

## **Drugs In Schools Another Pandemic In The Making**

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South Africa in recent years has become a playground for drug dealers and users. This especially affects the youth of South Africa. Lately, the drug pandemic has managed to creep its way into school grounds at an extremely alarming rate. At the beginning of May 2023, the government introduced crime wardens into communities to try and combat crime and substance abuse in communities. The duty of these wardens is to conduct random searches to prevent crime and drug abuse in townships.

The crime wardens were introduced after a number of communities, if not all in South Africa (SA), have been under attack by crime and drug abuse. Many communities have formed their own forums and community patrols to keep the streets safe, and more especially to keep their children safe as they travel to and from school and while playing in public parks.

However, this way of keeping the community safe is not always the best option as the forums are not acknowledged by law, and community members often find themselves in trouble with the law when they act on their own accord. The solution to this by the government was to hire young people who are unemployed in the communities to become crime wardens.

It came to the attention of many community members and the crime wardens in the area of Daveyton, east of Johannesburg, that many of the school children were carrying a number of drugs and weapons to school. Substance abuse has been an ongoing struggle as is evident.

"I am not just a crime warden, but I am also a parent, and the things we find on our children on a daily basis is (sic) extremely worrying to me and it should be to everyone who worries about the future of this country. I can say that about 80% of the school children that we search everyday carry a drug or a weapon. The most popular drug being crystal meth which is a glass-like substance that is smoked through a pipe or it can be injected, and the most popular weapon usually being a pocketknife. It has only been a month on the job but I can already tell that the safety of our children in schools is now questionable and we need to act fast as the community, the crime wardens, and as parents," Said a 33-year-old crime warden from the Daveyton area who would rather not be named.

"School is no longer the same since the habit of taking drugs in school has been introduced. School children who take crystal meth often leave classes during lessons and they go to smoke in the toilets. This drug makes them extremely unruly.

It is actually better when they decide to make a hole in the fencing of the school, and they leave after smoking because should they decide to stay they disrupt the learning and teaching process at school. For now, I haven't noticed any of the girls at school smoking, it's just the boys. But I know soon it will be a different story," said Neliswa Damba, a 19-year-old student at Dinoto Technical Secondary School in Daveyton.

There is absolutely no place for drugs or weapons in any environment, let alone one that is meant for learning. Although the wardens may be getting rid of some of the drugs for now, these learners will soon think of more creative ways to bring these things in schools. The

South African Police Services (SAPS) needs to target the root of this problem and the suppliers to cut the problem at the root.

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