

Paternal Involvement in the Financial Welfare of Children Receiving Child Support Grant in South Africa

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Abstract: This study explores the views of female beneficiaries on the commitment of biological fathers in the welfare of their children who are in receipt of the Child Support Grant (CSG). The study was qualitative in nature and interview guides were utilised in collecting data from twenty participants. The major finding of the study points to the realisation that the CSG has become a substitute of fathers' commitments to the welfare of their children hence there are few fathers who are present in the lives of their children. In the study, most of the fathers' whereabouts were unknown and so was their contribution. The mothers perceived that men as fathers assumed that the CSG represented them hence they did not need to be active in their children's lives. Some women who were single parents also did not want any involvements from these men due to the fact that they had deserted them. Nevertheless, the CSG emerged as a reliable source of income for these participants as the piece jobs the women engaged in were not sustainable. The study however recommends that fathers be liable to court sanctioned maintenance.

Key words: Child support grant, children, child poverty, fathers, paternal commitment, welfare

INTRODUCTION

Fatherhood comes with more responsibilities than the mind can think of and for this reason there are various interpretations which may be used to understand what paternity implies. In one way, paternity can be interpreted as conceiving a child in another way it can be understood as a contribution to the welfare of the off-spring that is born between a man and a woman and may include responsibilities like financial and emotional security for the child. It is thus Beermink (2012)'s conviction that there are two types of fatherhood which are "Social fatherhood" and "Economic fatherhood". Performance of both these responsibilities is of greater importance as it advances the social, economic and physical functioning and socialisation of the child. Consequently, the focus on the biological fathers in this study is justified by the fact that in the African tradition fathers are the backbone bread winners in families.

Child poverty is one of the major problems in Africa as a whole it often degenerates into child starvation, malnutrition and in severe cases mortality. In South Africa, according to a report by SSA (2013), Eastern Cape is the most affected in terms of child poverty. However, principal international institutions have committed themselves to addressing poverty, notably the World Bank through its poverty reduction strategies and the

United Nations through the Millennium Development Goals. Afro-centric institutions through African Charter on Children's Rights have also laid foundation for the birth of the concept of child support grants for many countries. This is done to ensure that those vulnerable children are well catered for through financial support to enable a favourable environment for their growth and development.

Nevertheless, in South Africa, The Child Support Grant (CSG) was initially introduced in the country in 1988. According to the South African Constitution (Chapter 2: Bill of Rights, 28.1c), every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services. The current statutes which relate to the child support grant bases on the priorities set out in the 1997 "White Paper" whose objective was to restructure the welfare system in South Africa thus prioritising children for state welfare. The Child Support Grant is designed to cushion children against poverty and is only available to benefit children whose parents earn <R2500 per month that is in the case of a single earning caregiver and for married caregivers the combined income may not exceed R5000 per month (SASSA, 2013).

The grant's performance has high salience within South Africa and internationally. When selected as South Africa's policy for addressing child poverty in the mid-1990s, the child support grant was unusual in

introducing cash rather than an in-kind benefit that was non-conditional. In addition, the program was unique in providing access to the grant through a primary care giver, in contrast to a biological parent in order to reflect the varied and fluid patterns of care giving observed in South Africa. The primary care giver of the child receiving the CSG has to be a South African citizen or staying in the country permanently and the same applies to the child. Nevertheless, there is a limit of six children who can be taken care of by a primary care giver in the event that the children are not biological or adopted children of the care giver.

The Child Support Grant is paid out by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) under the directive of the Department of Social Development (Smiley and Polly, 2011). According to statistics released by SASSA (2013) CSG's are said to be the most paid out social assistance covering over 10 million South African children. The monthly pay out for CSG has increased over the past 14 years to the current R290 per child, per month as from April 2013. Initially, the CSG covered children <7 years old. In 2003, the age limit was increased to include children under the age of 9 years. Children aged 11 and 14 years became beneficiaries in 2004 and 2005, respectively. Age limit further increased and encompassed 13 and 14 years old in 2008 and in 2009. To date since February 2011, the CSG covers all children till their 18th birthday (SASSA, 2013). The stance for the child support grant was further supported by the former South African President, Thabo Mbeki as he stated that:

The child support grant would be a significant contributor to enabling the children to complete school and compete better in the skills driven economy. Researchers can't afford not to extend this grant and as a society the investment will be worth it for all the children and South Africa

Literature review: This study reviews the literature on the impact of child support grant in South Africa and the extent of paternal involvement.

Impact of child support grant: The study conducted by Department of Social Development, SASSA and the DoSD SASSA and UNICEF (2012) found out that the impact of the CSG which is means tested but unlike those in many developing countries not conditional on participation in specific programmes exceeds expectations. The study also argues that the grant reduces poverty significantly. Furthermore, Case *et al.* (2005) found that one third of all age-eligible children received the grant and these beneficiaries were from the poorest households.

Also, there is a considerable body of evidence that exists regarding the impact of CSG on children's schooling (Fiszbein *et al.*, 2009; Behrman and Parker, 2010; Barrientos and Nino-Zarazua, 2010; DFID, 2011). These studies showed positive effects on enrolment and attendance with the magnitudes of these impacts typically varying by pre-program enrolment rates.

Food is typically the largest category of expenditure for the poor; comparative studies between CSG recipients and matched households that have CSG-eligibility but non-receiving individuals clearly show differential levels of food expenditure (Delany *et al.*, 2008). The grant leads to girls and boys eating better and being healthier. Even though the CSG is significantly smaller (less than a quarter of the size) and the literature on social transfers is far from unanimous on whether there are critical income levels below which households cannot invest research shows evidence of savings and investment. Recent research findings also suggest that the CSG has a significant positive impact on the likelihood of black female recipients participating in the labour market and an even larger effect on the probability of their obtaining employment (Eyal and Woolard, 2011). Socially, the grant is a silent weapon against drugs, alcohol abuse and crime. It undermines the "sugar daddy" phenomenon that leads teenagers to have transactional sex and being exposed to pregnancy or HIV.

However, there is a theory that suggests that receiving the CSG results in dependency on the state. This is based on the idea that women become intentionally pregnant to receive a grant. Nevertheless, Richter (2009) offers evidence to refute this claim. Even in 2007 the Department of Social Development released results refuting any association between teenage fertility and receipt of CSG. The allegations however are rooted in assumption rather than factual evidence. According to Potts (2012) while it is indubitable that a percentage of mothers partake in misbehavior, the percentage of individuals partaking in such behavior is proven insubstantial and has a negligent effect on the effectiveness of the CSG.

Paternal involvement: Baron and Byrne (2000) stipulate that in most communities where poverty rates are high and where most families are beneficiaries of the child support grant, it is a common feeling that men tend to have apathy towards their children. It is further articulated that men no longer feel the pressure and need for them to work hard to improve their circumstances and that of their children. This feeling is further buttressed by the unfortunate realisation that in most South African communities, men who are redundant do not make

initiatives to improve their lives through local income generating projects neither do they engage in poverty alleviating initiatives (McKendrick, 1987). The lack of enthusiasm on the part of males in these income generating initiatives leaves much to be desired regarding their roles and commitment to supplementing the meagre income provided by the government for the children's welfare hence, the interest of the paper to explore the paternal involvement in the welfare of children.

Beemink (2012) highlighted that in some homes, there are reports which show that men who are employed, often do not bring their salaries home neither do they buy groceries, clothes for their children, nor take care of them medically. He further alleged that there are reports citing that in cases where men are confronted by their wives regarding the welfare of their children, they often tell them to make use of the child support grant to take care of the children. In more severe cases, men are cited as fighting with their wives over the control and use of the grant. This leaves the role of modern fatherhood questionable as in the traditional African setup, men are expected to secure for resources to take care of their children rather than look forward to external assistance. On the other hand, Richter and Morrell (2006) argued that the modern society is characterised by absent but living fathers due to divorce or separation by work circumstances with the number of fathers living with their children having decreased from 49-36% between 2006 and 2009. This exposes children to various socio-economic plagues.

According to Denis, human beings are rational beings who can evaluate the levels of damage which comes to them in the event of them opting to indulge in a particular situation. It is thus his conviction that the threat of fathering a child is fast receding as men realise that the responsibility is shifted from them to the government hence there is deliberate impregnating of young women by boys and men. In some countries, the responsibility to take care of children lies squarely on the parents. For instance, parents have an obligation to provide financial support for their children under the Family Law (Scotland) Act 1985 (c37) and the Child Support Act 1991 (c38) as such, this discourages people not to have children whom they cannot afford to take care of.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the Golf Course Area in Eastern Cape, South Africa. It had a sample of twenty women of various age groups who were selected using snowball sampling. All of them were single mothers and knew each other in the location hence the use of snowballing. Saturation point was reached at the

twentieth participant. The nature of the study required the female beneficiaries (with children benefiting from CSG) to express their true perceptions about the fathers' participation in the financial well-being of their children thus the selection of women only in the study. A qualitative research design was employed with the use of in-depth interviewing technique to collect data. The qualitative design was chosen because probing gave participants the opportunity to respond in their own words rather than restricting them to choose from fixed responses as is in the case of quantitative methods. Thus, by using qualitative research methods, the study was able to scale the extent to which the CSG is assisting in the families and the extent that fathers with child beneficiaries of this grant are supportive economically.

RESULTS

Biographical information of participants: In terms of the age of participants, six were 25 years old and below and five were between 26 years old and 30 years. In the ages of 31 and 39 years, there were 3 participants. The remainder 6 were at least 40 years of age. Regarding their marital status, the majority making up eight participants had chosen to remain single after being abandoned by the men who impregnated them. However, five were cohabitating and three mentioned that they were married. The other remaining four participants were divorcees. Also, it means that 12 households were female headed households. These single mothers mentioned that they were trying very hard to support themselves and their families and they did not need a male figure to depend on. Some cited that they preferred to raise their children on their own and they were protecting them rather than exposing them to potential abuse from new partners. Further, in their households, participants had dependants comprising of both adults and children. Sixteen participants lived in households with less than five adults inclusive of themselves whilst the other four lived with more than five adults in their households. However, 15 participants had at most five children. The remaining five participants had six children and above in their care.

The participants were asked about their highest educational qualifications and the majority were between standard six and nine and they made up ten participants. Six participants indicated that their level of education was below standard five and the remaining four were above standard ten. Concerning their employment status only four were employed. Among these, three were ward committee members and earned R900 monthly but this depended on the 1 year term of office and community elections. One participant indicated that she was working

in a fashion shop run by foreign nationals and was earning a minimum wage which she chose not to disclose. The other 16 were not employed but they sometimes involved themselves in piece jobs to earn a living and also to supplement the grant. These women stated that in most cases they earned less than the CSG on the piece jobs. For instance, one of the 16 participants stated that at times she did laundry for R50 and this was on an occasional basis. Another participant said:

I rely on recycling, there is a white men who comes and collects the full bags of broken glass that I collect and he gives me money according to how much I have collected. This is not a constant thing but once in a while as you cannot fill the bag within a few days with broken glass

The extent to which the child support grant solely meets the child's needs: Regarding the monthly income that the participants got from the CSG they were receiving, majority (twelve participants) had one or two children and they earned between R280 and R560 on a monthly basis for child support. Three participants had five children in their care hence, they earned an overall of R1400 per month. Five participants had children who were >6 hence, they earn at least R1680 per month. Of these five women, two stated that they had eight children each and they collected R2240. These participants added that not all of the children in their care are their biological daughters as some are their grandchildren. The respondent with eight children in her care highlighted that three children are her grand-children registered for CSG under her daughter's name.

Consequently, the participants were asked on how and what they spent the CSG on. Three of the total participants stated that on a monthly basis they used between R500-800 on their children's monthly expenses inclusive of the CSG. The remaining fourteen participants of the research stated that they did not partition the money per child but used it all to cater for the children's needs and also family expenses as stated above. One of the participants mentioned that:

I pay between R150 and R180 per month for transport for the children to go to school and the remaining on groceries. However it is not enough. The grant is spent on groceries, stationery and expenses for the family. I use it for water bills but this time around I did not pay for the water bill so I could pay for transport to school

Nevertheless, all the participants stated that the CSG could not sustain them on a monthly basis as it was not enough to cover the basics they used the money on. One

stated that she had a baby and the CSG was insufficient to cater for the milk formulas and food for her baby which she needed on a monthly basis. The participants were asked on how they supplemented the inadequate CSG. Most women revealed that in supplementing this meagre resource, they had established income generating projects like poultry, bead weaving and stokvels (mahodhisana). In these initiatives the goal of the projects is to create income to improve the wellbeing of children and their families. However, most participants expressed discontentment over the lack of initiative on the part of biological fathers on the upbringing of their children.

Family unit and sustainability of the CSG: The participants were asked on what they think about the government's child welfare policy which provides for the CSG whether it is sustainable and supports family unit. The participants mentioned that it kept the family together with or without the father and it should not be terminated. In this regard, out of 20 participants, 16 outlined that if the CSG could be terminated their lives could be icy and lifeless and this does not only apply to them as beneficiaries but to the broader family at large. On the other hand four participants stated that nothing could happen even if it (CSG) could be terminated because the money itself is insufficient to cater for all needs of the child.

During the interview, participants were asked whether they would be able to survive if the CSG was terminated. Two respondents stated that they entirely depend on it and did not know what to do in the event that it was terminated. Eighteen others stated that they relied also on piece jobs of which 14 stated that they could not rely on their piece jobs as they were not always guaranteed to last. Fifteen of the overall 20 respondents who had other sources of income stated that life would be harder than it is now in the event that the CSG was cut off or terminated. They supported themselves by saying that it was an assured monthly income in as compared to their piece jobs which could be terminated at any time and they would have no other source of income. They added that they would have to start other projects for survival such as poultry or gardening.

The whereabouts of biological fathers: The majority of the households consisted of single mothers hence making them female headed households. Out of the twenty participants interviewed, 15 knew where the biological fathers of their children were. Among these, eight participants were staying with the biological fathers because they were either married or were cohabitating that is why they knew. Some of the participants (seven) who

did not stay with the biological fathers of their children, knew their whereabouts but they mentioned that there was no contact or any form of involvement in their children's lives. One 25 years old participant highlighted that:

Njabulo (the name of the biological father of her daughter) is staying in Cape-Town and he is working there. People always tell me that he has a good job but not even once did he ever buy his daughter anything even food

The other five participants indicated that they did not know the whereabouts of the biological fathers. One of these five said:

I do not know where the father of the child is and I do not want to even know due to the fact that my child is growing without him ever since the child was five months after birth and is currently doing grade 11 and soon he will be going to initiation school without seeing him

In an effort to understand the absence of men several reasons emerged. It was revealed that the absence of some men was merely because these biological fathers were married and already had other families which they were staying with. Some participants attributed this to teenage pregnancies and immaturity as they engaged in sexual activities which resulted in unplanned and unwanted children. One stated that:

I had this child when I was 18 years old and he was 20 years old. We were still young, he was not working and he was not ready to marry me. I could not abort my baby it's against my beliefs. So, I kept the pregnancy till I gave birth

Another participant went on to stipulate that "He just impregnated me and he was nowhere to be found after suggesting that I must go for abortion because he is not yet ready to be a father". The third participant pointed out that "The father of the child stated that he was not the only person sleeping with me they were too many and he cannot accept that the child belongs to him."

Paternal involvement in the socio-economic needs of the child: Concerning the involvement of biological fathers in the lives of their children those that were staying with the biological fathers of their children indicated that these fathers had time to cater for the emotional needs of their children and assist them even with homework. The participants also mentioned that the fathers were having quality time to read, play, counsel and watch television with the children. One of the participants mentioned that:

My husband goes to work every day but every night he reads stories to our children. Sometimes during the weekends he takes the children out to town to watch movies and play at the park. He really enjoys his role as a father to the children

As compared to the women who did not stay with the biological fathers, the participants indicated that the fathers were not involved in the children's lives. These participants mentioned that due to their absence there was no commitment or participation in any aspect of the children's lives. One participant argued that:

The father of my child does not even know how old his daughter is. He only visited us when the baby was born and he disappeared. He is not hands on in the life of the child and he is not involved in anything. For consultation at school or birthdays he doesn't show up

Further enquiry was made regarding commitment of biological fathers in the financial wellbeing of the children. Out of the twenty participants 15 mentioned that the biological fathers were not playing their adequate role in the lives of their children regarding the economic needs. One participant said:

These men assume that the grant is enough to cater for the child's needs. If you ask money from them they will say what about the grant that you are getting. They do not understand that it is not enough

Furthermore, they added that men perceived the CSG as a relief on their part to support their children as most men were unemployed therefore could not afford to support their families. Surprisingly, even those that were staying with the biological fathers indicated that they were not contributing financially to the well being of children. As women continued to get a monthly income the men saw no need for them to offer any assistance. One participant said:

My husband has been out of job for a very long time now. He cannot support his children because he doesn't have money. He is so reluctant to look for another job because he knows will get the grant every month and it puts food on the table. But I am grateful for this grant it helps our family to keep going

As such, one woman indicated that her fiancée was employed as a prison warden, and to this end, he would be earning more than the child support grant but he could not provide for them financially.

However, the most striking emotion expressed by the participants was bitterness amongst the women. The mothers outlined that the absence and non contribution by their male counterparts is in itself a mockery to the world of families and a perpetuation of patriarchy. One of the participants said:

I feel betrayed and undermined by the father of my children. He hardly sees the need to contribute towards the children, it makes me feel that men are still suppressing women and children...I am not asking him to give the children money but just his love as the father...

Regardless, five of the total participants pointed out that the fathers of the children were involved in the lives of their children as they acknowledged the fact that the CSG is insufficient to cater for the needs of the child. They added that they perceived them as supportive.

Upon being asked on their suggestions as in what they think could be done to improve fathers socio-economic involvement in their children's lives, the respondents suggested that men need to be arrested for abandoning their responsibility as fathers. Some respondents added that they should be killed with some suggesting castration due to the anger they had against them for forsaking them when they needed them and escaping the role of being a father. One of the respondents said that "Men will always be men and there is nothing one can do to tie them down to a responsibility as they would run away no matter what."

DISCUSSION

The impact of the CSG cannot be over-emphasised. The results of this study are in line with the growing body of evidence that the child support grant, it is used for essentials such as food, basic services and education related costs. Due to low income within the households, the CSG is likely to be pulled to cover general household expenses rather than being spent solely to maintain the targeted child (DoSD, 2008). However, due to the fact that the grant is too little it surfaces as being inadequate. In support of this, Streak (2011) indicated that poverty remains more extensive among children than adults even after the massive injection of cash via the CSG into poor households with children. As such, the cost of living far surpasses the value of the grant which is R290 (SASSA, 2013).

According to Williams (2007) the CSG including other social security grants forms the largest source of income for most poor families in South Africa. This reality has continued to plague the society and even further drawing

others into poverty. Dayen argues that there is a problem in political rhetoric which makes the provision of social security a measure of political campaigns rather than a case of citizen protection. He further alleges that the continued provision of CSG is detrimental to the society as it creates dependency and apathy and in the case of this study, it makes biological fathers to be reluctant on their duty of fatherhood that is providing for their children.

Generally, in the African culture the biological father is expected to take up responsibility of his children and cover their financial costs and wellbeing. Nevertheless, many households these days are female headed households. The fact that more than half of the participants were not staying with the biological fathers of their children can be supported by Schimid (2009) who mentioned that more than half of South Africa's children are not living with both parents and many of these children have little or no contact with their fathers. The study revealed that children in the majority of families were without their fathers due to desertion by the father and hence, the father was not economically active in the child's life. Imperatively, some fathers leave due to failure to assume responsibility when the mother of the child falls pregnant. Some of these fathers will move, get married and have families with new partners and neglect their earlier partners and children. This can be due to teenage pregnancies and immaturity as they engaged in sexual activities which resulted in unplanned and unwanted children. Later on in life they will be mature enough to settle down and have a family with different partners. The high levels of teenage pregnancy in South Africa have an impact into all this as children engage in sexual activities at a very young age which leads to unwanted pregnancy thereby increasing the number of needy children.

Closely associated with the disruption of South African families is the issue of poverty. Fathers who live in poverty and those who experience unemployment are more likely to be absent from their children both voluntarily as well as involuntarily. From the findings it is clearly noted that there is really a high rate of unemployment. This can be due to the fact that jobs are not available or because the participants lacked skills as well as the issue of inequality within South Africa where the service users are defined as the poor. Therefore, these fathers are not able to perform the economical responsibilities which are associated with fatherhood. This may lead to desertion by fathers because they cannot carry the burden of being the economical provider. However, in some cases the desertion of fathers is not voluntary. The woman's family might prohibit in the upbringing of his child (Holborn and Eddy, 2011). At the

end of the day, this becomes a problem because the burden for ensuring the child's safety and well-being is placed on the mother's shoulders.

It has been established through this study that biological fathers of children who are beneficiaries of the CSG are reluctant or lack the motivation to provide for their children. The outcomes of the reluctance have been vented out through the perceptions and expression of despair, anger and bitterness amongst biological mothers or female caregivers of children who receive CSG. Further, it can be recognized that due to the passive or complete non participation of biological fathers in the social sphere of their children's lives leads to delinquency, low self esteem and resentment of fathers by their children. In terms of the non participation of biological fathers in the lives of their children's economic lives, the outcome could have a positive correlation between child poverty and criminal and immoral behaviour like theft and prostitution. Therefore, the increase of absent fathers is associated with an increase of children living in poverty. South Africa has very high rates of child poverty and poverty tends to be more pronounced among African single parent households. In support of this, Streak (2011) indicated that poverty remains more extensive among children than adults even after the massive injection of cash via the CSG into poor households with children. As such, the cost of living far surpasses the value of the grant which is R280. It is an irrefutable reality that the CSG as a form of social security measure by the government is going against the gains and envisaged payoffs of the developmental approach which is currently being advocated and implemented in South Africa. CSG only play the curative role instead of the preventative role. While it is a fact that certain citizens require assistance from the state for their welfare, it remains an absolute reality that family empowerment would serve the families in far much better ways than providing relief for them through the CSG.

CONCLUSION

The overall conclusion of this study is that biological fathers of children who are beneficiaries of the CSG are not actively supporting their children either deliberately with the mindset that the CSG will replace their contribution or involuntarily as these fathers are not employed, neither do they have a solid form of income to enable them to provide for their children. The social and economic implication of this is that children are living in poverty. A radical shift from the normative provision of the CSG to a more sustainable form of child welfare like prevention services should be provided in the form of empowering families and providing employment opportunities for biological fathers to enable them to take their natural responsibility.

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