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Sanitation SA pays huge cost, both social and economic, for shortage of facilities

1.5m kids lack toilets

By **TANYA FARBER**

- One-and-a-half million.

That is the number of children in South Africa who still have to leave their home every time they need the toilet.

The 2017 SA Early Childhood Review, released by Ilifa Labantwana, says: “Despite huge progress in providing sanitation, South Africa still has more than 1.5 million children under the age of six who do not live in a household with a toilet on the site.”

The lack of sanitation is a leading cause of diarrhoea, which accounts for one-fifth of all under-five deaths in the country.

In Gauteng the number of children without a toilet is 8% – but in Limpopo it is at 49%.

In Bonnytoun informal settlement in Cape Town “Aunty Mona” Allie, a resident and committee chair, said: “When the sewerage [sys-

tem] is full, everything gets blocked and comes out of the drain. The road gets full of waste and the children have nowhere to play.”

There are also no lights near the 13 toilets in the settlement (for just under 200 people).

Frank Tabisher, 69, who has to walk down a dark road at night to get to the communal toilet, said: “We can’t feel safe here. Not at night.”

Resident Margie Matthews said the elderly were terrified of going to the toilets at night.

“They need the toilet urgently and some end up doing it in their pants,” she said.

“The road gets full of waste and the children have nowhere to play”

AUNTY MONA ALLIE
Bonnytoun resident

An earlier study by Yale University found that women in informal settlements around Khayelitsha, Cape Town, are at high risk of rape for 15 minutes of every single day of their lives as they walk to and from toilets.

They also found the costs associated with these “toilet travel” sexual assaults in Khayelitsha was about R265-million a year (medical expenses, lost earnings, legal proceedings and others).

“Think about that for just a minute,” said US researcher Becky Jacobs, who earlier this year conducted research on the role of gender in how people experience urban life in Cape Town.

“Even if you are not completely appalled at the human tragedy involved in these circumstances, consider the economic consequences ... and the fact that Khayelitsha is only one of 437 informal settlements in Cape Town.”