

# Lack of parenting castigated

## Values 'thrown out of window'

**KEITH ROSS**

**P**ARENTS should take the blame for the high number of abortions in South Africa, according to a top family policy expert, who has said that "lack of parenting" was resulting in girls as young as 12 getting pregnant.

"The reason young girls are getting pregnant out of wedlock and as young as they are – and it is affecting their lives fundamentally – is that there is a lack of parenting in South Africa," said Errol Naidoo, director of the Family Policy Institute.

He said that this, together with the lack of guidance, had led to values and morals being "thrown out the window".

"We have become this new progressive society where everything goes and everything is acceptable. You can determine your own destiny, do as you want and make your own decisions. Even parents do not get involved in their children's lives any more."

Naidoo made this observation when taking part in the SAfm Radio panel discussion programme, the *After Eight Debate*, on the topic of teenage pregnancies.

This was chosen after recent newspaper reports that teenage pregnancies were exception-

ally high in some schools.

However, the high number of abortions in South Africa had helped cut the teenage child-bearing rate in recent years, according to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).

A second member of the debating panel, HSRC senior research specialist Dr Monde Makiwane, said that contrary to the popular perception that it was increasing, the rate had actually declined.

"But the distinction must be made between child bearing and pregnancy," he said. "It is not pregnancy that is declining, but child bearing, because some of the teenagers terminate pregnancies."

"Termination of pregnancy is very prevalent and has been increasing every year. That is one of the main reasons why child bearing in South Africa has been declining."

Makiwane told the panel that in spite of the decline, teenage child bearing remained high in South Africa, compared with many other countries in the world.

"The problem in South

Africa is that it happens mostly outside marriage," he said.

"For instance, in many countries of Africa, teenage child bearing is more common than in South Africa, but in many cases it happens because of a culture of early marriages."

Makiwane said that in South Africa the highest teenage pregnancy rates were in provinces with large rural areas.

"It is higher, for instance, in KwaZulu-Natal than in the Western Cape and so on – linked to its large rural areas."

Rates were also high, he said, in informal settlements. But nowhere should high teenage pregnancy rates be seen as an isolated phenomenon. "It is across the country."

Naidoo said the media were also "promoting and glamorising" promiscuity.

"What the media never ever tells young people about is the consequences of their actions."

A third member of the debating panel, Nhlanhla Nxumalo, co-ordinator of Lovelife's Youth Friendly Services, said teenagers were influenced by parents, community, friends, peers, romantic partners and the media.

"All are spheres of influence, which will determine the power of the young person to make responsible choices."

