

# Artisan training

## COULD ASSIST YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Artisanal and intermediate level training are important starting points for addressing the challenge of unemployed young people, currently estimated to be between 35% and 37%. This article explores include the scarcity of young people in artisanal employment and the mechanisms of exclusion that contribute to this situation – *Tamlyne Meyer and Angelique Wildschut*

Artisan development in South Africa is afflicted by the historical imprint of a system fraught with racial, gender and language prejudice. Equally important is the plight of the growing constituency of unemployed youth in our country.

While many believe that artisanal and intermediate level training are important starting points for addressing this challenge, statistics do not give rise to much optimism. Overall, the employment of youth (15 to 34) in the

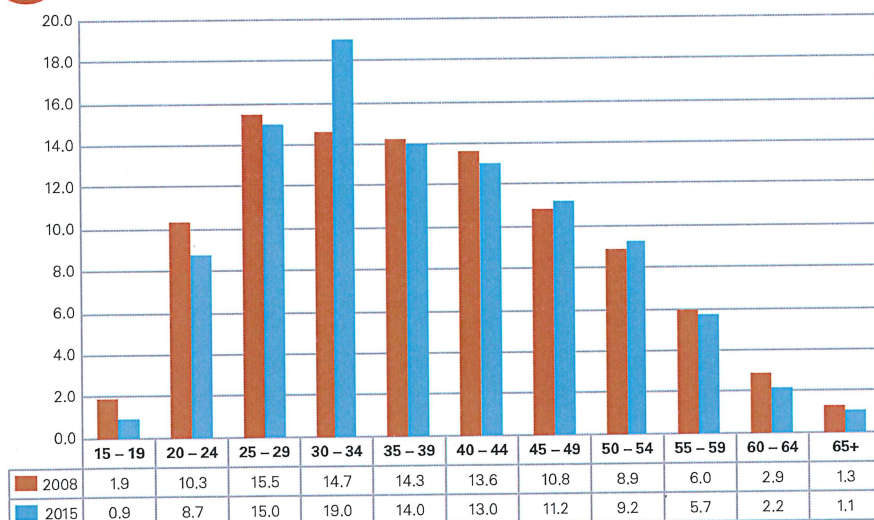
craft and related trades workers (CRT) group has shown some improvement between 2008 and 2015 (42.4% to 43.6%). However, closer examination reveals that this increase can largely be attributed to the 30 to 34-year-old category, with declining employment levels for all other youth categories. This statistic runs alongside increases in adult employment in the 45 to 49 and 50 to 54-year-old categories. We are reminded not only that the South African youth is

not a homogeneous group, but that we need to engage and investigate questions of youth access to employment more critically.

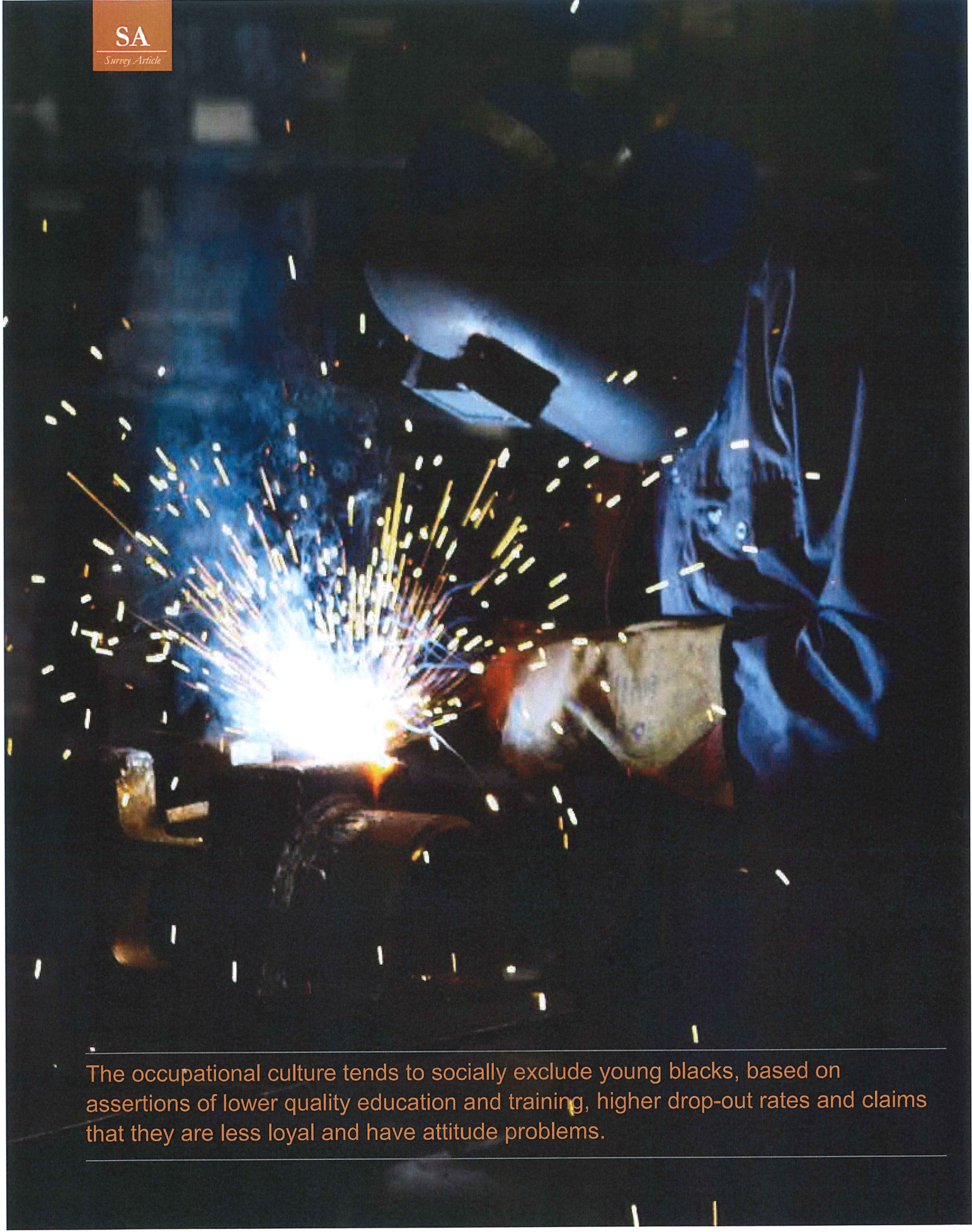
Such trends raise the questions: Why are there not more young people in artisanal employment? What are the mechanisms of exclusion that contribute to this state of affairs? These are important questions when we reflect on the aspirations of the South African youth on the eve of commemorating the 1976 Soweto uprising. Despite the many initiatives aimed at addressing the inequalities that led to the uprising, concerning trends still emerge from recent research on artisanal work and occupations in the country.

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Fig 1 Employment of craft and related trades workers by age, 2008 and 2015 (%)



Source: StatsSA, 2008-2015



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The research project evaluated changes to artisanal work and occupations across three artisanal trades. A case study on millwrights in the metals sector highlights trends pointing to the nature of occupational closure in artisanal training and employment that show how young African individuals continue to be at a distinct disadvantage when entering the labour market.

The occupational culture tends to socially exclude young blacks, justifying exclusion based on assertions of lower quality education and training, higher drop-out rates associated with such candidates and claims that they are less loyal and have attitude problems:

*'It takes you ten plus (10+) years to become a manager... The AIC (African Indian Coloured) candidates are not prepared to wait that long... (but) they all want to be managers. [He] was last week appointed as Works Manager with Controlling (and) he's got 28 years' service. But none of them are prepared to wait that long because they want to be managers. (They are) leaving the company. They get appointed somewhere else as a manager and the big problem is because of the scarcity of AIC Technical people, they (are) job hopping all the time. I've lost eight last year ... all the AIC left for more money and bigger clientele.'* (HR practitioner)

An engineer further declares that 'a good artisan is "born an artisan". He must have initiative, passion for the work, love the detail, and work cleanly – these all determine the quality of the work. The younger guys are doing it for money and that is the root of the attitude problems. They are always on their cell phones and lack initiative'.

**Younger black apprentices and artisans experienced a high degree of hostility from older artisans, affecting their ability to learn and improve their skills.**

Similarly, an older artisan elaborates:

*'... the problem with the new guys at the moment ... it's their attitude which is killing them. They are not willing to listen and they are not willing to work hard ... Some believe that they are just doing their artisan job (apprenticeship) because it is the only thing they have at the moment. (It often) backfires because you find that some are struggling to get the job because of their attitude - after they qualified they need to go back to the plants and beg for the job. So if you didn't do well while you are still training, then it's not easy for them to find a job. And outside they are looking for experience.'*

A good relationship between an older experienced artisan and a young apprentice is the cornerstone of the production of quality skilled artisans. However, younger black apprentices and artisans in this case experienced a high degree of hostility from older artisans, affecting their ability to learn and improve their skills.

**The older white male element typical of artisanal employment and training under apartheid continues to impact on opportunity and choice for young people.**

A young black foreman describes the hostility he experiences in the workplace:

*'Yes, you (as a young black foreman) always come into contact with them (older, old-school, white artisans)... for me it's more like... resistance to change... they're used to their own, old ways and they feel that if a new guy comes in he's going to change that and change that... The other factor (is) their own personal growth. Now, the normal (promotion route) is Apprenticeship, Artisan, Master or Senior then Supervisor. Now, (the company) take a Technician to work as a Super and this old guy who is a Senior who has been leading as Foreman for 34 years, he's now off.'*

*He feels used. He felt he deserved the position more than an outsider...'*

An engineer and a manager expand on this sentiment, also relating the source of the hostility to older artisans feeling more deserving of the higher status positions.

*'... there's quite a bit of frustration amongst the senior ranks ... before there was long standing artisans and then there was a change in the company... towards the affirmative action side. And that has resulted in a lot of the artisans being relatively inexperienced, both in tenure and in the plant. So they (are) young people, they not experienced artisans and that has been a frustration to some of the older (Charge) Hands and I think that is also where the conflict arises ...'* (Engineer).

*'The maintenance manager has five sections that he is responsible for and only here and there one would pick up some racism. It is more generation conflict than racial conflict. The older generation followed the previous longer training route to become an artisan. After an 18 month training programme young artisans are not always mature enough to face up to the working environment...'* (Manager).

This research shows how the older white male element typical of artisanal employment and training under apartheid continues to impact on opportunity and choice for young people. It is clear that the mechanisms for such exclusion are not as overt and appear under the guise of attitude, poor educational preparation and lack of company loyalty. In fact, the research shows that it is young black artisans who are most likely to be associated with these characteristics and thus portrayed as being less able and willing to do artisanal work.

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# REVIEW

Making sense  
of racism

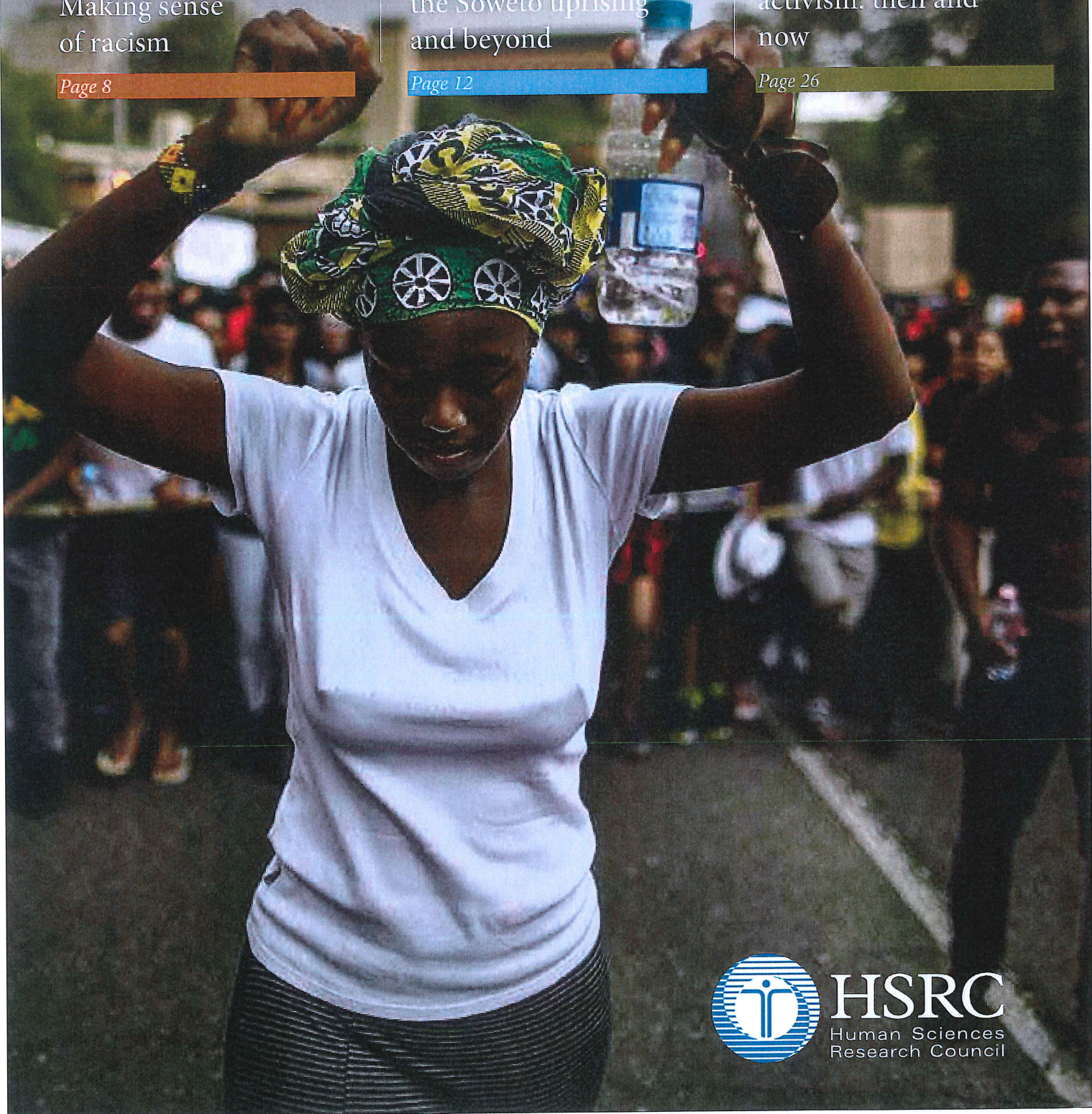
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Remembering 1976:  
the Soweto uprising  
and beyond

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Youth (educational)  
activism: then and  
now

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