

Whoonga!

Story and images by Kamogelo Mabizela

Two of the biggest issues facing South African teens have joined forces! A new, deadly and highly addictive drug called whoonga is taking hold of South Africa's townships, with authorities warning that its users have increased by thousands. The drug is a concoction of the antiretroviral stocrin, dagga (marijuana) or heroin and several other substances, including chemicals found in detergents and even rat poison!

Addicts who are smoking this poison have now resorted to mugging HIV positive patients outside clinics where they receive their ARVs from the government. The drug's origins were unknown, but it was probably discovered by experimentation.

A 15-year-old addict said most of the crimes they committed were motivated by the need to get a fix. "We break into houses and cars, and we steal clothes from washing lines. When we don't smoke we get sick with severe stomach pains. We know that the drug is dangerous, but once you start it's hard to stop."

Side-effects of the drug include loss of appetite, excessive sweating and bleeding when urinating. Obviously, the mix is highly addictive and thousands of young people are falling victim to it.

The use of this concoction has increased dramatically in a short time. Many people say that it is the availability of drugs in townships which has caused the youth to start experimenting with drugs and becoming creative – inventing new drugs such as TIK and WHOONGA which are unique to South Africa.

It is tragic that this generation of youngsters is being referred to as the 'lost generation' when we were supposed to be the first 'free generation'! Why is the youth being held back by drug use? Is it due to home factors such as alcohol abuse? Is it because teens have no outlets for self-expression? Is it because of the shortage of jobs and opportunities to further education due to poverty? Whatever it is, something has to be done!

African culture is centred around UBUNTU which is our values and humanity. African children are brought up to live by this. When these values are ignored, it is a tragedy for the whole community. It is up to each individual how you want to live your life, so we should never allow ourselves to be led astray by people who don't want what is best for us.

While the individual needs to take responsibility for himself, it is also crucial that the government steps in and starts focussing on the problems of drug and alcohol abuse.