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THE UTILISATION OF THE CHILD SUPPORT GRANT BY CAREGIVERS: THE CASE OF BA-PHALABORWA MUNICIPALITY IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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The Child Support Grant (CSG) represents a major policy response to child poverty in South Africa. Based on qualitative research, the article explored how caregivers in Ba-Phalaborwa sub-district in the Limpopo province utilise the CSG. The findings revealed that the CSG is mostly utilised to buy food, clothes and school necessities for children. There were perceptions, though, that some recipients did not utilise the grant in the best interest of children. It is recommended that the Department of Social Development should monitor closely the utilisation of the grant to ensure that beneficiaries use the grant in the best interest of the children.

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INTRODUCTION

This article explores how caregivers in Ba-Phalaborwa sub-district of the Limpopo province in South Africa utilise the Child Support Grant (CSG). Children are a vulnerable group and are affected most by poverty (Nkosi, 2009). Nkosi (2009) argues that most children become poor as a result of parents dying of AIDS, yet another factor which leads to children living in poverty is the high rate of unemployment. It is therefore not surprising that six out of ten children grow up in poverty (Nkosi, 2009). The South African government's policy response to children living in poverty in South Africa is the Child Support Grant (CSG). It is payable to a needy primary caregiver of a child for the benefit of that child. The aim of the CSG is to support primary caregivers of children by making a contribution towards supplementing their resources in order to enhance their capacity to provide adequately for the growth and development of children (Nkosi, 2009; Triegaardt, 2005). The CSG was introduced in 1998 following a recommendation by the Lund Committee, which was set up to explore alternative policy options to improve the wellbeing of children and families as part of the ANC government's commitment to poverty reduction (Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF, 2011). Section 28 of the South African Constitution stipulates that children have the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and social services. Mutshaeni (2009) argues that "some of these children's rights have in a way motivated the formulation of the Child Support Grant". This grant is an attempt to make some of the children's rights a reality. According to Delany, Ismail, Graham and Ramkissoon (2008), the CSG was meant to cater mainly for the food requirements of children. Although the grant is targeted at children, some of the caregivers tend to misuse the grant, which then results in children living in poverty (Makhubu & Ndenze, 2013).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

According to Article 26(1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), every child has the right to social security (United Nations, 1989). The CRC further highlights that every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. In line with the CRC, the South African government adopted the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005, which indicates that all children have the right to have their basic needs met, not only for survival and protection but also to be able to develop to their full potential, to participate as members of society taking into account their age and stage of development. However, there are some caregivers who fail to ensure that the basic needs of their children are met (Makhubu & Ndenze,

2013; Mutshaeni, 2009). For instance, although the CSG is meant to alleviate poverty among children, some of the caregivers who receive the grant on behalf of the children are reported to be misusing the grant and not utilising it in the best interest of the children (Makhubu & Ndenze, 2013). This results in the persistence of child poverty, which is strongly associated with less schooling, lower educational attainment, malnutrition and low standard of living (Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF, 2011). It is therefore essential that the grant should be able to meet the needs of the targeted children. Although there is extensive literature on social security in South Africa, very few studies have paid sufficient attention to the utilisation of the CSG; hence there is a need to focus on this area (Goldblatt, 2006; Hunter & Adato, 2007; Jordan, Patel & Hochfeld, 2014; Mutshaeni, 2009). This article therefore reports on how the CSG is utilised by caregivers in Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality in the Limpopo province of South Africa. The findings of the study contribute to our understanding of how caregivers utilise the CSG in order to meet the needs of the children.

THE HISTORY OF THE CHILD SUPPORT GRANT IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to Amoateng cited by (Udjo, 2009), before 1997 single parents who were unemployed or had a low income were eligible for the State Maintenance Grant (SMG) in South Africa. The uptake of the grant by African parents in rural areas was low because of its racial bias. The SMG was replaced by the CSG after the Lund Committee's recommendations in 1996 (Amoateng cited in Udjo, 2009). Despite the CSG having been greeted with mixed reactions when it was introduced, the SMG was eventually phased out over a period of three years (Vorster & Rossouw, cited in Triegaardt, 2005). The CSG was introduced in 1998 to cover children below the age of seven. The grant was considered limited because of this low age threshold. However, the age threshold for receiving the grant was raised to 18 years in 2012 (Du Toit & Lues, 2014). According to Triegaardt (2005), the aim of introducing the CSG was to target impoverished children and relieve child poverty, regardless of their family structure, tradition or race. The grant was also aimed at boosting the low earnings of caregivers and thereby enabling them to care for children independently of the labour market (Triegaardt, 2005).

THE IMPACT OF THE CHILD SUPPORT GRANT

Delany *et al.* (2008) state that "the CSG is the largest social assistance programme in terms of number of beneficiaries reached." According to the Department of Social Development (2004), the study on the social and economic impact of South Africa's social security system provides evidence that social grants yield positive impacts that include, amongst other things, the reduction of poverty and hunger, promoting job searches and increasing school attendance.

Reduction of poverty and hunger

According to Mirugi-Mukundi (2010), many poor families rely on social grants such as the CSG to meet their basic needs. Nkosi (2011) concurs that the CSG is the sole source

of income for many poor families, and thus essential for their survival. Studies on CSGs found that the grant is spent mainly on food (Delany *et al.*, 2008; Richter, 2009). The expenditure on food is associated with improved nutritional outcomes. For instance, in each household that receives a CSG, there is a likely decrease of 8-14 percent in the probability of any child suffering from hunger (Richter, 2009). Households receiving the CSG are less likely to experience hunger (Department of Social Development, 2004). According to Pauw and Mncube (2007), cash grants targeted at children directly reduce poverty and the vulnerability of children living in poor households. The authors further observe that in the year 2006 the percentage of children in poverty fell from 42.7 percent to 34.3 percent (Pauw & Mncube, 2007). Patel and Hochfeld (2011) concur that the CSG provides a valuable safety net to poor households, with significant benefits for both women and children. Since the majority of beneficiaries spend the grant on food, it contributes to household food security and provides some financial security to women independently of their partners. The grant also provides women with the flexibility and choice on how the money is spent. This confirms the assertion that the receipt of grants by women leads to improvements in children's wellbeing (Samson, MacQuene & Van Niekerk, 2010).

School attendance

Many poor children cannot attend school because of the costs associated with education. Social grants counter these negative effects by enhancing the capacity of households to meet the educational needs of children. Case, Hosegood and Lund (2005) argue that children who received the CSG are significantly more likely to be enrolled in school in the years following receipt of the grant than equally poor children of the same age. The authors further state that the older brothers and sisters of the grant recipients, when they were observed at the time the grant was not implemented, were less likely than other children to be enrolled in school (Case *et al.*, 2005). Williams (2007) also observes that the CSG increases primary school enrolment slightly above 2 percent and decreases non-attendance by 54 percent. Nkosi (2011) is of the view that the CSG beneficiaries are able to afford transport to school for children and also to meet other school needs. Nkosi further argues that there is a positive link between the CSG and access to education. She believes education makes it possible for children to escape from poverty in their adult lives and equips them to become economically independent (Nkosi, 2011).

Labour force participation

According to Williams (2007), most beneficiaries of CSGs tend to participate in the labour market. The grant yields positive effects by increasing job searches and employment. Williams (2007) believes that grants enable poor households to participate in productive economic activity. Samson *et al.* (2010) concur that persons in households receiving social grants have a higher success rate in finding employment when compared to non-beneficiaries. They argue that individuals in households receiving social grants have increased both their labour-force participation and employment rates faster than those who live in households that do not receive a social grant.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to explore the extent to which caregivers utilise the Child Support Grant in the best interest of children and the specific objectives were:

- To investigate how caregivers utilise the Child Support Grant;
- To establish perceptions about the misuse of the Child Support Grant;
- To establish the views of caregivers on how the Child Support Grant can be utilised in the best interest of children.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach and was exploratory in nature. The study was conducted in Ba-Phalaborwa sub-district in the Mopani District of the Limpopo province, South Africa. The study population consisted of caregivers who were receiving the Child Support Grant. A sample of 20 caregivers aged between 21 and 50 were selected as participants using purposive sampling. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data. Face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and were transcribed to make retrieval easier. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data. Key concepts, ideas and short phrases that occurred during interviews were noted and used for coding. The data were also categorised in terms of their similarities and differences.

The key ethical considerations in this study were voluntary participation, informed consent, avoidance of harm, confidentiality and anonymity. Ethics clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand non-medical ethics committee. For the purpose of data verification and trustworthiness of the study, its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, as outlined by De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011) were ensured. To achieve credibility of the findings, open-ended questions were asked in order to elicit detailed information and also to follow up participants' responses for verification. The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes and the researcher was also able to observe the participants' domestic circumstances and compare this with their responses. In this study dependability was ensured by discussing explicitly the methods for data collection, data analysis and sampling procedures; this will enable future researchers who are interested in this type of study to use the same research instruments in order to yield comparable results. The researcher also observed the two major principles of dependability as outlined by Neuman (2011), which are to conceptualise all concepts and to use a pilot study. The literature review was able to contextualise CSG in South Africa, provide the historical background of social assistance in South Africa and also focus on the impact of the CSG. The research instrument was pre-tested in order to ensure the feasibility as well as reliability of the study and no changes were made to the interview schedule based on the pilot study. Confirmability aims to ensure that the research findings are based on the true data and the process of data analysis was properly applied (Padgett, 2008). In order to address confirmability, themes were identified when analysing data and the themes were confirmed by the use of direct

quotes in presenting the findings of the study. The researcher has also kept the records of the interview schedule, audio-tapes and transcripts in a safe place. The findings are also presented in relation to an existing body of knowledge on the area of research under study.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The participants of the study were all females; this is not surprising given the fact that the overwhelming majority (96 percent) of the recipients of the CSG nationally are women, especially mothers and grandmothers of the child (De Koker, De Waal & Vorster, 2006). According to Case *et al*. (2005), there is a significant difference in children's lives when women receive the grant and they suggest that cash in women's hands leads to greater improvement in children's wellbeing. The majority of the participants were single mothers. All the participants were the primary caregivers of the children. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 49 years. It should also be noted that the majority of the participants had a secondary education and were unemployed. It was apparent that the participants were dependent on the CSG for the upkeep of the children.

THE UTILISATION OF A CHILD SUPPORT GRANT

The first objective of the study was to investigate how caregivers utilise the CSG. In the light of this objective, participants were asked how they utilised the CSG. The majority of the participants reported that they spend the grant on food, clothes for children, contributions to burial societies and on the children's school needs. For instance, one of the participants said: "*I buy maize meal, canned fish and bath soap."* Another participant indicated that "*I am able to buy food and clothes for the child, but the grant is not enough"*. This finding confirms the observation by Lombard (2008) that the CSG is spent mainly on food. As alluded to earlier, the increased spending on food is associated with better nutritional outcomes and improved access to food. One of the participants confirmed that households in the community receiving the CSG do not suffer from hunger. Spending on clothing for both children and adults was mentioned by only a few participants. This is in line with the finding by the Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency and UNICEF (2011) that clothing was one of the items rarely purchased with the grant. A few participants indicated that they used part of the grant to pay their electricity bill. The fact that only a few participants referred to using part of the grant on electricity can be attributed to the reality that many of the participants did not have electricity at their homes.

A few of the participants indicated that they used the grant to pay crèche fees for their children. For instance, one participant mentioned: "*I pay for the child's day care centres' fees and also pay for her transport."* Although transport costs to school were rarely mentioned, one participant observed that "*I buy food and school uniform for the children and also pay for transport to crèche for one child."* In the Child Support Grant Evaluation Report by the Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF (2011) some of the primary caregivers mentioned school-related expenses such as crèche fees, pre-school fees, pens, bags, calculators, transport, soccer trips and clothes. The majority of the participants also mentioned that the

purchase of school uniforms was a priority. Some participants indicated that they made sure that their children have pocket money when they go to school.

Participants also indicated that they used the grant to pay their contributions to burial societies. One of the participants stated: "*I buy food, school uniform for the children and pay for two societies amounting to R200-00. However, I am unable to afford other things such as soap and sugar, which are household necessities."* The payments to two burial societies made it difficult for this participant to buy other things which she regards as important. Another participant stated that "*I'm unemployed, so I'm able to buy food and pay burial societies with the CSG."* The Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF (2011) also noted that grants are frequently used to pay contributions to burial societies. According to Tshoose (2010), a burial society is classified as a self-organised informal social security system in which a particular group of people within the community, including families and neighbours, incorporates values that promote togetherness and a sense of belonging. This type of informal social security represents a way of life within traditional black African communities (Tshoose, 2010). It was therefore not surprising that some of the participants utilised a large amount of the grant to contribute to these burial societies.

Only two participants indicated that they used the CSG to pay for medical treatment. This could be because medical care is freely provided in government health care facilities such as clinics, which are easily accessible in the community. The Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency and UNICEF (2011) observe that the CSG is used to access health care, since children are prone to childhood illnesses and injuries. One of the participants remarked that "*The youngest child is sick most of the time, so some of the money I use it for her medical treatment."* This signifies the role of the grant in protecting the health of poor children (Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF, 2011).

Many of the participants reported that they spend the grant mainly on meeting their children's educational or school needs. This is in line with the finding of the Child Support Grant Evaluation Report by the Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF (2011), which points to the fact that school-related expenses were frequently mentioned by CSG recipients as one of the major uses of the grant. Utilising the grant, especially on school-related items, was found to have a positive impact on the children's schooling (Lund, 2011). When asked if children attend school, two of the participants replied as follows:

"They [referring to children] all attend school very well."

"The child attends school regularly and she is in Grade 1."

Potts (2012) also found a positive correlation between grant receipts and enrolment in school amongst the poorest families. The grant is also used to buy school uniforms for children. One of the participant stated that "*I buy school uniform for the child, make sure the child has pocket money to school."* Some of the participants pointed out that it was possible for their children to attend day care centres because of the CSG. For example, one participant proudly stated that her child attends crèche. When the participant was

asked whether there was any difference in her life after receiving the CSG, she replied as follows: *"Yes I can afford to take my child to crèche like other children and she gets stimulated by crèche activitie."* This confirms the observation by the Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF (2011) that early childhood development (ECD) services are highly valued by parents and caregivers in South Africa. This certainly shows that the CSG plays a vital role in enabling children from poor households to access ECD services. These ECD services prepare children for primary school and also promote interaction among children, which enables them to acquire social skills (Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF, 2011). Williams (2007) also found that the CSG is used to pay for early childhood development (ECD) services and pocket money for children who are the recipients of the CSG.

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE MISUSE OF THE CSG

The second objective of the study was to establish the participants' perceptions of the misuse of the CSG. The majority of the participants were of the view that some of the caregivers misuse the grant and do not utilise it in the best interest of children. One of the participants remarked that "*There are also those who utilise the grant for their own benefit and buy clothes for themselves instead of buying food for children."* According to Potts (2012), there is inappropriate use of the grant. Mutshaeni (2009) found that most recipients know the purpose of the CSG, but are often just careless and selfish in their use of it. He further reports that sometimes the grant is not spent on the things it is intended for. Some of the participants expressed feelings of disappointment, anger and shame because some caregivers misuse the grant.

Some examples of how the grant is misused are discussed below.

Gambling

The majority of the participants argued that some of the CSG recipients use the money for gambling. One of the participants pointed out that "*Some recipients of the CSG gamble with the grant and leave their children without food."* Another participant agreed that *"Some of the people use the grant to gamble."* Therefore, money which should have been spent on necessities is often spent on gambling. According to Bulwer (2003), gambling causes harm to society, especially when individuals display impaired control on their gambling behaviour and as a result experience severe negative personal, financial and social consequences as a result of emotional distress. The type of gambling which was observed to be dominant in this community was playing cards. This is a common practice among unemployed females in this community. This was confirmed by one of the participants who said: "*Some recipients gamble with the grant by playing cards."*

Utilisation for personal benefit

It was observed by many participants that some of the recipients of the grant utilise the grant for their own benefit. For instance, one of the participants mentioned that "*Some of the people* [referring to CSG recipients] *use the grant to gamble, buy alcohol, clothes for*

themselves and do not utilise the CSG to benefit children. This end up being generalised that recipients of CSG misuse the grant." This is not surprising, however, because the majority of the recipients do not have other sources of income apart from the CSG. Therefore it is likely that they will also use the grant for their own benefit. This was also confirmed by one of the participants: "*I sometimes create my own debts such as ordering shoes which I pay with the grant."* The prevalence of poverty in many communities and households means that they use the grant for general household budgets rather than for child-specific needs. Therefore there are instances where the grant is not spent specifically on children, but shared among other family members. This does not always represent misuse of the grant (Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF, 2011).

Although there was a general view among the participants that the grant tends to be misused sometimes, one of the participants expressed a different view; she indicated that *"I don't believe there are people abusing the grant. I do not know of such people myself."* Despite the fact that some of the recipients might be using the grant for their own benefit, given their socio-economic challenges, what was a matter of concern is what one of the participants highlighted: "*Others misuse the grant by giving it to their boyfriends."* Mutshaeni (2009) observed that young women tend to be pressured to share their grant with their spouses or boyfriends. Jordan *et al*. (2014) concur that young women do not always have the power to make decisions on how to spend the CSG. Jordan *et al*. (2014) found that, although there are young women who make decisions independently, in most cases the decision makers are either their own parents or whoever they share the household with, which might be their boyfriend or spouse.

It was further argued by one participant that some of the recipients leave their South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) cards with loan sharks. This happens in cases where a recipient borrows money from loan sharks and fails to repay them. The loan sharks keep the card until all the money, including interest, has been repaid. This leaves the recipient indebted and, as a result, children are likely to suffer. One participant observed that "*Some recipients create their own debts and gamble with the grant and not utilise it in the best interest of children."* This is an indication that some recipients accumulate debts and then use the CSG not for its intended purpose but to settle the accumulated debt.

Purchase of alcohol

Some recipients of the CSG are said to abuse the grant by buying alcohol for their own consumption. One participant indicated that *"some they utilise it* [referring to the CSG] *to buy alcohol, meanwhile children are without food."* The participant added that *"Actions should be taken against those abusing the grant."* For instance, one of the participants remarked that *"one of community members was arrested last week because she has been utilising the CSG and Foster Care Grant* [FCG] *to buy alcohol and the children did not have food."* In the study conducted by Niehaus and Shapiro (2010) on the effects of cash transfers on low-income households in developing countries they found that in Western Zambia less than 0.5 percent of the transfers were misspent on

alcohol and tobacco. It was also established that 1.8 per cent of a cash transfer to Mexican households was spent on alcohol. In South Africa the Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF (2011) reported that the grant is sometimes utilised to purchase alcohol, pay for visits to hairdressers by caregivers, spending on boyfriends, gambling, cell phones, clothes for caregivers and luxury foods (such as KFC). The study conducted by Surender, Ntshongwana, Noble and Wright (2007) also established that some of the caregivers spent the money on liquor or clothing for themselves. This is a clear indication that the grant is not always utilised in the best interest of children.

According to Mutshaeni (2009), the purpose of the CSG is clear and specific. It is intended for those who cannot otherwise support their children to enable them to give their children a decent life. However, there is reason to believe that not all children who should be the beneficiaries of this grant are in fact benefiting. While some recipients misuse the grant by purchasing drugs and alcohol, gambling and buying fancy clothes for themselves, other recipients do use the grant well and for the intended purpose. None of the participants admitted to misusing the grant themselves.

PARTICIPANTS' SUGGESTIONS ON HOW THE GRANT CAN BE UTILISED IN THE BEST INTEREST OF CHILDREN

The last objective of the study was to establish the views of caregivers on how the CSG can be utilised in the best interest of children. The majority of the participants indicated that food should be the major item purchased with the grant. This is how some of the participants expressed their views:

> *"It should be utilised to buy food for them* [referring to children]."

> *"The grant should be utilised to buy food and clothes for children."*

In addition to food and clothes, it was also suggested that the grant should be used to pay school fees. One participant stated that *"It* [referring to CSG] *should pay school fees for children."* This can only be applicable to some and not all children, however, because the majority of children are eligible for exemption from school fees. Other suggestions on the utilisation of the CSG related to schooling were that "*The grant should be utilised to buy school uniforms"* and "*Recipients of the CSG should ensure that children have a lunch box when they go to school and that they also carry pocket money to school, in that way the children will be befitting."* Some of the participants reported that they could only afford to buy food with the grant. Therefore, it can be inferred that food is the most basic need that the grant should be utilised for in order to benefit children. Some of the participants argued that meeting the educational needs of children should be a priority. These participants were of the view that a portion of the grant should be saved on a monthly basis to help the children in future, especially when they go to tertiary institutions. One of the participants observed that "*An amount of R50 has to be saved per month which could be used for tertiary fees."*

Some of the participants, however, felt that although it was desirable to save money, it was not always possible. One participant commented that *"the amount we receive is*

very little, so I'm unable to save part of it; I only buy food and clothes." One participant also shared a similar view that it was only possible to save money if there was another source of income other than the CSG.

CONCLUSION

The CSG was introduced as a poverty-alleviation strategy. Although the CSG is supposed to be used for the benefit of children, it also meets the needs of other members of the household. However, it is important that it be used in the best interest of children, since they are the intended beneficiaries. Based on the research findings, it is concluded that the grant is utilised to benefit children directly by paying for food, clothes for children, school-related needs such as school uniforms, ECD centres and transport. Indirectly, though, the grant benefits other family members as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the fact that there are recipients who misuse the grant, it is recommended that vouchers be introduced in order to enable the recipients to purchase only what is needed for children. For example, if food vouchers are issued, this will reduce instances where children are found to be without food. In cases where it is found that the recipients misuse the grant, someone should be appointed to receive the grant on behalf of the child and to use it for the benefit of that child. This should be done in collaboration with social workers and South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) officials.

It is further recommended that social workers should monitor the utilisation of CSG in order to ensure that the grant benefits children. Given the fact that the caseload for social workers is high, hiring other personnel (e.g. social auxiliary workers) to deal specifically with the monitoring of the grant could be a solution. The social auxiliary workers can also assist families who are unable to manage their finances.

Social assistance benefits such as the CSG require exit strategies. It is important that exit strategies be implemented in order to avoid dependence on the grant. In the light of this, it is recommended that officials from the Department of Social Development such as social workers and community development practitioners should work with the CSG beneficiaries to initiate income-generating projects and small businesses as graduation and exit strategies. These beneficiaries can also be assisted to apply for funding from government, the private sector and corporations to implement such initiatives.

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