

VIOLENCE: WHAT LIES BEHIND IT

Violence in Natal's Black townships has been attributed by the media almost entirely to the political conflict between Inkatha and the UDF/Cosatu/ANC alliance. But this is only part of the overall picture.

Violence has many root causes. They stem in the main from the four decades of institutionalised apartheid which has left a legacy of bitterness, poverty and deprivation for today's Black generation.

Tackling mindless violence, sociologists agree, must go hand in hand with an assault on these core issues which have contributed to the black-on-black conflict in the townships close to Natal's White cities as well as in the informal squatter-type settlements.

Statistics of violence in these Black residential areas show that there has been a steady but definite upward trend for the past ten years.

The media dismisses this as the Inkatha/UDF "war". But this is a dangerous over-simplification. It obscures the many fundamental causes of violence.

Part of the key to the solution in defusing the townships lies in recognising and addressing these basic issues.

Some valuable insights into the root causes of violence have been provided by the Inkatha Institute, which has been collecting violence-related information in the townships for the past few years.

A position paper prepared by Institute director, Mr Gavin Woods, gives some revealing findings.

Researchers found that more than 90% of all types of township violence is perpetrated by Black youths between the ages of 15 and 24. And they found that the anti-social attitudes of the Black youth were directly linked to poverty.

This, given the fact that there has been no discernable growth rate in the KwaZulu job market together with population growth of 4,2% a year (birth rate plus urbanisation) has aggravated township poverty — especially in the informal settlements.

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This extreme poverty fuels Black anger. And it is particularly applicable to Black youth living in Third World communities alongside relatively affluent White cities — as is the case in Natal.

The Institute is able to describe a typical youth situation:

"This could be a young man, in his mid or late teens who leaves school (often prematurely) only to find his vision of adulthood completely blocked. He sees no direction for his future — not even a starting point. The unavailability of jobs is highest among the youth — as high as 80% in some communities. Youths have no opportunity and no hope. Insecurity and frustration are enhanced by a strong sense of purposelessness as youths aimlessly kill time around the impoverished peripheries of the White metropolises."

Those who try to find a job, the report points out, often spend long and fruitless hours outside the gates of factories. The jobs that do become available often require an education which their system did not provide — a further reason for anger.

The denial of political rights —

which would give the disadvantaged Black youth the democratic tools to seek redress — overcrowding and the breakdown in traditional values are other

aggravating factors, as the Institute has noted.

It says the harsh circumstances of township youth make it clear that even without political ideologies, there would be enough anger, frustration and aggression to produce violent behaviour. This is borne out by statistics prior to the so-called Inkatha/UDF conflicts.

In common with ghetto life anywhere in the world, black groups and gangs are a reality. Researchers found that in some areas of high killings, up to 50% of deaths can be gangster or crime-related.

These may be small gangs, killing indiscriminately for material gain — but there are also large Mafia-type operations who use extortion. This usually results in casualties.

Mob violence is a resultant spin-off. This fits the pattern of much of the violence in Natal/KwaZulu which have been publicised as Inkatha/UDF clashes.

The Institute report says instigating factors are to be found at the beginning of almost every violent occurrence in Natal and are most often discovered to be individuals playing any one of a



This unidentified victim was stoned by a gang of youths.

YOUTH GANGS “NOT FIGHTING FOR LIBERATION”

number of agendas. They use an issue that is sensitive to the community so as to mobilise action.

In a number of township areas, researchers found, gangs control entire communities by intimidation and threat — where possibly 90% of the community is totally apathetic to the motives of the gang in control. Such gangs frequently operate under names which have a political connotation.

The research report notes: “Invariably found present as in KwaMakhuta, Mpumulanga, Pietermaritzburg, Shongweni, Inanda and to a lesser extent in Molweni, are groups of youth calling themselves Inkatha or Theleweni on the one hand — or

UDF, Amaquabane or Comrades on the other. But it was found that most of the individuals in these groups had scant formal or ideological connection with the established UDF and Inkatha movements.

Over the past year, the research findings indicate, these groups have become increasingly autonomous and self-centred. This is borne out by the increasing incidence of fighting between groups who are usually associated with the UDF

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(eg: Amaquabane and Comrades). There have also been examples of Theleweni groups dissociating themselves from Inkatha youth groups.