty. Four in every ten employed African youth and a quarter of all employed coloured youth were earning a monthly income of R500 or less.

Added to this are the high unemployment rates among the youth. Using the expanded definition of unemployment, two in every five economically active youth (40,9%) were unemployed in 1996. Unemployment was particularly high in provinces that are mostly rural, e.g. Eastern Cape (55,7%), Northern Province (53,4%) and KwaZulu-Natal (47,1%). The unemployment rate for older economically active people aged 36-65 years is 25,0%, which is relatively low compared to that of the youth.

Of all population groups, African youth had the highest rate of unemployment of 50,2%, i.e. just over half of those that were economically active. The situation is worse among African youth in non-urban areas where, on average, 55,3% of economically active youth were unemployed in 1996; 45,0% among young males and 66,4% among young females.

Poor living conditions, starting a family at a young age, inadequate education, lack of employment opportunities and high unemployment rates are indicators of poverty. Large proportions of South African youth are living in poverty.