

# Dependency on Child Support Grant Increases Teenage Pregnancy Rate in the Community of North West Province

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**Abstract:** *In South Africa, increased teenage pregnancy rates especially among teenagers is considered to be one of the social problems because it yields social and economic challenges. Due to insufficient material and social support, poor primary caregivers are believed to be putting themselves and the beneficiaries of child support grant on a predicament of lifetime poverty. This paper is based on the research study that was conducted in 2021. The conducted study examined the dependency on child support grant which increases teenage pregnancy rates in the community of the North West Province. In this paper, researchers followed a mixed-methods approach and purposive sampling. The sample method consisted of primary caregivers and social workers. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews. The conclusions of this paper are that CSG is one of the contributors to increased pregnancy rates, however other social factors such as poverty, increased domestic violence, interrupted education, lack of employment opportunities, criminal activities, child neglect as well as child abandonment are contributors to increased pregnancy rates (Amoateng, Ewemooje, & Biney 2022: 34).*

**Keywords:** Teenage pregnancy, Poverty, Child support grant, Primary caregivers, social problems, North West

## 1. Introduction

In South Africa, social assistance programmes refer to all the cash transfers from the state to poverty-stricken individuals (Garman, Avendano, Avans-Lacko & Lund 2022: 114631). Social assistance programmes, including the child support grant may foster challenges such as economic dependency, increased pregnancy rates, and abuse. However, it also increases access to job opportunities, education, and health services. Child support grant was established in 1998, to provide assistance to primary caregivers in taking care of their children (Rosenberg, Pettifor, Nguyen, Westreich, Bor, Barnighausen et al, 2015: 52). Results of the study suggests that, child support grant is a useful anti-poverty strategy. This is justified by the increased applications of child support grant in the North West Province at the end of August 2021 which included 903 767 beneficiaries (SASSA Annual report on social grants 2021: 9).

The results revealed that, 50% of primary caregivers receive child support grant on behalf of the beneficiary were between 18 to 40 years of age in 2021. According to Woolard & Leibbradt (2013: 17), child support grant plays a fundamental role in reducing the number of households affected by poverty in the democratic South Africa. Naidoo & Tailer, (2021: 128), state that half of teenagers who fall pregnant are unlikely to return to school after giving birth, therefore, as a result these teenagers automatically become trapped in the cycle of poverty. These teenagers increase the number of women who live in poverty and who do not have proper education and skills. These women fall under the statistics of societies' socio-economic strata (Oyenubi & Kollamparambi, 2022: 52). Although the democratic government introduced the child support grant to eradicate the high levels of poverty that were inherited from the apartheid government, the grant

yields challenges of increased rates of pregnancies, abuse and the misuse of the grant money (Malahlela 2012: 8).

Nonetheless, child support grant has a positive impact on the lives of disadvantaged people. Based on the conducted study in 2021, the results revealed that, the child support grant has been found to reduce poverty in rural areas of the North West Province. The grant has a positive impact on child nutrition and school enrolment. As a result, primary enrolments have gradually increased since more applications of child support grant were recorded in the province. Child poverty refers to a condition where children are deprived of basic needs required for them to survive. Poverty is connected with hunger, unemployment, abuse, and lack of access to clean water, hygiene, health care or education (Breunig, 2014: 27). Section 27 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, states that everyone has the right to access nutrition, health care services and clean water. Section 28 (1) of this constitution makes provision for the protection of children's right to basic nourishment. Section 11 provides for the right to life. Section 28 (1) delineates children's rights to basic health care. The right to basic education is provided by section 29 (1) of this constitution.

### Requirements of child support grant

Section 5 (1) of the Social Assistance Act (13 of 2004), states that the Department of Social Development is the overseer of social grants, while the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) is responsible for administering of social grants. The South African Social Security Agency, as an agency of the Department of Social Development applies a means test to applicants of social grants. For child support grant, which is provided to primary caregiver of the beneficiary, the caregiver and his/her spouse should have a combined monthly income of less than R8 900.00. If the primary caregiver is single and working, his or her monthly salary should not

exceed R4 000.00 p. m. The primary caregiver and the child should both be residents of South Africa and the child's age should be less than 18 years (Nannan, Hall & Sambu 2014: 101).

Despite interventions to reach as many children living in poverty as possible, there are still children who cannot benefit from social assistance owing to legislation determining when a child may qualify. Due to awareness programmes provided by the South African Social Security Agency in rural areas of South Africa, applications of child support grant have gradually increased. The child support grant is the largest by number of recipients, with more than 10 million children on its books and over R9 billion budget per annum (SASA Annual report, 2021: 16). There are still challenges in reaching the poorest children in the application system of the child support grant due to absence of infrastructure and the means for delivery of the grant. However, the democratic government has made enormous efforts in terms of bringing services to the needy and ensuring that disadvantaged and vulnerable people are able to access the child support grant. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) has taken the initiative to establish sub-offices and satellite offices as a means of bringing the services closer to the people. The agency has also been conducting door-to-door campaigns within wards, visiting each household, marketing their services, especially the child support grant (SASSA Annual report, 2013: 69).

#### History of social assistance in South Africa

In the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century social assistance was provided by churches and non-governmental organisations in South Africa. The apartheid government played a minor role in assisting disadvantaged people. The church and state policies that guided the social assistance programmes led to discrimination. The social assistance programme was only provided to enrich a certain racial group (i. e. Whites) and excluded others. Poor people were described into two categories, the deserving and the undeserving. The deserving were old people who were unable to work for themselves while the undeserving were those who were poor but had the ability to work if provided with an opportunity (Van Niekerk 2012: 619).

In 1929, Coloureds and Indians were included to receive the old age pension. In 1930, the state maintenance grant was introduced to assist White single parents in taking care of their dependents. Black old people and Black single mothers started receiving the old age pension and the state maintenance grants in 1944. However, Black people received 10% of what Whites, Indians and Coloureds received. The SMG was provided to support mothers and their children in cases where the spouse was no longer or had never been present. Policies and laws regarding social assistance remained discriminative until 1993, when South Africa was negotiating for democracy. In 1994, the democratic government gained power and all the apartheid policies were amended to accommodate every citizen regardless of race or gender (Adesina 2020: 561).

In 1998, the democratic government reconfigured the grant provided to children and the child support grant was introduced and replaced the state maintenance grant. The state

maintenance grant did not cater for many vulnerable children who needed it. The grant favoured poor minority people and had inconsistencies. The child support grant was implemented with the understanding that the state must respect, protect, promote and fulfil the terms of the Bill of Rights. The primary objective of the child support grant is to ensure that primary caregivers of young children living in poverty are able to access financial assistance in the form of cash transfers to supplement rather than replace household income. Through the child support grant, primary caregivers are able to send their children to crèche and enrol in school (Plagerson, Patel, Hotchfeld, & Ulriksen, 2019: 1).

#### Social assistance in South Africa

Social assistance in South Africa is provided to disadvantaged individuals to enhance their social status and protect their rights (Patel, Hochfeld, Ajefu, Bryer 2018: 113). Social assistance refers to public and private programmes that provides opportunities to poor and vulnerable individuals to receive income. The South African government use social assistance programmes to provide protection to poor people against risks that may threaten their livelihoods and improve their right to social security (Children's Institute 2012: 23). Children's Institute (2012: 28), is of the view that the child support grant has failed to combat child poverty and primary caregivers of child support grant are not responsibly using the grant in an effective manner. Due to the above reason, Hall, Woolard, Lake and Smith (2012: 29), suggest that the democratic government should promote access to land for food production and self-consumption to enhance independence among young unemployed vulnerable South Africans.

Poverty affects the physical and mental wellbeing of children. Due to poverty, children are not protected from exploitation, violence and abuse. Children who grow under the situation of poverty continue to become adults who pass poverty onto their next generation (Uniceff 2016: 19). Social assistance in South Africa is provided through the provision of social grants. Therefore, there are seven types of social grants provided to disadvantaged people. These grants are; old age grant, child support grant, disability grant, war veteran's grant, grant in aid, foster care grant and care dependency grant (Coetzee 2013: 35).

Social assistance contributes to a basic minimum standard of living, and assists with bringing about better income distribution in unequal societies. The provision of social security is fundamental in combating extreme levels of poverty. In 2022, approximately 27.8 million South Africans are beneficiaries of social grants out of a population of 60 756 135. From the total population, 17.2 million of these people are beneficiaries of child support grant. The child support grant covers children under the age of 18 years and the current amount of CSG amounts to R480 per month (Stats SA report, 2022). Social assistance transfers are the highest basis of income in deprived homes and are linked to better nourishment, health, and schooling results for children (Hall et al 2012: 28). Whilst social assistance is directed to the underprivileged families and it is linked to better nutritious outcomes, child starvation is still most prevalent in indigent homes (Nannan et al 2014: 103).

### Importance of child support grant

Child support grant is provided to primary caregivers with the intention to benefit the child. Based on the study conducted by researchers in 2021, the results revealed that child support grant is used by primary caregivers to buy food for their families. Devereux (2011: 414), states that, the child support grant regulates and distributes resources for the household. This is regardless of the gender relations within the household. The democratic government is empowering primary caregivers socially and economically and motivates them to take care of their dependents. The results revealed that, 84% of primary caregivers spend the grant on buying food, while 13% spend the grant on the child's educational costs and lastly only 3% of primary caregivers spend the grant on buying clothes for the beneficiary and for themselves. The results also revealed that 84% of primary caregivers were female primary caregivers therefore, when comparing female primary caregivers and male primary caregivers, women are found to be more family orientated. When the earnings of women increase, it is likely to have a positive impact on the household (Dinbabo, 2011: 118).

Based on the stated results, the above statement suggests that, when caregivers are women there are higher chances of the grant to impact positively on the livelihoods of beneficiaries. May and Timaeus (2014: 764), concur that women tend to prefer to spend their income on their family. Nkosi (2011: 81), is of the opinion that the child support grant enables primary caregivers to pay for the children's transport and school requirements. Therefore, the child support grant is often used by primary caregivers to cover the needs of the beneficiary.

### The impact of child support grant on beneficiaries and primary caregivers

The child support grant is aimed at reducing child poverty in South Africa, despite the race, structure of the family and the tradition. The grant boosts low incomes of primary caregivers and assist them in providing for their children with a better life (Hall et al 2012: 30). Child poverty affects children's quality of life as well as their quantity of life (Makhalima, 2020: 4111). Poverty makes children more vulnerable within the society they live in. Children living in poverty are denied their basic and fundamental constitutional rights to basic services such as nutrition, health care, as well as social services (Khumalo 2013: 5643). Often majority of households use the child support grant on buying food for the family as a whole, therefore the grant is diverted from benefiting the intended beneficiaries due to unemployed strategy that stays longer with their primary caregivers in order to benefit from the household's resources. For example, instead of the grant providing for the basic needs of the beneficiary, the priority then shifts to feeding the whole family (Eyal, Woolard & Burns, 2014: 34).

According to May and Timaeus (2014: 765), child stunting has decreased since child support grant was introduced. The grant poses both positive and negative impacts on the lives of beneficiaries. The positive impacts of child support grant include reducing poverty and hunger, increasing the attendance of school learners as well as promoting job searches. Despite the fact that, child support grant impacts positively on beneficiaries it also yields negative impacts on beneficiaries through domestic violence, increased pregnancy

rates and misuse of the grant. The above positive and negative impacts of CSG on beneficiaries and primary caregivers are discussed below;

The conclusions of the study revealed that, many families use the grant to buy basic necessities such as food. Majority of households that receive the child support grant, have a likely decrease of a maximum of 14% of child hunger (Grosh 2011: 36). Due to the above stated reasons, CSG contributes to household food security and provides single women with financial security. Because of educational costs such as paying transportation to school in instances where the school is far, buying extra educational material and seasonal school uniform, poor children are unable to go to school. According to (Hotchfeld, 2015), children who receive child support grant are likely to enrol in school following the years of being in the system. Therefore, there is a positive link between child support grant and access to education. The grant assists in buying extra educational resources such as books, stationery, school uniform as well as paying for school fees.

Due to dependency on the grant, primary caregivers who receive the child support grant on behalf of beneficiaries are more likely to be able to participate on the labour market. With the grant amount, primary caregivers are able to actively search for employment. Through the grant amount, primary caregivers are able to travel to different working stations in search of employment. The grant enables primary caregivers to print all the required documents needed when applying for jobs (Bruenig 2014: 15). According to Hochfeld and Plageron (2011: 109), households that receive the grant have increase in labour participation and employment as compared to families that do not receive the grant. The results revealed that, 58% of primary caregivers in the community of the North West Province are able to pay for costs associated with job hunting and travel to different places of work in search of employment.

The results of the study revealed that, child support grant contributes to domestic violence. Some primary caregivers use the grant for the purpose that is not intended for. They deprive the beneficiaries to enjoy the full benefits of the grant. Married and unmarried primary caregivers sometimes fight to use the grant amount for their own personal leisure. Child support grant is very fundamental for the livelihoods of beneficiaries, however due to poverty and insufficient amount of the grant, primary caregivers tend to have multiple pregnancies with the aim of increasing the grant amount they receive. According to social workers, there are high unemployment rates in South Africa, therefore primary caregivers end up resorting to fall pregnant with the purpose of increasing the amount of the grant in order to cover all the households needs.

## 2. Research Conclusions

The researchers made use of exploratory research design in order to conduct qualitative and qualitative research simultaneously to better understand the research problem and achieve research objectives as well as answer research questions. Exploratory designs enable researchers to explore situations and give meaning to social phenomena. Child support grant was mainly introduced in South Africa to

provide support for beneficiaries who are living in poverty. According to Naong (2011: 901), the rates of pregnancy in South Africa, are considered to be among the highest in respect of other African countries. Due to poverty, child support grant is confirmed by social workers to be encouraging primary caregivers to have more children to secure the grant. The study conducted by the researchers in 2021, confirms that due to dependency on the child support grant, pregnancy rates especially among teenagers have increased in the community of the North West Province. Primary caregivers agree with social workers that due to unemployment; they tend to resort to having more children with the intentions of receiving more child support grant amount. The reason for increased pregnancies is because unemployed primary caregivers entirely depend on the grant.

In the study conducted by researchers in 2021, results revealed that the (58%) of primary caregivers have a primary education, this is followed by those with secondary education (20%), and those with no education (18%). Minority of primary caregivers (4%) have tertiary education. From these primary caregivers, majority (84%) are females while 11% are males and the remaining 5% fall under the category of non-binary individuals. Majority (59%) of female primary caregivers are unemployed due to apartheid government which prohibited women to enter into the labour system. The apartheid government encouraged men to work while women were prohibited to stay home and look after the children. The results of the study conducted also revealed that, majority (i. e.50%) of primary caregivers range from 20 to 40. While (40%) were between 40 to 60 years of age and only (10%) were above the age 60 years. The above results revealed that collecting child support grant is not popular among those in old age groups.

Although the purpose of the grant is to benefit the child in terms of meeting their basic needs and access to school, child support grant appeared to be often used for consumptive expenditure. The results, also confirm that primary caregivers spend the grant on alcohol, paying stokvels, burial policies, clothes and cell phones as well as gambling instead of benefiting the children. This implies that primary caregivers deliberately fall pregnant to receive the grant available to them to gain financial security and then some of them spend the money irresponsibly instead of feeding their children or buying educational material. In the study conducted by researchers in 2021, the research results revealed that, primary caregivers with little or no school background often are entirely dependent on the child support grant. These primary caregivers apply for the child support grant to combat poverty and because they cannot find a formal job due to being less skilled. Majority of these primary caregivers are teenagers who could not continue with school after falling pregnant. They were forced to leave school and take care of their children. Social workers confirmed that the child support grant is one of the factors that contributes to domestic violence. Primary caregivers use the child support grant amount for their own personal leisure. They do not use the grant to benefit the children. Primary caregivers (i. e. couples) often fight among themselves to consume the grant for their own benefits. These primary caregivers use the grant for burial society, gambling, buying lottery tickets, as well as buying alcohol and clothes.

### 3. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers proposed a few recommendations that may enhance the CSG to impact positively on beneficiaries at the investigated community;

Based on the conducted study, primary caregivers should strive to find employment. Therefore, primary caregivers may be encouraged by the government to participate in voluntary initiatives in old age homes, hospitals, schools and municipalities. Assessments should be made quarterly by South African Social Security Agency and social workers to thoroughly assess whether primary caregivers are using the child support grant for the purpose it is intended for. The results of the study revealed that some primary caregivers misuse the grant, therefore the government may consider providing card vouchers for food, school material and clothes too prohibit primary caregivers to use the grant on their own personal things.

The South African Social Security Agency together with the Department of Social Development could improve access of the child support grant to beneficiaries through provision of free school uniforms, school material, and school nutrition programmes to avoid spending the grant amount on such necessities. This initiative could assist primary caregivers to only spend the grant on basic food and clothes as well as medical costs for beneficiaries. The results of the study confirm that, primary caregivers try and increase the amount of child support grant they receive by having more children. Therefore, the government may consider increasing the child support grant beyond the normal increase of R10. Lastly the government should try and enhance the access of child support grant though providing free school uniforms, school material, and school nutrition programmes to avoid spending the grant amount on such necessities. In this way the grant will only cover basic need to food.

### 4. Conclusion

The child support grant is fundamental to both beneficiaries and primary caregivers as it assist in buying basic food in the household. The grant plays a critical role in enhancing the livelihoods of people living in poverty. Through the child support grant, disadvantaged people are able to afford their basic needs. In this research paper, researchers have investigated the dependency on the child support grant by primary caregivers which results in higher pregnancy rates especially among the youth in the community of the North West Province. The grant assist in buying food for the family as well as covers educational needs of the beneficiaries. However, it was revealed that some primary caregivers tend to use the grant in a reckless manner which only benefits themselves not the child. Through the grant, primary caregivers are able to provide for their dependents. The grant reduces the stress that primary caregivers go through when they are unemployed and unable to look after their children.

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