

Child Grants and Unpaid Care Work in South Africa Suzanne Clulow, Children in Distress Network, South Africa

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Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, evidence suggests that progress has been made towards a policy environment in support of interventions and attitudes that promote gender equality (Lesejane 2006; Makusha & Richter 2014; Strebelt et al. 2006). The translation of this "supportive" environment into shared responsibilities between men and women in relation to unpaid care work, particularly in the domestic sphere, is less evident (Patel 2016; van den Berg, 2015). A recent qualitative study (Kerry & Clulow 2016) carried out with young men and women aged between 19 and 35 years in several rural communities for the KwaZulu-Natal Programme for the Survivors of Violence, suggests that patriarchal, traditional gender roles remain entrenched, even amongst young people. According to the respondents, women's primary responsibilities were seen as caring for the home, children and family, whereas men's responsibilities were to be the breadwinner, to (financially) support the family and provide physical protection. When asked about their use of time, 35% of the female youth reported household chores and child care as significant aspects of their daily life, as compared to 15% of the young men.

In response to more detailed questions relating to the fairness of the distribution of household tasks, 74% of the male youth and 44% of the female youth respondents agreed that it was fine for women to do most of the household tasks (including domestic work and unpaid care work). Notions supporting this view included the increased availability of women for this type of work - "*Women are always available at home so they must do most of the house tasks*" (female, 25yrs) - to this being the established way of doing things - "*It is by law or tradition*" (male, 29yrs) - to the perceived natural aptitude of women for this type of work - "*Because they were made or created to be a care taker of the house*" (male, 19yrs), "*Yes, because a lot of the work in the house is for women*" (female, 25yrs).

In terms of unpaid child care work, the 2010 Time Use Survey (StatsSA) shows that more than 80% of men living with children under 7 years of age did not report having done any child care in the previous 24 hours. In contrast, only 32% of women living with one young child and, and 25% of women living with three young children, reported no child care. Mothers living with one or more of their own children under seven did an average of 80 minutes of child care per day, compared to only 13 minutes for fathers (Delaney et al. 2016).

Traditional gender roles focusing on women as primary caregivers need not be "all bad", indeed maternity as a social good and its value as an important social activity is suggested in the fact that some South African women find self-esteem and dignity in their role as caregivers of children (Wright et al. 2014) The point of concern is the extent to which this role is invisible and undervalued, and leads to the exclusion of women from decision making as well as social and economic activities (Reddy et al. 2014). For example, in contexts of poverty, the inability of women

to fulfil the role of caregiver can result in some women describing their dignity as ‘crushed’ and ‘destroyed’ (Wright et al. 2014). Such gendered norms also fall short in their recognition of the extent to which women subsidise the welfare system in South Africa (Patel 2015) as well as their contribution, through unpaid care work, to the Gross Domestic Product (Budlender 2010).

South Africa’s post-apartheid developmental social welfare model, as outlined in the White Paper on Social Welfare (Republic of South Africa 1997) sought to create a more equal, redistributive society. Emphasis was placed on the meeting of women’s needs and rights through improving access to basic services and the provision of social assistance. Whilst this represented progress from apartheid policy, the White Paper has been ‘criticised for not locating care – that is, the right to receive and give care, and to be supported by various actors including the state in meeting people’s care needs – within a social rights framework’ (Patel 2016). This lack of right’s-based-framing for care work is reflected in negative social discourse (particularly around the abuse of cash transfers by recipients, dependency creation and dis-incentivising of economic activity and increases in teenage pregnancies) which undermines the dignity of women receiving social assistance and their right to receive this as enshrined in South Africa’s Bill of Rights (Wright et al. 2014, Roelen et al. 2015, Patel et al. 2012).

The Child Support Grant (CSG), introduced in 1998 as part of the post-apartheid welfare policy, is currently South Africa’s largest grant in terms of coverage and annual budget (Zembe-Mkabile et al. 2012). Although not specifically gender-sensitive in design, from inception the CSG was gender-neutral in its targeting, allowing for both male and female primary caregivers as recipients. This represented a shift away from the “loss of earnings by male-breadwinner” central to other welfare-state models of the time (Patel 2016). In spite of this, most beneficiaries of the CSG are female (Vorster & de Vaal 2008). Quantitative and qualitative studies show positive impacts for the CSG on education, nutrition and health outcomes for children (DSD, SASSA & UNICEF 2012; Eyal & Woolard 2013; Heinrich et al. 2012, Patel et al. 2012, Roelen et al. 2015) as well as the participation of women in the labour force (Williams 2007, Eyal et al. 2011) and household decision making in financial matters and general household spending in relation to child well-being (Patel 2012). Less is known about its impact on the redistribution of care work, on gender relations and on non-material child wellbeing.

A 2016 study by the Centre for Social Protection, Family for Every Child and the Children in Distress Network (Roelen et al. 2015) explored the linkages between the CSG and children’s material and non-material wellbeing and care. In addition to supporting positive material outcomes from other studies, the findings also reported outcomes on non-material aspects of children’s wellbeing and care. Both adults and children indicated that the reduction of financial stress through the receipt of the cash transfer helped to improve child-carer relationships and intra-family relationships as demonstrated in the following quote: *‘When you are a parent, you usually go to work for your own children, now that I have orphans, my children need to know that they need to share now. This notion that benefits of you working are for your child alone changes, and now my child looks at the other ones with anger, now they have to share these benefits. Getting the grant has helped me a lot, my children can now say “Mom, let us share this money with them, let us all pay half for school fees*

and when their money comes we will divide it and pay all balances and finish all payments". With the grant money the pressure or the work that you carry can be reduced'.

Caregivers pointed out that the grant is an important source of income for the whole family and vital for supporting all children and other household members. *"Everybody in the house gets a share of the grant to eat; they must all get it, because it is painful if they do not get equally"*. This was supported by findings from other respondents in the study (children and social workers) who indicated that money received through grants was pooled and spent equally across all family members. Since the majority of recipients of the CSG are female, it can be understood that the grant increases women's financial decision making and decision making around children within the household.

Patel 2012, cites financial decision making, decision making around children, and the division of care responsibilities in the home as "key areas that reveal levels of women's empowerment in intra-household relationships". Findings from the 2015 Roelen et al. study suggest progress in relation to the first two of these key levels but provides little insight into the third, the division of care responsibilities. Research by Centre for Social Development in Africa on the gender dynamics and impact of the CSG (Patel et al. 2012) sought to understand more about how the CSG impacts on the division of care responsibilities. Of the women sampled (both CSG and non-CSG recipients), 92% were the main person in their household responsible for caring for children (including other people's children) and 89% for caring for the ill and people living with disabilities. Whilst the report notes some positive findings in relation to CSG recipients being less likely to accept the household gender division of labour, these were countered by the same cohort's acceptance of traditional gender norms about the roles of men and women in family life. The report notes "the changing of unequal gender relations is therefore complex and intractable, and one cannot assume that the feminisation of social grants will automatically lead to women's empowerment".

To address some of the gaps in the transformative capacity of South Africa's social grants, further knowledge is required. More needs to be understood about the effects of social grants on gender relations; why uptake of the CSG by men is so low; how those men who do receive the grant make use of it; and the effects of the grant on the quality of children's non-material, emotional and psychosocial care as compared to its use for meeting the basic needs of children. In relation to the wider social welfare context in South Africa, consideration needs to be given in future policy development to the recognition, valuing and redistribution of unpaid care work. Discourse that reinforces the notion that social grants encourage dependency and laziness needs to be reframed to emphasise the importance and extent of unpaid care work and the State's obligation to support this. Finally, while both qualitative and quantitative data on unpaid care work by women in South Africa is available (although this could be explored further), less is known about unpaid care work by children. Recommendations for further research might take note of this significant gap.

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