

# Taverns and shebeens are drowning the lives of our children

THERE are more taverns and shebeens in our communities – townships and villages in particular – than youth centres or child-friendly recreational facilities.

This drives children to drink, with some starting as early as age 13 because alcohol is easily accessible.

Even though the Department of Trade and Industry has proposed more stringent regulations for the liquor industry, focus should be on enforcing existing laws.

More importantly, the law on no selling of alcohol to children under 18 must be fully enforced. They must not be allowed to enter taverns, shebeens, pubs and bottle stores.

Seeing children in school uniform drunk in the streets and malls after writing exams has become a common sight and a new cul-



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ture. They say, *Ba tlhatswa dipene* (cleansing pens).

When Grade 12 pupils go to a matric dance, the so-called after-parties are well-organised drinking sprees. There, most young people experiment with alcohol for the first time and can't stop thereafter.

Some youngsters have been spotted drinking alcohol at taverns and shebeens even during school hours. Youth Day has turned into a full-on drinking spree.

A community mapping programme done by the Soul City Institute with a group of 39 young people in Montshiwa, North West, in

2013 revealed that there were more than 27 alcohol outlets in the area. Of these, 24 were shebeens, which according to the Liquor Act in North West, are illegal.

Montshiwa comprises 2 305 housing units, one soccer field, the Mmabana School of Arts, and regrettably fewer schools, churches and recreational facilities for children. However, liquor outlets are in abundance.

During the community mapping exercise, a group of pupils were found drinking at a shebeen while a catch-up camp for Grade 12s was taking place at one of the high schools. They had bunked classes.

Some teachers complained that this is due to some of these outlets being close to the schools – in one case there were three shebeens across one school,

and some pupils often missed class opting to go drinking at these establishments.

This is just one township. The probability is that the situation in Montshiwa is replicated across the country. It is high time government dealt effectively with this problem. All the youth centres should have programmes that will see children engage in sport and other youth-related recreational activities.

These programmes should be monitored and evaluated constantly to see if they remain relevant to children. Children should be encouraged to establish "youth clubs" and come up with activities they want to

participate in. The local government should fund these activities.

Schools in townships, and villages in particular, should have extra classes and activities to keep children in school longer.

Authorities must engender greater respect for the law that seeks to protect children from the pitfalls of

underage drinking. The police and the community poling forums must raid

taverns regularly, especially during school hours, weekends, public and school holidays.

Alcohol vendors who are found to have sold alcohol to children must be charged and have their licences revoked.

Authorities responsible

for issuing liquor licences must ensure that everyone who sells alcohol is licensed to do so, so that they can hold them accountable if they disobey the law. No children must be allowed in taverns.

Children are our future, so we need to invest in them. All of us – parents, teachers, civil society and government – must protect our children from unscrupulous tavern and shebeen owners who sell them alcohol. We must teach our children ways to celebrate and have fun without alcohol.

Parents should talk openly to their children about the consequences of underage drinking.

● *Mogapi is North West provincial manager for youth programmes at Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication*

“ Pupils often go drinking during school hours

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