

# Addressing Poverty Issues through the Provision of Child Support Grant in South African Community

**Khashane Stephen Malatji<sup>1</sup>, Makwalete Johanna Malatji<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Tshwane University of Technology, School of Education, Department of Primary Education, Soshanguve North Campus*

<sup>2</sup> *University of Pretoria, Department of Early childhood Education, Faculty of Education, Groenkloof Campus, Pretoria, South Africa*

*Email: <sup>1</sup>malatjiks@tut.ac.za, <sup>2</sup>makwalete.malatji@up.ac.za,*

## **Abstract:**

*The study investigated the role played by the child support grant in alleviating poverty. The research approach used in this study was qualitative with a phenomenological research design. Purposive sampling was used to select six unemployed single women who relied only on a grant to make their living. Data was collected through individual interviews and analyzed in a form of a thematic approach. The study found that child support grants played a very important role in providing basic needs for many families. Some families were found to rely solely on the grant to make living. The study concluded that a child support grant does not completely remove poverty. The study recommends that government should do a needs analysis of each family to meet the basic needs of each family. Furthermore, the study recommends that families that only depend on the grant should be given more to meet their basic needs.*

**Keywords:** *Basic needs, beneficiary, child support grant, food, Poverty*

## **1. BACKGROUND**

The Child Support Grant (CSG) is an important instrument of social protection in South Africa, reaching over 10 million South African children each month. The South African Child Support Grant (CSG) was first introduced in 1998 (SASSA, 2013). Thurman, Kidman and Taylor (2015) argue that over the past 14 years, South Africa's social grant programme has evolved into one of the most comprehensive social protection systems in the developing world. According to SASSA (2013) the expansions to the Child Support Grant's criteria for eligibility include an increase in the age limit from seven to eighteen years old and adjustments to the income threshold to take inflation into account and improve equity.

The implementation of the child support grant was recommended by the Lund committee to replace the maintenance grant in 1998 (SASSA, 2013). The child support grant becomes more accessible to caregivers and children. According to the Constitution of South Africa, section 28 (1), every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and social services (Richer, 2015). The Constitution states that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation. This is one of the legal frameworks that support the provision of child support grants. The grant is paid to the primary caregiver of a child up to 18 years of age and now reaches more than 11 million children in South Africa (SASSA, 2013), which indicates the extensive reach of the programme. The child support grant has four immediate objectives which are stated as follows: firstly, to ensure greater access for poor children to an integrated and sustainable

security system in the country. Secondly, to provide a child grant on an equitable basis to those in need, regardless of family structure, tradition, or race. Thirdly, to prevent children from unnecessarily entering or remaining in statutory substitute care and lastly, to keep children off the streets and out of juvenile detention centers (Department of Health, 2015). Without the Child Support Grant, Woolard (2016) estimated that 48 percent of children would be living in poverty, and 23.9 percent would be classified as ultra-poor. In South Africa there are six different types of grants, namely: child support grant, foster care grant, care dependency grant, war veteran's grant, disability grant, and grant for an older person which start from sixty years and above (SASSA, 2013).

While all six types of social grants reduced the total rand poverty gap by 45 percent, the greatest poverty-reducing grant was considered to lie with the extension of the Child Support Grant to age 18, which would reduce the poverty gap by 28.3 percent (Thurman, Kidman and Taylor, 2015). The extension of the qualifying age to 18 years over the next three years will have positive poverty-reduction benefits for children and their families. This indicates that although there are beneficiaries who are using the grant for their personal use, there are those who use the child support grant to address poverty-related issues.

The study by the Department of Health (2016) illustrates that in the Western Cape, 57 percent of the grant recipients live in formal metropolitan areas and that less than 50 percent of grant recipients in the other provinces live in formal metropolitan areas. Except for the Free State, Gauteng, and the Northern Cape, most of the child support grants recipients in other provinces do not live in formal urban areas or towns. In the North-West, Limpopo, Eastern Cape, and Mpumalanga Provinces, over 66 percent of child support grant recipients live in rural villages that do not have farms. The study found that the North-West and Limpopo have the highest number of recipients of up to 91 percent of the recipients live in non-farm rural areas. The present study was conducted in Limpopo Province which was considered to be one of the poorest provinces in South Africa. The study was conducted to find out if child support grant does meet the basic needs of South African community (Department of Health, 2016).

Despite its impact on poverty alleviation, Child Support Grants have been blamed for increasing teenage pregnancy (Hall & Proudlock, 2015). Some communities, specifically among older people, have the perception that increased teenage pregnancies are a result of a Child Support Grant (Schenk, 2016). Community members believe that some of these teenagers become pregnant to obtain the grant, and then placing the burden of caring for their children on grandparents and using the grant money for other purposes. Kidman, Nice, Taylor and Thurman (2014) stated that Child Support Grant is blamed for increasing teenage pregnancy mainly because some women, instead of using the Child Support Grant money for the needs of the child, tend to misuse it by spending it on things that enhance their physical looks such as lipsticks, pledging of hair and clothing.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

**To investigate how the provision of child support grant contributes to poverty alleviation in Makhwibidung village.**

## **3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

- To explore how the provision of child support grant in Makhwibidung Village contributes to poverty alleviation.

## **4. RESEARCH QUESTION**

- How does the provision of child support grants in Makhwibidung Village contribute to poverty alleviation?

## **5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A theoretical framework refers to the structure that can hold or support a theory of the research study. According to Richard (2013), a theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. The theory that was used in this study was the hierarchy of needs by Abraham Maslow. As presented below, the needs are arranged in a hierarchical order. The upward climb is made by satisfying one set of needs at a time. The most basic drives are physiological needs. According to Maslow's theory of needs, five types of needs must be satisfied before a person can act unselfishly (Schenk, 2016). One must satisfy lower-level basic needs before progressing on to meet higher-level growth needs. Once these needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization. Every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization. Unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by failure to meet lower-level needs. In the context of this study, the focus is on physiological needs that talk about the basic needs that a person cannot survive without. For human beings to survive, they need food, water, shelter, and clothes. However, if a person is unemployed, he/she is unable to afford to buy basic needs; as a result, they depend on the Child Support Grant to survive. This theory is important to this study because it explains the importance of fulfilling the first stage of need which is physiological needs. Maslow explains the needs in these stages basic needs such as food, water, and shelter. The theory becomes relevant to this study because the study was based on CSG which is provided by the government to reduce poverty by providing people with basic needs. Therefore, the study agrees with Maslow that the first stage of needs becomes basic and important.

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research approach used in this study was the qualitative approach. The purpose of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of individual events in their natural state, taking into account relevant context (Leedy, 2001). In this study, individual women were interviewed to find out how Child Support Grant (CSG) contributes to poverty alleviation in their everyday life. The study followed an interpretive paradigm because it consists of women's subjective experience as people who rely on CGS to make their living. The study explored if CSG contributes to poverty alleviation in Makhwibidung village. Gephart (1999) argue that interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation; hence there is no objective knowledge which is independent of thinking or reasoning human. The research design used in this study was Phenomenology because the study was based on lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept for several individuals. At the root of Phenomenology is the intent to understand the phenomena under study on their terms and therefore to provide a description of human experience by the subject allowing the essence to emerge (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2008). The population consisted of women who rely on CSG in Makhwibidung Village. Purposive sampling was used to select six unemployed women who rely only on CSG to make their living. Data was collected through unstructured one on one interviews. After the interviews data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically using verbatim quotations. Thereafter, emphasis was given to emerging themes that generated discussion.

## **7. RESULTS**

In this section, data was transcribed and presented verbatim. Codes such as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 were used to refer to participant one, participant two, participant three, participant four, participant five, and participant six. A thematic approach was used to identify emerging themes that later guided the discussion section of this study.

## POVERTY ALLEVIATION

How child support grant was being used differs according to beneficiaries and family background and family needs. The table below shows how child support grants help in alleviating poverty in different families.

**Table 1: Poverty alleviation**

Sub-theme	Main issues raised
The grant does not reduce poverty	Needs of children
	Contributing to the household income, making life easier.

### **The grant does not reduce poverty**

The main aim of the government in providing child support grants is for poverty alleviation. However, participants have expressed different views that confirmed that the grant does not reduce poverty. The following issues were raised by participants in supplementing that child support grant does not completely reduce poverty:

#### *Needs of children*

The child support grant is initiated to reduce poverty in families that are in need. People need access to basic needs to survive. Some of these basic needs contribute to the development of a child. Children require lots of things for them to grow healthy and strong.

**P1** mentioned that:

*“Having a child is very expensive especially when the child is still a baby or a newborn. The child needs medical attention wherein she or he has to see the doctor very often”.*

In other words, having a child comes with lots of demands that a child needs to grow. Based on the response mentioned above, one can argue that the child support grant needs to cover some of the important things that children require. For example, taking a child to a medical doctor needs money for the child to get medical assistance.

### **The grant does reduce poverty**

#### *Contributing to the household income.*

Even though the child support grant does not appear to be enough, Participant 3 mentioned that it does contribute to the household income in some families.

**P3** stated that:

*“Yes, it is contributing to the household income. I can manage to pay burial society, join stokvels and buy uniforms for children who are attending school.”*

In support of this, **P5** stated that:

*“Is the same because its main focus is for providing for the child, poverty is a family background situation which can be changed once a person is employed. The child support grant is not enough to change the situation at home.”*

Reflecting on the quotation above, one can argue that the difference that the grant is making will never be the same for everyone. People are from different backgrounds, and that makes their needs to be different.

#### *Making life easier*

For unemployed parents, a child support grant can cover some of their basic needs. However, the money does not cover all of their needs but it is making life a bit easier.

**P2** stated that:

*“It makes our living condition better because at first, I did not have this three hundred and something per child that I receive every month. Since I started receiving it every month it is making a difference. I can afford to buy formula for the child and also buy baby nappies”.*

The responses above indicate that the money is helpful because it assisted parents in fulfilling some of their children’s needs. However, some feel that there was no difference because the

expenses of raising a child increase as the child are growing up. However, the argument remains the grant was meant for helping the child not to support the entire family which is the case in most families.

## 8. THE USE OF CHILD SUPPORT GRANT

A child support grant is financial assistance that the government is providing to every child that is in need. The money is given to the primary caregivers of the child to help them in raising the child. It is every child's right in South African to receive the grant as long as they are a citizen of this country and falls within stipulated total household income. The table below indicates some of the sub-themes that emerged from this theme.

**Table 2: The use of child support grant**

Sub-theme	The main issue raised
Monitoring of child support grant	Replacing money with a voucher

### Monitoring of child support grant

Since the child support grant is given to the parents on behalf of their children, some still think they can use the money as they want, instead of supporting the child.

**P1** mentioned that:

*"I cannot complain about how teenage mothers use the child support grant. It is their money so they receive it and they are allowed to use it the way they want."*

Based on the response above, it can be argued that there are people who do not understand the aims and purpose of the child support grant. From the quotation above, it may be argued that educational campaigns about child support grants are needed. This can help clarify some misunderstandings. However, the money needs to be monitored to ensure that it is used accordingly.

**Table 3: Replacing money with vouchers**

Sub-theme	Main issues raised
Replacing money with vouchers	<i>Misuse of money</i>
	<i>Gambling and drug abuse</i>

### Replacing money with vouchers

In this study, there were some inputs and suggestions from participants that vouchers should be given instead of giving money. Such suggestions were as a result of parents that were found to misuse the money and those who were using the grant for gambling and drug abuse.

#### *Misuse of money*

Responsible parents are aware of their children's needs because they spent most of their time with them. However, parents who are not paying attention to their children will not worry too much about their children's needs. Therefore, they spend the money on things other than the needs of the children.

In line with the sub-theme above, **P2** mentioned that:

*"No. Teenage mothers misuse the child support grant because they use the money to make themselves look beautiful. It is not in all cases wherein teenage mothers use the grant to cater to the needs of their children. The grant benefits teenage mothers than their children. Teenagers use the money to play cards and buy nice clothes for themselves. It is like they do not know the purpose of the grant."*

**P3** further mentioned that:

*"Teenage mothers use the money to change hairstyles every month after receiving the grant. Therefore, there is a need for control of this money".*

Looking at the responses above, most of the participants mentioned that beneficiaries of child support grants use the money for their own needs. Therefore, one can argue that the grant is not used for what is expected to do.

### ***Gambling and drug abuse***

These are issues related to the misuse of social grants. Beneficiaries join most of the gambling groups with the hope of making more money. The abuse of alcohol is also growing in teenagers. Since most of them are not working, they take advantage of the child support grant to buy alcohol.

**P5 and P6** mentioned that:

*“There are other teenage mothers who are using the money to go out and have fun and also buy clothes for themselves and also they use it for alcohol during weekends. They use the money for weekend special”.*

Based on the above-mentioned responses, recipients of the grant do not use it for the purpose that it is intended for. The question that comes to one’s mind is: what is happening to those who are supposed to benefit from this grant? Furthermore, it was mentioned that beneficiaries use the money to play cards, and according to South African law, those are considered illegal gambling.

### **The main findings of this study were categorized into the following:**

The grant does not reduce poverty; needs of the children; Contributing to the household income; monitoring of child support grants; replacing money with vouchers; misuse of money; and gambling and drug abuse.

## **9. DISCUSSION**

### **The grant does not reduce poverty**

The study revealed that child support grant does not contribute toward poverty alleviation. The reason is that the money is too little to cover all the needs of a child, especially the basic needs. Furthermore, the expenses of the child also go along with their development stage; for example, newborn babies are expensive because they need special care when it comes to medication, food, nappies, and clothing. The amount of three hundred and eighty rands cannot buy all the basic needs for a child for the whole month. For example, if the mother is a single parent with no other income except for the child support grant, then it means her whole family has to depend on the little that they are getting. The money is too little to buy food only for the whole month. In line with this argument, Woolard (2016) argues that child support grant households, particularly those headed by women; remain mildly to severely food insecure.

### **Needs of the children**

The study revealed that the needs of children differ, depending on their socio-economic background. The study further revealed that the needs of children depend on the age of the child. For instance, it was discussed in this study that young children are more expensive since they require more medical attention. Researchers such as Richard (2013) and Schenk (2016) argue that the most money that parents invest is in the education of their children. Reflecting on this argument, one can argue that the needs of children are more than what the government is offering on child support grants.

### **Contributing to the household income**

In South Africa, caregivers that receive child support grants fall within certain brackets of income. Such people can be regarded as low-income earners. In this study, it was found that parents acknowledge that child support grants contribute to the income of their household. However, it was argued that the money is not enough, while on the other hand, some parents

appreciated the government's efforts to offer such financial relief to the poor. According to Schenk (2016), child support grants should support rather than taking the whole responsibility of raising children.

### **Monitoring of child support grant**

The study revealed some disputes when it comes to the way the grant is spent. Therefore, it was argued that the grant should be monitored how it is spent. Most teenage mothers were found to spend the grant on their personal needs rather than the needs of the child. The main aim of the government in providing the grant was to alleviate poverty in the disadvantaged community of South Africa. However, it was found that the way parents are spending the grant does no longer serves the initial purpose of the government. Therefore, there is a need for this grant to be monitored to ensure that it is spent for benefit of the child. Woolard (2016) in his study argues that CSG in South Africa is not well monitored, and that results in funds being spent for irrelevant staff.

### **Replacing money with vouchers**

The study found that a child support grant was used for the wrong staff. Therefore, it was suggested that instead of giving parents money, is better to give vouchers. Hassim (2005) further argued that Child Support Grants are blamed for increasing teenage pregnancy. Therefore, replacing money with vouchers would reduce pregnancy rates for parents who are making babies get money or the grant.

### **Misuse of the grant**

The study revealed that the beneficiaries of child support grants misuse the money because they do not use it specifically to cover the needs of the child. This raised many issues that paint a bad picture of this programme (child support grant). Furthermore, the study revealed that the beneficiaries use the money for their wants. Some use the money in illegal activities such as gambling and buying alcohol. In the same line of argument, Hall and Proudlock (2015) argue that how people perceive the aims or goals of the child support grant influences the way the grant is used. Richer (2015) further argued that Child Support Grants are blamed for increasing teenage pregnancy. In the line of this argument some women instead of using the child support grant for the needs of the child, misuse it by spending it on things that enhance their physical looks such as lipsticks and clothing. The study further revealed that upon receiving the grant, beneficiaries change hairstyles, and some go for shopping to buy new expensive clothes for themselves. This proves that the beneficiaries are misusing the money since it is not used to serve its purpose. As a result, one can conclude that people/beneficiaries do not understand the aim of the grant. Hall and Proudlock (2015) have a similar view related to the misuse of the grant. They indicated that young women have a clear understanding of the costs associated with children, but there is further evidence to counter concerns over mothers claiming the grant and leaving their child in the care of others.

### **Gambling and drug abuse**

Gambling and drug abuse are some of the challenges that South Africa is facing, especially when it comes to youth and teenage parents. The study revealed that teenage mothers use the grant for gambling and buying alcohol instead of taking care of their children. There is a need for strict measures for those who do not accurately use the grant. Gambling and buying drugs with the grant's money should be regarded as criminal offenses. Therefore, there should be harsh punishment for those who may be found misusing the grant. Hall and Proudlock (2015) in their study argue that parents who use CSG for their benefits should be arrested and charged.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the grant does not completely remove poverty. However, it was further concluded that it caters to some of the needs of the children and that it contributes to some of the household income. Some families, solely rely on the grant to make living. With the teenage parents, the issue of misusing money was found to be a challenge.

### Recommendations

The study recommended the following:

- Government should do a needs analysis of each family to meet the basic needs of each family.
- Families that only depend on the grant should be given more to meet their basic needs.
- The Department of Social Development should monitor to ensure that parents use the grant to cater to the needs of a child;
- The grant should be offered in a form of a voucher to avoid mismanagement;

### REFERENCES:

1. Department of Health. (2016). *A simple analysis of the impact of child support grants on the fertility rate in South Africa. The economic Society of South Africa*: Pretoria: Government Publication.
2. Department of Health. (2015). *Child support grant for Social Change in South Africa. The economic Society of South Africa*: Pretoria: Government Publication.
3. De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B., & Delpont, C.B. (2008). *Research at grassroots: for the Social Sciences and human services professions*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Pretoria: J.L. Van Schaik Academic.
4. Gephard, Y. (1999). *Review of the Child Support Grant*. Johannesburg: CASE.
5. Hall, T., & Proudlock, K. (2015). *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago press.
6. Hassim, H. (2005). Relationships of Knowledge and Practice, *Review of Research in Education*, 7(24): 222-249.
7. Kidman, D., Nice, H., Taylor, K., & Thurman, J. (2014). *Documenting adolescent sexual and reproductive Practices, and exploring perceptions of the impact of child support grant*: Durban: University of Kwa- Zulu Natal.
8. Leedy, Y.S. (2001). *Handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
9. SASSA (South African Social Security Agency), (2013). *Fact Sheet no. 4 of 2012: Summary of Social Grants Distribution in South Africa as at 30 April 2012*. Pretoria: SASSA.
10. Schenk, M, (2016). Gendered trends in poverty in the post-apartheid period, 1997–2006. *Development Southern Africa* 29(1): 96–113.
11. Richard, J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice A: Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London: SAGE Publications.
12. Richer, I. (2015). *Policy Performance of the Child support grant*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
13. Thurman, B., Kidman, J., & Taylor, P. (2015). Gender and Social Assistance in the First Decade of Democracy, *Journal of Social Sciences*, 32(7): 239-257.
14. Woolard, D. (2016). Education inequality in South Africa: Evidence from the National Income Dynamics Study. *Studies in Economics and Econometrics*, 34(3): 85-105.