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## THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS ON THE FUTURE EXPECTATIONS OF AFRIKAANS SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICAN ADOLESCENTS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Youth is synonymous with future expectations. Should these be marred or negative, it could be an indication that all is not well in society, and that the values and conditions in society should critically be examined and attended to. The interest in the orientation and nature of the future expectations of adolescents is of particular relevance in South Africa due to the extent of social challenges which is currently experienced such as crime, corruption, poverty and HIV/AIDS. An empirical study was conducted to establish Afrikaans speaking youth's expectations regarding their future. Questionnaires were completed by grade 11 learners from five schools. The study was based on the assumption that social problems in South Africa would significantly impact on the future plans of adolescents, particularly on those who aspire to emigrate. The most important conclusion is that this hypothesis could not be verified. The respondents were predominantly positive regarding their future ideals.*

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### **Key words:**

social problems, youth, future expectations, values

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## INTRODUCTION

The nature and orientation of adolescents' future expectations is of particular relevance in South Africa due to the extent of social problems which are currently experienced. Media reports on crime, corruption, mismanagement, poverty and HIV/AIDS are ever-increasing, crime in particular has seemingly spiralled beyond control. According to a study by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP, 2006), 40% of South African children between 12 and 22 years have already been victims of crime or violence. This situation begs the question: How do social problems in South Africa impact on adolescents' perspectives and expectations regarding their future in their home country?

Adolescents' views of their future are of crucial importance for society. This has relevance for education as disinterested and negative inclinations towards the future could manifest in low learner motivation, poor academic performance and anti-social problems such as aggression, drug abuse and crime (Harris, Duncan and Bolsjoly, 2002). Adolescents' perspectives on their future in South Africa also have significant potential as indicators of, inter alia, the "state of the nation" in South Africa, the expected "brain drain" from South Africa, the stance of adolescents' loyalty towards South Africa, the degree of adolescents' inclination towards materialism, and the measure of their internal versus external locus of control in contemplating the future, with specific reference to religious faith. Attention to the latter is particularly appropriate in a study of the Afrikaans speaking youth, in view of the Afrikaans speaking population group's historically strong links with the Christian faith.

For the purposes of determining the extent of negative future expectations, we decided to focus on Afrikaans speaking youth. With reference to the population categories of the Employment Equity Act (South African Government, 1998) we assumed that a negative future orientation would be strongest amongst the white and coloured Afrikaans speaking adolescents for the following reasons:

- The political transformation that took place in South Africa in 1994 had a substantial impact on the white Afrikaans speaking population, in the sense that they had to abdicate political power and became a minority group.
- There appears to be a pervasive feeling amongst the coloured Afrikaans speaking population that their situation has not really improved in the new dispensation in South Africa. They experience discrimination in

relation to job opportunities and political opportunities, because they are not really regarded as part of the black population, and due to the perception that they actually received preferential treatment during the apartheid years (Beeld, 2006b). This situation causes considerable bitterness in the realisation that they have not really advanced from a minority group position.

The reality of negative future orientation is strikingly demonstrated by emigration figures. According to estimates by the South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR), between 800 000 and one million white South Africans have left the country during the last decade, mainly for reasons of violent crime and affirmative action (Buys, 2006). Although this exodus is mainly white, it is not exclusively so. It is, however, very difficult to determine the figure of black, coloured and Indian emigrants (Van Aardt, 2006).

Following from these considerations and factual data, the following research question guided the research: To what extent do Afrikaans speaking adolescents perceive social insecurity as a reason for emigration?

The exclusive focus on Afrikaans speaking respondents was also seen as beneficial in providing a test for the methodology which could, with possible refinement, later be used in larger scale to conduct comparative research on future expectations amongst adolescents and tertiary students of other population groups.

We begin by providing a brief orientation on the role of social context in the future expectations of adolescents. Next we highlight some major social problems in South Africa. This orientation sets the theoretical and contextual framework within which we then present and discuss the design and findings of an exploratory empirical study.

## **THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CONTEXT IN THE FUTURE EXPECTATIONS OF ADOLESCENTS**

A focus on the life-world of adolescents suggests a sociological angle of investigation. There are two prominent sociological models that could be applied when exploring the youth's future expectations, namely the ecological model and the life history model (Crockett and Silbereisen 2000). The ecological model studies the immediate life world of the adolescent (family, school, peer group), while the life history model investigates the sociological obstacles which obstruct the optimal realisation of the adolescent's potential (Crockett and Silbereisen 2000).

The life history model is of particular relevance for any study of the youth's future expectations vis-à-vis the impact of social problems. Crockett and Bingham (2000) maintain that an individual's expectations and plans for the future are thought to be structured by institutional patterns and by shared assumptions about the typical life course. According to life history theory, young people acquire their perceptions of the adult life course through cumulative exposure to social institutions and by implication, the problems experienced by, and because of, social institutions. Elder and Shanahan (2006:667) explain as follows: "Individuals do not 'develop according to their natures'; but, rather, they are continually produced, sustained, and changed by their social context".

In sum, the social context (particularly economic realities and political climate) in which adolescents find themselves appears to be the major factor in their development as future role players in civil society. The political sphere is particularly influential. As Larson (2002:15) remarks: "Along with economic activity, government shapes the institutional order in which adolescents choose their lives and prepare for their future".

The impact of the social context in terms of macro socio-economic, political and cultural factors, is convincingly highlighted in the so-called Euronet study where the future expectations of adolescents in 11 European countries were explored (Alsaker and Flammer, 1999). Prominent discrepancies in the future expectations of adolescents in Eastern and Western Europe were uncovered, such as in perceived social responsibility and materialistic viewpoint (Numri, Liiceanu and Liberska, 1999).

The Euronet project, supported by prominent international research regarding the future expectations of youth (Larson, Bradford, Brown and Mortimer, 2002; Crockett and Silbereisen, 2000), indicated a few common denominators in the modern youth's reaction to, and the interaction with social influences concerning their future expectations. It appeared that adolescents generally have a feeling of control over their future (Grob and Flammer, 1999) and that love for one's own culture and country is stronger than the urge to settle elsewhere (although there is a relation between an unfavourable political order and an outward orientation) (Flannagan and Botcheva, 1999). Materialistic values and aspirations appear to be prominent, although religious convictions remain important (Larson, 2002). Variations in these generic results are determined by gender, age, self-concept and personal circumstances (Trommsdorf, 2000).

It was established, for example, that (a) girls dream more than boys about a professional career; (b) teenagers, as they grow older, have progressively more uncertainties and doubts concerning the future (Trommsdorf, 2000); (c) an optimistic outlook on life and a positive self concept (based on what has already been achieved) creates confidence in the future (Csikszentmihaly and Schneider, 2000), and (d) future ideals and the motivation to reach them are much more apparent in teenagers from deprived and underdeveloped societies (Csikszentmihaly and Schneider, 2000; Grob and Flammer 1999).

The extent of outward future orientation (i.e. visualising one's future in another country) amongst adolescents who find themselves in difficult social conditions was extensively researched by Elder and Russell (2000). The findings were to be expected: Young people, especially the more ambitious ones, will look for greener pastures when their circumstances are unfavourable, regardless of family ties and love for their own. Although Elder and Russell (2000) focused on economic deprivation, their research findings on outward future orientation could be applied to other forms of social problems. The important point is that the extent and intensity of young people's outward future orientation serve as pointers to the perceived relative welfare (or lack thereof) in society.

The social imperative to provide a secure future in the interest of the youth is poignantly stated by Larson, Wilson and Mortimer (2002:159):

The future of societies depends on their success in providing pathways whereby young people develop and prepare themselves to be contributing adults to their communities. When these pathways are well marked, stable, supported by the community, and inviting to adolescents, a society can be confident that new generations will join the ranks of adulthood well prepared. When these paths are hazardous, unpredictable, uninviting, or ill-fitted to the demands of adulthood in that society, the future is insecure, both for adolescents and for society.

Larson et al. (2002) provide an extensive profile of the modern adolescent based on studies in eight world regions. It highlights some social obstacles which adolescents may encounter on their way to adulthood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as global poverty, inadequate and irrelevant provision of education, increasing unemployment rates, political apathy regarding the youth's welfare and future, and insufficient provision to equip people with inter-ethnic communication skills in a globalised age. The necessity of comprehensive research concerning the social welfare and development of the youth is hence implied.

Evidently, the social contexts in which the youth build their dreams and formulate their plans concerning the future are determined by politics and the domestic affairs of the state, such as the political order and the efficiency and stability of the state. Larson (2002) cautions:

Governmental dysfunction and violent conflict have dire consequences for adolescents and for their preparation toward adulthood. Weak, destabilised, and distracted governments are less able to provide a beneficial developmental infrastructure to children and adolescents. Ultimately, governmental disorder, terrorism, and warfare deny adolescents a clear and predictable path to adulthood. It throws the future into uncertainty, leaving youth without a reliable vision or any confidence in whether they will get to adulthood and what skills will be needed. Promoting stable governments and minimising domains of misrule are vital to the future of adolescents.

The following brief review of social problems in South Africa intends to explore the extent to which a “beneficial developmental infrastructure” (Larson, 2002:16) indeed exists for Afrikaans speaking adolescents.

## **SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Social transitions are traumatic events which are characterised by distress and uncertainty (Saraskinsky, 2001; Jung, 1998). South Africa underwent political reform in 1994 from an Apartheid government to a democratic state. This shift impacted on all population groups and filtered through to every facet of life. South African adolescents find themselves in a particularly precarious situation. On the one hand, they must negotiate the development of their own identities, while on the other, they must adapt to the social changes that are occurring around them (Finshilescu and Dawes, 2001).

These changes are, unfortunately, not all for the better. South African society has to cope with an ever-increasing intensity of social problems like HIV/AIDS and violence. Smith and Stones (2001) observe that South African adolescents face significantly greater challenges than their counterparts in countries where society is more stable. The extent of these challenges, as social problems, becomes clear from the almost daily media reports on the incidence of poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and violent crime in South Africa. According to survey data, violent crime and affirmative action are most often cited by (prospective) emigrants from South Africa as their reasons for leaving (Buys, 2006; Kadalie, 2006; South African Migration

Project, 2006 – Beeld, 2007; Van Rooyen, 2000) and brief expositions of these factors follow.

In terms of proportional media attention, violent crime can be regarded as the most topical social problem in South Africa. David Garland, British criminologist and social theorist, characterises South Africa as a “high crime society” (Berg and Scharf, 2004). Whereas crime under the previous dispensation was to a large extent politically motivated, the face of crime has changed and violent crime is now the norm (Keegan, 2005). The incidence of murder in South Africa is shocking. Van Rooyen (2000:72), reflecting on pre-2000 figures, illustrates this poignantly as follows: “25 000 innocent South Africans are being killed each year, or 67 each day. This is the equivalent of a fully laden jumbo jet, carrying 300 South Africans, crashing almost every four days and killing all on board. Should this happen, it would be a national disaster”.

According to Berg and Scharf (2004), violent crime manifests as murder, attempted murder, culpable homicide, aggravated robbery, rape (and attempted rape), assault and common assault, and the number of incidents of these crimes have rapidly risen from 1994. These authors furthermore emphasise that many incidents of crime are not reported and are therefore not reflected by the official statistics. Consequently a so-called ‘dark figure’ of unrecorded crime exists. A study conducted by Powdthavee (2005) indicates that the sense of well-being as experienced by people who haven’t fallen victim to crime correlates significantly with the regional crime rate. He observes that crime and the perception of personal safety are important factors in any assessment of social well-being and an individual’s happiness level.

From a sociological viewpoint, Smith and Stones (2001) argue aptly that racism, as the most obvious flaw of the Apartheid era, has now been surpassed by other social manifestations of an ailing society, like fears of crime, and conclude by pointing out that a new nation cannot be built on fear and mistrust. A recent survey amongst metro dwellers in South Africa resulted in the alarming finding that 75% of the respondents (blacks 71%, whites 87%, coloureds 71%, Indians/Asians 90%) did not feel safe any more due to the crime levels (Research Surveys, 2006). Not surprisingly, crime has become the most prominent emigration factor by far (Marais, 2006; Van Rooyen, 2000).

Affirmative action, the practice of transforming the “white face” of the work force in South Africa to reflect the demographic profile of the population, has

closed the door for many white and coloured job seekers in South Africa, thus becoming another major motive for emigration (Kenny, 2007; Kadalie, 2006). Major symptoms of this motive are bitterness and alienation, and it has become increasingly evident that white groups are experiencing personal, economic and social negative consequences due to the reversal of racial privilege. Hermann (2007) points out that a sense of alienation gives rise to feelings of powerlessness, of being excluded from the system, and of being unable to exert any influence on it. These feelings easily result in a dampening of future expectations by experiencing life in South Africa as largely meaningless.

Visible evidence of alienation is inter alia the decline in the number of whites taking up local tertiary study (Hermann, 2007). Table 1 mirrors the incidence of registrations for the different population groups at South African universities during the period 1993-2002.

**Table 1: Increase in student numbers at South African universities and technicons, 1993 - 2002**

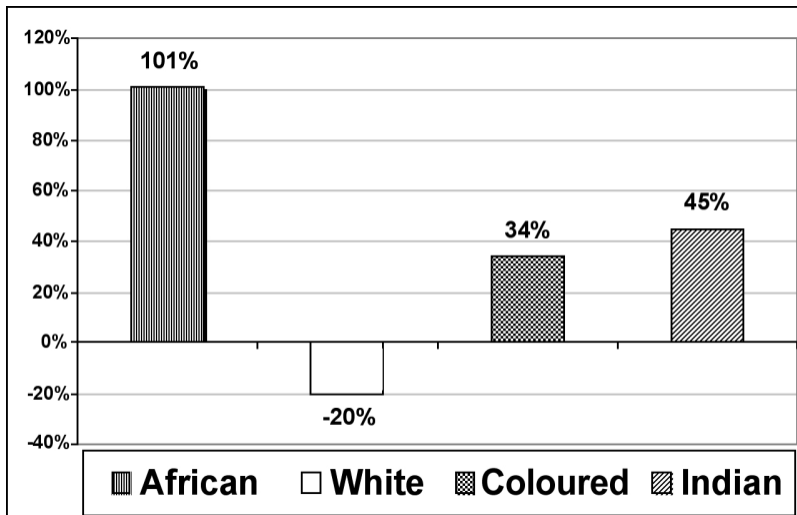


Table from: Hermann (2007:77)

In view of the fact that adolescent views on their personal futures, as well as their emerging identities, are influenced by their societal, political and economic contexts (Finchilescu and Dawes 2001), it appears that circumstances in South Africa could have a significant negative impact on



particularly Afrikaans speaking adolescents' future expectations, expressed specifically in the wish to emigrate. To establish the extent of this assumed negative outlook on the future in South Africa, an empirical study was done to gain first hand impressions about Afrikaans speaking adolescents' perspectives and expectations regarding their future in South Africa.

## **DESIGN OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY**

Although grade 12 learners would have been the ideal research population, principals have good reason to disallow any infringement on these learners' preparations for the matriculation examinations. Grade 11 learners were therefore selected. There was no reason to believe that these learners would differ significantly from Grade 12 learners in contemplating their future.

To explore the terrain, a qualitative approach was initially followed. Grade 11 learners from an Afrikaans language medium secondary school were probed on their future expectations. The school was multicultural with coloured and white learners and served an affluent white community, as well as a coloured community with numerous socio-economic problems. We involved the Afrikaans language teacher, and requested learners to write essays of 300 words on the topic: "My future in South Africa". The 65 essays were analysed so as to determine the drift of, and themes on, future expectations. Useful data were gathered, and were verified by interviewing a focus group of eight learners, equally representing gender, race and positive/negative views as expressed in the essays.

The themes emerging from the essays were subsequently used to compile a questionnaire for application on a larger scale. To assess the content validity of the questionnaire, it was completed by 120 learners from a sizeable secondary school in Centurion (Pretoria) with only Afrikaans speaking learners from high-income families. This trial run was successful and the questionnaire was also applied in four other Afrikaans secondary schools, once again with grade 11 learners as respondents.

In the choice of these schools it was assumed that economic and geographic variables (socio-economic level, farming environment, industrial environment) could influence future expectations. Subsequently the choice was narrowed to the grade 11 learners of a secondary school in (a) a low-income area in Pretoria-West (n = 98); (b) a rural farming area in Mpumalanga Province (n = 107), and (c) a mining community in the Free State Province (n = 178). In order to determine the perspectives of coloured learners, the

grade 11 learners (n = 105) of a secondary school in Eersterust (Pretoria) were also included. Cooperation was excellent at the schools, where all the grade 11 learners (n = 608) completed the questionnaires.

The qualitative and questionnaire findings are presented next, followed by the interpretation of these findings.

## **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Focus group interview**

As mentioned, the essay data were used to select eight participants, equally representing gender, race and positive/negative views. The gist of the essay data is covered in the discussion of the focus group data.

The eight participants took turns in stating what they considered South Africa's biggest advantage and gravest problem. Subsequently an open conversation ensued with the following guiding question: What needs urgent attention in South Africa? The participants were relaxed and friendly and expressed their opinions frankly.

In the discussion the unrestricted crime and the audacious lack of punitive discouragement and action were declared as the single major problem. Mention was also made of the extensive incidence of corruption. The necessity of the rigorous maintenance of law and order was emphasised, but the group members were not unanimous in their view on the re-institution of the death penalty. Other concerns were the non-availability of employment opportunities, as well as the continued affirmative action and persistent racism. The view was expressed that racism stems from parents and that it will take another "20 years" for it to disappear. It was also mentioned that parents have major influence on the nature and drift of their children's future expectations. This view has strong research support (Durbow, Arnett, Smith and Ippolito 2001; Finchilescu and Dawes 2001; Jodl, Machael and Malanchuk 2001; and Eccles 1993). Some coloured learners were of the opinion that the coloured population group is still marginalised.

On the positive side, South Africa's (variety of) people, its natural scenery and climate were highlighted as the greatest advantages of the country. It was felt that that it is up to the people of South Africa to contribute to, and develop the country. On the matter of crime, it was mentioned that this problem is not exclusive to South Africa. Seven of the eight respondents had

a concrete, positive image of their career and family position in 10 years time.

Other observations were the absence of any friction between white and coloured participants (rather the opposite to the past), and the participants unreserved expression of the importance of their faith and the Bible in their lives.

The over-arching finding was that the focus group discussions were an almost perfect reflection of the views raised in the preceding essays. The group's feeling about the future could best be summarised by "qualified" or "conditional" optimism and patriotism – a wait-and-see attitude, which would determine whether the future lies locally or in another country. Two of the eight respondents were however determined to seek their future overseas.

## **FINDINGS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY**

A short user-friendly questionnaire was developed. It collected information on age; gender; church attendance; self-concept; future plans after school (local and/or overseas); main reason to leave South Africa temporarily or permanently (if applicable); South Africa's biggest advantage; South Africa's biggest problem; extent of positive/negative view on own future in South Africa; nature of home and school conversations regarding South Africa; and frequency of reading newspapers. The last item in the questionnaire was open-ended and gave respondents the opportunity to envisage their position and achievements in 10 years' time.

### **Biographical information** (age, gender, church attendance, self concept)

As expected, the respondents were predominantly (74.9%) in the age group 16-17 years. More girls (57.4%) took part in the survey. The item on church attendance (to determine the role of religious values) reflected that 59.4% of the respondents attended a church service as far as possible every Sunday, with an additional 18.4% who attended twice a month. About ten per cent (10.5%) of the respondents indicated that they seldom or never go to church, but this percentage varied with locality. In the instance of the secondary school in Pretoria-West the percentage was 22.2%. In response to a subsequent item, 96.3% of respondents declared their belief in God's provision and disposal in their lives.

The response on the item on self-concept revealed a strong positive attitude towards life in general, with 86.9% of the respondents indicating that they

were happy, and 96.4% who looked forward to the future. However, 63.3% of the respondents revealed that they frequently worried about personal and/or contextual issues.

### **Future plans** (studies and career)

The rationale behind the items on future plans was to determine the locus of future plans, that is, South Africa or overseas? According to the data received, the future locus was predominantly South Africa; with only 9.7% of the respondents who envisaged themselves emigrating to another country. Twenty seven percent (27%) of the respondents expressed the wish to work in another country, but only on a temporary basis. Concerning the immediate future, the majority of respondents (42.1%) preferred to continue their tertiary studies in South Africa. Asked what the main reason would be if they were to leave South Africa permanently or temporarily, 71.6% of the respondents expressed financial and/or career motives, and only 7.9% indicated that safety reasons would be the compelling drive. For the coloured respondents this percentage was even lower, namely 3.8%.

### **South Africa's biggest advantages and problems**

South Africa's natural scenery was nominated by 38.3% of the respondents as its biggest advantage. Other electives were viewed as less significant, for example sport achievements (13.5%), relations between people (10%), freedom of speech (9.6%) and economic prospects (7.9%).

Table 2 indicates the respondents' rating of social problems in South Africa.

**Table 2: Respondents' rating of social problems in South Africa**

<b>PROBLEM</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
HIV/AIDS	126	20.6
Unemployment	107	17.7
Violent crime	96	15.9
Affirmative action	60	9.9
Corruption	58	9.6
Mismanagement	46	7.6
Poverty	41	6.8
Racism	39	6.5
Land reform	1	0.2
Other	31	5.1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>100</b>

There were noticeable variations in the responses from the different schools. Coloured respondents ascribed more weight to the HIV/AIDS problem (42.5%) whilst unemployment also ranked more prominently (24.5%). Respondents from the more affluent group afforded precedence to factors such as violent crime, racial tension and affirmative action.

Respondents were also prompted to indicate which of five listed viewpoints corresponded most closely with their personal view. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: My future in South Africa**

I believe that there is a future in South Africa. My life is determined by God and He has placed me in South Africa and He will take care of me.	45.0%
My future in South Africa is bright. Yes, there are quite a few problems, but with hard work and a positive attitude I can realise my dreams and can be successful in South Africa.	24.3%
The problems in South Africa are worrying, and I will wait and see. Should things worsen, I shall leave the country. I shall consider returning, should things improve.	11.8%
Conditions in South Africa force me to make use of the first opportunity to leave the country. Should things change for the better, I shall return.	9.5%
Problems such as poverty, HIVAIDS, crime and corruption will only worsen. I don't see any light for improvement; therefore I would like to leave the country permanently.	6.7 %
None of the abovementioned	2.3%

The options stating a definite decision to emigrate in Table 3 elicited even lower response percentages from coloured respondents.

### **Home and school conversations on conditions in South Africa**

Almost sixty percent (57.2%) of the respondents indicated that conversations at home on conditions in South Africa alternated between positive and negative. A minority of respondents (7.9%) portrayed their home conversations on South Africa as usually positive, whilst 22.0% indicated that these conversations were usually negative. (The response to the option *usually negative* varied considerably from school to school: Centurion (29.2%), Pretoria-West (18.2%) and Eersterust (8.5%). The remainder of respondents (12.6%) mentioned that conditions in South Africa were not discussed at home.

Regarding teachers' remarks concerning conditions in South Africa, 18.0% of the respondents judged them to be generally positive, 8.4% as usually negative, and 62.6% stated that teachers' remarks about South Africa alternate between positive and negative. Eleven per cent (11%) of the respondents chose the option *insignificant* which means that their teachers very seldom made any remarks about conditions in South Africa.

### **Reading of newspapers**

This item was included to gain a rudimentary impression of the extent to which the respondents were informed and influenced by newspaper reports in their future expectations and their views on especially social problems in South Africa. The responses pertaining to the frequency of reading newspapers were as follows: newspaper is read on a daily basis (14.0%), two to four times a week (20.0%), only now and then (51.2%), or never/very seldom (14.6%).

### **Future ideals for 2016**

This item provided for an open response and thus afforded respondents the opportunity to express their future ideals freely and in detail. The responses were categorised and indicated that respondents' ideals for the future mainly concerned being successful in a career or private business. Other ideals which were mentioned (albeit by significantly lower margins) were a happy marriage and family life, a safe living environment, a large income, and relieving the plight of those in need. The wish to settle elsewhere permanently was expressed or implied in only six per cent (6%) of the stated future ideals.

## **DISCUSSION**

With regard to the validity of the research findings, we express two reservations: (a) The research was conducted on a relatively small scale, and (b) the real depth of respondents' knowledge and insight in the general state of affairs in South Africa may be queried, as is evident from the reported relatively low incidence of reading newspapers. Although we are thus careful not to view and interpret the findings as all-conclusive, we regard the substantial corpus of responsibly gathered data as worthy of discussion and reflection.

As rationale for our research we postulated that the extent and intensity to which young people visualise their future in another country serve as pointers to the perceived welfare (or intensity of social obstacles) in their home

country. We assumed that the extent of negative future expectations and the wish to emigrate would be the strongest amongst the white and coloured Afrikaans speaking adolescents, due to feelings of alienation in the new political dispensation in South Africa. Our literature review provided an overview of two social obstacles in South Africa (violent crime and affirmative action) which are most commonly cited by (aspiring) emigrants as reasons for feeling socially insecure, and therefore as reasons for leaving the country. In answer to our research question *‘To what extent do Afrikaans speaking adolescents perceive social insecurity as a reason for emigration?’* the research findings indicate that the wish to emigrate (for whatever reason) is negligible. Notwithstanding social problems as reflected by the rates of crime, HIV/AIDS and unemployment, the future expectations of living in South Africa appear to be positive amongst Afrikaans speaking adolescents. Although there were variations in the data collected from the different schools, no strong deviations from the broad tendencies were evident. It was apparent, though, that coloured respondents tended to be more positive about their future in South Africa than their white counterparts, indicating a measure of societal alienation and estrangement amongst the latter.

A noteworthy finding was that HIV/AIDS and unemployment were regarded as bigger problems than violent crime and affirmative action (see Table 3). This finding was rather unexpected in view of violent crime and affirmative action being the reported primary reasons for emigration, as already indicated. Although the respondents were seemingly well aware of the relative seriousness of HIV/AIDS, unemployment and violent crime as social problems in South Africa (see Table 3), it became evident that the respondents did not generally view the extent of these problems as cause to get away and seek their future elsewhere (see Table 4). This positive local future orientation may to a considerable extent be attributed to the findings on the respondents’ strong adherence to religion as external locus of control in their (future) lives. The positive slant in the results can also be attributed to the fact that most people who emigrate from South Africa do so as families, and not as individuals. Put differently; the decision to emigrate seems to be taken at a stage where serious concerns arise about the future of one’s own (young) children. Clearly, the respondents had no family commitments, but merely personal ideals in contemplating the future, and from this perspective, the respondents viewed their future in South Africa as positive.

Our literature review also provided a brief profile of the 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescent, indicating inter alia an optimistic outlook on life, a strong incidence of materialistic values and aspirations, and religious convictions

remaining important. Our questionnaire survey data confirm these characteristics by indicating that the Grade 11 respondents

- seemed to take faith and religion seriously;
- were inclined towards materialistic, rather than philanthropic values in what they wanted to achieve. (Career success was the predominant ideal for achievement by 2017);
- had a positive attitude toward life.

Concerning the possibility of racial motives for emigration, no evidence of such motives could be found from both the qualitative and quantitative data of our empirical research. The questionnaire data in particular indicated that the respondents were not exposed to mostly negative (presumably racist) statements and conversations about South Africa, neither at home nor at school.

The adolescent respondents' local orientation regarding their future plans corresponds with the positive tendencies reported in the Euronet project (Alsaker and Flammer, 1999), as discussed earlier. They also tally with findings of a recent investigation by the trade union Solidarity amongst Afrikaans speaking youth leaders (head boys and girls of prominent secondary schools), according to which 77% of the respondents did not consider leaving the country, although 95% of the respondents felt that they should be exempted from affirmative action (Du Toit, 2006). In the broader South African context, the findings of our study correspond with those of an opinion poll by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to the effect that (broadly speaking) 93% of all South African citizens are "proudly South African" and 83% prefer to stay in South Africa, regardless of the fact that 49% of the respondents were of opinion that their circumstances would not improve during the next five years (Beeld 2006a).

In terms of the life history model, as briefly elucidated earlier on, our study findings confirm the relevance of this model for studying the youth's future expectations. The findings reiterate that adolescents' thinking about their future is significantly determined by the socio-political environment, and that the positive or negative slant in these expectations can be indicative of strengths and weaknesses in the social fabric of a particular country. In the case of South Africa, our findings suggest that the Afrikaans speaking youth are not feeling politically and socially threatened, and are not feeling insecure to the extent of wishing to emigrate. Yet the positive findings can in no way be interpreted towards being happy with present circumstances in the South African society, or being complacent about the social ills and obstacles in



South Africa. The focus group participants and questionnaire respondents in our study emphasised violent crime as particularly problematic. In view of the impression that the majority of the participants and respondents were convinced that South Africa's social problems could be solved and that emigration is not the answer, it is essential that social ills indeed be addressed, and not further deteriorate to the point where the youth becomes so disappointed and disillusioned that South Africa becomes part of the "out of Africa" migration pattern, particularly as "brain drain" (Brümmer, 2006).

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In view of the fact that this exploratory study was done amongst Afrikaans speaking respondents who, for reasons as already indicated, could have the strongest inclination to being negative about South Africa, the positive research findings provide good reason to postulate that the general trend of future perspectives amongst the youth of all South Africa population groups is likewise positive. This must however be verified through further research, which we are currently doing.

From an educational viewpoint the findings are reassuring in their indication of adolescents' positive life orientation, patriotic inclination and locally oriented future expectations. These attributes are implicitly indicative of adolescents' educational expectations and an initial positive inclination towards learning. The key challenge is to provide topical, high quality education which meets these expectations and establishes sustained learner motivation.

A last remark: Research on the future expectations of adolescents and young adults should be conducted on a repetitive basis, as the data are of crucial importance to every aspect and avenue of youth work. The data are also valuable as a barometer of societal tranquillity and well-being. The need for such a barometer is particularly strong in South Africa, in view of the high incidence of violent crime, poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS.

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