

EARLY MOTHERHOOD IN SOWETO: THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE CHILD SUPPORT GRANT AND DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

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Abstract

In this article we ask whether the child support grant can mitigate the vulnerability of early motherhood, and if so, in what ways and what are its limits. Using data from a study on CSGs in a poor urban area of Johannesburg, we report on the circumstances of young women recipients. We find that the grant has positive outcomes for the women, but these are limited in the face of the range of needs and support necessary to give the young women a chance to successfully negotiate both motherhood and their own transition to adulthood. We suggest areas where social workers can engage positively with these issues.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

It has been argued that in South Africa the transition between childhood and adulthood is particularly onerous because of the lack of meaningful education, employment and skill development opportunities for the majority of young people. This situation significantly extends the transition phase for poor youths (Graham, 2012, 2010). Early motherhood, whether planned or not, ushers in many challenges for young women, who have to take on caring roles not only for their own children but also for their younger siblings. Consequently, they cease to be viewed as youths with the needs and desires of youths, and are viewed solely as mothers and carers (Hassim, 2006; Razavi, 2011). Their vulnerability is increased because of the many risks that they face in negotiating both motherhood and the transition to adulthood. The additional burdens of caregiving could also close access to future opportunities and the development of their capabilities to successfully make the transition to adulthood (Hutchinson, 2012).

In this article we use a youth development approach that “sees young people as active agents in their own development” (Graham, 2010:90; Patel, 2009) in order to understand the particular experiences and needs of young mothers or caregivers who are receiving a child support grant (CSG) for a child in their care. Using data from a study on CSGs in a poor urban area of Johannesburg, we report on the circumstances of young women recipients. In this article, we ask whether the mechanism of state social protection such as the CSG can mitigate the vulnerability of early motherhood, and if so, in what ways and what are its limits? We also consider what role social workers can play in helping young women negotiate both motherhood and the transition to adulthood.

The article is structured as follows: part 1 locates early motherhood within the context of youth development and youth transitions literature, and provides a framework for thinking about the nexus between social protection, more specifically social grants, and social work services. Part 2 provides a brief overview of the CSG and developmental social work services. The method of the study is outlined in part 3, followed by the findings in part 4. The penultimate section of the paper, part 5, returns to a discussion of the role of social protection in reducing vulnerability, and recommendations are offered in part 6 on how developmental social work might complement social grants.

### **YOUTH TRANSITIONS, EARLY MOTHERHOOD AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Furlong, Cartmel, Biggart, Sweeting and West (2003) assert that transitions from childhood to adulthood are complex, difficult, and characterised by risk and uncertainty, which are powerfully exacerbated by social contexts such as poverty, class disadvantage, gender inequality, low educational attainments and weak social capital. Poor young women are

particularly vulnerable as a result of significant class and gendered power imbalances which puts them at risk of, among other things, domestic and sexual violence (Bhana, 2012; Jewkes, Vundule, Maforah & Jordaan, 2001) and adolescent childbirth (Hutchinson, 2012; Jewkes *et al.*, 2001), both of which are accepted as fairly ‘normal’ in South Africa (Jewkes *et al.*, 2001). The difficulties of young motherhood in the context of poverty are multiple. Research demonstrates a strong relationship between teenage childbearing and social, psychological and economic disadvantages (Makiwane, 2010; Manzini, 2001; Marteleto, Lam & Ranchod, 2006), and these outcomes could be a result of, or exacerbated by, “mediating factors, such as expulsion or exclusion from educational facilities or a lack of material and social support” (Makiwane, 2010:193). For example, in South Africa there is a correlation between teen childbearing and not completing high school (Gustafsson & Worku, 2013), despite recent policies designed to keep young mothers in school (Bhana, Morrell, Shefer & Ngabaza, 2010; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2013). A lack of education almost guarantees no, or low levels of, employment and income, and it is further accepted internationally that the lower the mother’s educational attainment, the lower the birth weight of their children and the less likely their children (especially daughters) will complete their own schooling (Malacova, Jianghong, Blair, Leonard, De Klerk & Stanley, 2008). This scenario is especially true for teenage mothers (Chen, Wen, Flemming, Rhoads, & Walker, 2007).

It is widely acknowledged that South Africa has a real challenge in relation to teenage pregnancies in this country (Bhana, 2012; Bhana *et al.*, 2010; Makiwane, 2010). A lack of knowledge on sex and reproductive health, inadequate supervision of young people, disempowerment of young women, gender inequality, sexual violence and the lack of adequate role models for boys are some of the causes cited by researchers (Bhana, 2012; Bhana *et al.*, 2010; Goldblatt, 2006 cited in Steele, 2006). Despite a widespread belief among South Africans that the CSG acts as the incentive for young women to have children (Makiwane, 2010), there is no evidence to support this. The number of CSG beneficiaries who are in the age group 15-19 years is estimated to be 5% (Patel, Hochfeld, Moodley & Mutwali, 2012; Vorster & De Waal, 2008). Teenage pregnancies started declining in the first half of the 1990s and this trend was already under way when the grant was introduced (Makiwane, 2010). There is therefore no evidence to support the claim that grants influence teenage pregnancy. In fact, teenage pregnancy rates continue to decline despite the availability of the CSG.

A typical pattern in South Africa is for fathers to have little or no involvement in their children’s lives, if the relationship between them and the mother breaks down (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod & Letsoalo, 2009; Van Bercum, 2013). Thus young women often have to raise children in the absence of their fathers. Reasons for this are complex and include fathers’ difficulty in resolving the conflict between the strong cultural understanding of fathers as economic providers and the widespread pressure of unemployment (Mavungu, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013; Swartz & Bhana, 2009). Often young men are bewildered by the adult realities of early fatherhood, while for others, having children when young might be perceived as an affirmation of a masculinity underpinned by patriarchal beliefs (Mavungu *et al.*, 2013; Swartz & Bhana, 2009).

The support that young women receive during pregnancy and after the birth of the child is critical to their own wellbeing and is an important factor in easing their transition to adulthood (Marteleto *et al.*, 2006). In South Africa the only direct state service that targets young mothers (along with all poor mothers) is the CSG, a cash transfer paid to the care giver of a child. We know from the study of comparative welfare policies that “the more limited welfare states are, the more vital the family’s generosity” (Van Bercum, 2013:7). When welfare policies are less expansive, it adds substantial financial and other forms of stress in the households in which these young women live. Pregnancy for young women, especially if unintended, could lead to intergenerational tensions and changing relationships in the household, and very often conflict with their parents or guardians (Taplin, 2009).

While early motherhood is associated with a range of social risks outlined above, viewing these risks as unchangeable could reinforce the mothers’ disempowerment. Reframing this scenario by placing young people at the centre of youth development interventions and viewing them as active participants in changing their lives could open spaces for new ways of thinking about how social grants and social work services might work together. An investment in social development programmes such as social grants and developmental social work services that build the capabilities of young mothers to make the transition to adulthood more successfully are needed (Midgley, 2013; Patel, 2005). This approach allows us to think more holistically and creatively about youth development interventions (Furlong *et al.*, 2003; Graham, 2012; Patel, 2009).

South Africa has a large young population: 60% of the country’s population of almost 52 million are under the age of 35 years. Instead of working towards realising the “youth dividend” by investing in young people to promote economic, social and political development of society, dominant discourses on youth studies tend to frame youths as a social problem (Graham, 2012, 2010). Young people in South Africa are perceived as ‘at risk’ for crime and violence, HIV infection, teenage pregnancy, drug use and gang involvement. Social work practice is understandably concentrated in these problem areas, which results in our missing the voices of young people who speak out about their wider concerns and aspirations. A youth development approach is therefore a useful lens to guide the exploration of how social grants might intersect with social work and other wider social development issues and services, such as building youth assets, promoting employability and youth livelihoods, fostering opportunities for education, and access to reproductive health and basic services, among others. These issues are discussed below and are explored further in the concluding section.

### **The child support grant (CSG)**

The CSG is a wide-reaching, means-tested and monthly state-funded cash transfer, designed to support children via their primary caregivers, who are overwhelmingly (96%) women and largely biological mothers and grandmothers of the child (De Koker, De Waal & Vorster, 2006). The value of R310 per month (in 2014) per child reaches just under 11 million children monthly (SASSA, 2013). The key objective of the CSG was to eradicate poverty among children and improve their quality of life (Lund, 2008). The

CSG has undoubtedly had positive effects, including improved child nutrition and school attendance (Adato & Bassett, 2008; Agüero, Carter & Woolard, 2006; Case, Hosegood & Lund 2005; Delany, Ismail, Graham & Ramkisson, 2008). Overall, research indicates the grant has made modest but important inroads in reducing poverty and vulnerability in recipient households (Lund, 2011; Posel & Rogan, 2012).

Social policy governing the CSG indicates that caregivers can be as young as 17 years old;<sup>1</sup> this is a form of recognition of the vulnerability of these young caregivers and their need for support in looking after children.

Studies have shown that the CSG contributes to women's control over decision-making, choice in spending, and in securing positive outcomes in child wellbeing (Patel *et al.*, 2012; Patel, Knijn & Van Wel, unpublished). The CSG has not, however, led to any substantive changes to unequal intra-household gender relations (Patel *et al.*, 2012; Patel & Hochfeld, 2011; Patel *et al.*, unpublished).

Internationally, cash transfer programmes are increasingly coming under scrutiny for not only the effectiveness of their economic safety nets, but also whether women are empowered through this process. Positive conclusions have been reached in some cases (Adato *et al.*, 2000; Escobar Latapi & De la Rocha, 2009). In South Africa the results seem to indicate that women's empowerment is enhanced when they receive a CSG (Patel *et al.*, 2012; Patel & Hochfeld, 2011; Patel *et al.*, unpublished). However, similar conclusions internationally have been controversial in some of the literature, which has argued intra-household responsibilities for care, a key source of gender inequality, are generally unchanged by these interventions; indeed, are sometimes exacerbated by them, and women's empowerment in these programmes is generally as guardians of children and not in their own right (Molyneux & Thompson, 2011). This could be a particular concern for young women who tend to be treated as mothers only, and their needs as young people are completely erased.

### **Developmental social work services with young women**

Young and unmarried mothers in South Africa and internationally have historically been conceived of as a social problem and a social pathology that deviates from the social norms of society. This situation is fast changing as more and more women choose to exercise their right to freedom of choice in marital relations as a social norm. While the stigma of single parenthood is slowly eroding, these new social norms are still not widely accepted. Social work practice and services are increasingly responding to these changing realities in South Africa.

Broadly, South African social work and development literature acknowledges that youth exclusion from education and work is both pervasive and problematic, and is largely structural in nature (Bloch, 2009; Booyens & Crause, 2012; Maposa & Louw-Potgieter,

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<sup>1</sup> The primary caregiver is defined as follows in Section 1 of the Act: "primary caregiver" means a person older than 16 years, whether or not related to a child, who takes primary responsibility for meeting the daily care needs of that child.

2012). There are some calls for specifically targeted interventions for youths who live on the margins, because broad social services often miss these young people, leaving them to fend for themselves (Booyens & Crause, 2012; Raniga & Mathe, 2011). In particular, developmental and community-level interventions, such as the establishment of youth-focused community and recreation facilities, or accessible and affordable training opportunities, are recognised by social workers focused on youth as critical for high-impact benefits for young people.

Social work services for young mothers are usually delivered by child and family welfare agencies that are largely voluntary and faith-based organisations. These organisations deliver broad family services, including statutory services, services for orphans and vulnerable children, family support and counselling services (Patel & Hochfeld, 2008). However, services are under-funded, fragmented in the way in which they are delivered, and are under-provided in peri-urban and rural areas. Social workers generally engage with young mothers on an individual basis and do not have the time, resources or institutional support to deal with early childbearing experiences “not just [as] private issues, but [as] profoundly linked to public, structural concerns such as poverty, economic exclusion, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequalities” (Raniga & Mathe, 2011:345). While social workers facilitate young mothers’ application for the CSG, how these two programmes might complement each other remains unexplored.

The developmental approach to social welfare and social work (Patel, 2005) is a rights-based approach that is participatory, people-centred and that works in collaboration with the client system and a range of partners and social development sectors (such as health, education, economic development) to promote social and economic inclusion. Development Social Work (DSW) with young mothers receiving the CSG should, from this perspective, incorporate service provision that intervenes at multiple levels in the lives of women – individual, family, group, community and social networks. DSW is strongly oriented towards the empowerment of young women through reducing poverty, enhancing their livelihoods and human capabilities through education and skills development, and increasing the employability of young women. In addition, DSW promotes the provision of direct social support services through counselling, and connecting young people with much-needed supportive child care, family, community and public services, such as public works programmes, and opportunities for second chances in education and reproductive health services. While the focus here is on the young mother, it is assumed that her empowerment is also vital to the improved wellbeing of her children (Patel *et al.*, unpublished). It is important to note, however, that the structural challenges of the South African context make even a good developmental youth programme difficult to implement: Maposa and Louw-Potgieter (2012) illustrate this point in an article describing the disappointingly modest outcomes of a well-developed youth development programme in the Western Cape.

The notion of empowerment is important to this study, and we viewed empowerment as the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Kabeer, 1999). As empowerment is a notoriously difficult construct to measure, we followed the lead of Adato *et al.* (2000), who measured specific

indicators of women's empowerment in their study of the impact of certain poverty-reduction interventions in Mexico. Specifically, we were interested in whether young women had decision-making power over how the grant is spent, whether they had knowledge of their rights as women and whether they actually claimed these rights. A sense of self-confidence or personal empowerment, and participation in community activities was also considered, that is, whether they participated in school meetings, street committees, stokvels and burial societies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article draws on two different data sources from a large study on child support grants in Doornkop, a poor area of Johannesburg with a high up-take of the CSG (De Wet, Patel, Korth & Forrester, 2008). Doornkop is a formal municipal area well serviced with pre-paid metered electricity and piped water to outdoor taps on most stands. Housing is a mix of formal housing, backyard shacks and small informal settlements on vacant land. Despite relatively good urban services, households are poor: over 80% of households (averaging 5 people per household) survive on less than R2,500 per month, and over 50% of households regularly experience severe food insecurity (Patel *et al.*, 2012).

In this article we triangulate data from a quantitative study conducted in 2010 and a qualitative study conducted between 2011 and 2012. This mix of methods allows the cross-corroboration of findings. The qualitative study helps to explain and "thicken" the quantitative data through a richer description of the quantitative findings using the voices of the participants themselves. This process is one of the key motivations for mixed method studies, which are well established as a method in the research design literature (Creswell, 2003).

Further details of these two studies appear below.

### **Household survey**

A household survey of 343 households was conducted in 2010. A closed-ended questionnaire was administered to respondents who were all female primary caregivers of children 15 years old or younger (the cut-off age of CSG eligibility in 2010). Rigorous systematic sampling, based on the area's official ward map of municipal stands, was used to select these households. There was a 78% response rate to the questionnaire. Analysis was done to generate frequencies and relationships between variables, and, on certain items, structural equation modelling (SEM) was used for further depth. Findings are generalisable to the whole Doornkop population, and to other urban areas with a similar profile. The study method is set out in detail in Patel *et al.* (2012).

From that sample we extracted a further sub-sample of 37 young women (16 to 25 years old) who were recipients of the grant. The findings in this article are derived from the sub-sample of young women and are at times compared to the findings of the larger household survey.

### **Qualitative interviews with young women CSG recipients**

Between July 2011 and February 2012, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 young mothers between the ages of 16 and 25 years from Doornkop to get a richer understanding of the challenges of young motherhood. Ten of the young mothers were younger than 18 years and 10 were 18 years and older. Care was taken to interview the respondents privately without external interference from elders and other people in the households. Semi-structured interviews were used and the data were analysed thematically.

Both sets of data provided a description of the social and demographic circumstances of the young women beneficiaries, how they perceived their empowerment, and how the grant works together with women's agency to enhance their level of empowerment. Quantitative statistics were generated based on the survey data, which we triangulated with qualitative data, particularly to understand the social dynamics and the underlying beliefs and practices that influenced their overall sense of empowerment. The findings are presented below and are structured in two parts: part one outlines their circumstances and social profile, and part two focuses on their perception of empowerment.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Circumstances and profile of young women in the study**

The young women grant recipients surveyed lived mainly in two-generation (51%; n=19) and three-generation households (38%; n=14) with an average household size of 5.3 people. This is similar to the average household size of all the survey households in the larger study (Patel *et al.*, 2012). The majority (68%; n=25) had only one child in their care, with very few caring for three or more children. Also, women were largely the children's biological mothers and a smaller number (22%; n=8) cared for non-biological children. Young women grant beneficiaries lived in households which had an average total monthly income of less than R1,692.70 per month, indicating high levels of poverty. None of the young mothers in the survey received more than two CSGs for children in their care. The majority (78%; n=29) received only one CSG monthly.

Of the women surveyed, 92% (n=34) were not in formal employment and only 11% (n=4) were attending school or college. A few undertook livelihood activities to contribute to the household income, over and above the receipt of a CSG, such as running their own business (11%; n=4), while some did occasional or "piece" work (11%; n=4). An explanation for their lack of employment might be the burden of caring for young children, which limits their opportunities to seek employment or undertake labour activities. This may be exacerbated when they do not have alternative carers at home. A young woman living with a household member who is of an older generation has greater access to helpful assistance with care responsibilities. This usually means that they are heavily dependent on others in the home for food security and survival for themselves and their children.

Although the majority of young women in the survey (68%) had not completed their secondary schooling, we do not know whether their pregnancy was the reason they left



school. However, almost all of the interview participants (80%, n=16) reported that pregnancy was the reason for leaving school and they never went back. Sixty-two percent (n=23) of the young women in the survey obtained at least a Grade 8 qualification; 32% (n=12) completed their matric and 3 of these women had a post-schooling qualification. Early parenting is often cited as one of the reasons for interrupting women's education, which has an impact on their employment prospects and their income-earning capacity (Makiwane, 2010).

Early parenting ushers in heavy care responsibilities and young women usually find that their lives change drastically when their first baby is born, which for 64% (n=23) of the survey respondents occurred when they were between 17 and 20 years old. Only 11% (n=4) had a baby at a younger age. Even if the women were integral to domestic labour in the household prior to their baby's birth, the needs young babies have are immediate and all-consuming, which imposes major time constraints on carers. A majority of the young women (73%) in our study spent much of their time on domestic responsibilities. Interestingly, 86% of all the women (aged 16 to over 70 years old) who participated in the larger household survey in Doornkop spent most of their time on domestic chores (Patel *et al.*, 2012), but fewer (73%) younger women reported this. The implication may be that younger women are less burdened by housework than older women and either are not expected to engage in house work or choose not to do so, as much housework is done by the older generation.

This care burden is somewhat relieved by the existence of accessible services. The young women respondents reported having access to services such as electricity, water and healthcare. Ninety-seven percent (n=36) said they had access to electricity, running water in the house or yard, and 78% (n=29) had flush toilets on the stand. But they had to use the grant to pay for transport for taking children to school and the clinic, and to crèche or day care.

The data showed that, similar to the spending of all women in our larger survey sample, young women spent the CSG predominantly on food and groceries, and education-related costs such as uniforms for the children. This was followed by spending on health-related costs for the children. From the data it is clear that the grant assisted with reducing poverty and vulnerability through providing income; without it they would be a lot poorer with dire consequences for the wellbeing of their children. Grant access also increases young women's choices on what and how to spend the money. The women's control over the money increased their power in the household, as described below.

### **Empowerment**

The empowerment of young women grant beneficiaries was assessed following the indicators of empowerment in Adato *et al.* (2000). The proxies for empowerment in this study were assessed first in terms of women's decision-making powers; second, whether they knew their rights and whether they claimed these rights (including women's rights); and third, how self-confident they were, which is an indicator of personal empowerment. Finally, we examined whether they participated in community activities, which is an indicator of wider participation in the public domain.

## Decision-making

The study found that the power to make decisions on how the grant was to be spent did not always lie with the young women in the households of Doornkop. Of the young women in the sample, 43% (N=16) reported that they decided how money would be spent within the household, but 30% (n=11) made the decisions jointly as a household. In fewer cases (22%; n=8) the decision was made by their parents or someone else (5%; n=2) in the household. This pattern is similar to the data gathered on all women receiving a CSG in Doornkop, although slightly fewer young women were sole decision makers (43%) compared to the larger group of women (48%). Overall this suggests that most young women (73%) had some control over decisions about spending and that the grant increases their capacity to make choices on financial matters, while 27% had limited decision-making power and control.

With regard to the payment of debts and savings, half (46%; n= 17) of the sample made decisions on how much should be saved and how much should be paid towards debts owed, while 19% (n=7) said their mother or grandmother was the main decision maker. Having the CSG earmarked for a child in itself gave young women the opportunity to be primary decision makers. A young woman interview participant, who was only 19 years old when she had her first child, said:

*“I make the decisions [about the grant expenditure]. The decision is up to me whether the child goes to crèche or I buy clothing or food with the money.”*  
(Deli, 21 years old)

Another participant claims that the grant itself has equipped her to make her own decisions:

*“I’m able through the grant to exercise my own decisions about what to do with the grant.”* (Noma, 22 years old)

While young women do appear to be very active in making decisions, and in some cases they do this completely independently, some of the women’s decision-making power is influenced by her age and generational status. For example, interviews with young women revealed that at times their parents or even members of the older generation advised on what to do, which was explained by Gugulethu (a respondent) who was told by her aunt to “buy jerseys for the child, it is cold”. She then decided to give her aunt money from the CSG to buy a jersey and a tracksuit for the child. In addition, decision-making powers are also mediated by the payment of “lobolo”. If “lobolo” has been paid for the woman, she does not make decisions alone, but with the father of the child. This is the case with Thab’sile (21 years old). Thab’sile has two children, a 2-year-old and an 11-month-old child. She was 19 years old when she had her first child. The father of her two children paid “lobolo”<sup>2</sup> for her, even though she still lives at her home with her aunt. The boyfriend lives nearby and supports her and the children. They do things together and make decisions jointly. However, this reflects the experience of very few women,

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<sup>2</sup> Bride price, still a very important ritual in many South African families and a common barrier to marriage for poor couples.

and the survey shows that only one out of 37 women reported that their partner is the main financial decision maker.

### **Effects of gender and generation**

As a result of poverty, many young mothers are forced by circumstance to be dependent on others for their livelihoods and for child wellbeing. In Doornkop this seems to take the form, broadly, of being dependent on boyfriends or the fathers of your children and/or on parents or family with whom you live.

The young women in the study did not have strong relationships with the father(s) of their child(ren). Sadly, in the cases where the father of the child is no longer a partner of the young woman, it was most likely that she receives no financial support from him at all. Absent and non-contributing fathers are a very common scenario in South Africa (Mavungu *et al.*, 2013).

Ten out of 16 (63%) women who no longer live with the father of their child reported that he never pays maintenance. Six (38%), however, said they did received some maintenance from the fathers. However, fewer than half the young women answered this question (n=16).

In addition, of all the young women in the survey receiving a CSG, a quarter said that the fathers no longer provide support for their children now that they are getting a CSG. This raises the question of whether the CSG may lead to the displacement of private maintenance paid by the fathers of the children. The lack of the payment of maintenance by fathers of children receiving a CSG further contributes to financial insecurity in these households.

This situation is corroborated by the qualitative data. Some young women reported that they do not tell the fathers of their children, and sometimes deliberately hide the fact, that they receive a grant. They said that they feared the fathers may decide to withdraw whatever maintenance was forthcoming, if they knew the child was getting a CSG, or that the father may demand a share of the money. Statements to this effect were expressed:

*“If I tell [him] I think he will play mind games and cheat me out of the money. Even now he still does not know that I get the grant.”* (Lethu, 19 years old)

Another young woman, Lucky, justified not telling her boyfriend about receiving the grant because *“he would not give me support for the child”*. A while later she reported that her partner’s friend saw her at the pay-point and then told her boyfriend that she was receiving the CSG. The boyfriend was angry and indeed stopped the support.

While there was evidence from the qualitative interviews that some young women felt supported by their families, sometimes these relationships across generations were marked by tension and conflict. For example, Bassie is 20 years old and her child’s grant was being received by her aunt who lives in Bloemfontein, far from the young mother and child. She is very erratic in forwarding the grant to Bassie, and some months she does not pay. In such cases it is difficult for Bassie to plan on what to buy, because she is not sure whether the money will be forthcoming or not.

Instances were cited of tension within the household when young women requested support from family members and were told that they deliberately fell pregnant so they could access the grant. Noma, aged 22, reported that she was regularly told that she had chosen to be a mother.

The social dynamics of partner and family relations draws our attention to the subtle ways in which young women are disempowered by their partners and family members. Social and gender beliefs and hierarchies serve to reinforce the powerlessness of young women in relation to partners and family members. Women continue to be institutionally disempowered as a result of the inefficiency and the ineffectiveness of the private maintenance system. The difficulties of claiming maintenance remains a major problem for them, despite the recommendations of the Lund Committee (Lund, 2008) and civil society groups in recent years. Recent evidence indicates some fathers have justified non-payment if the mothers of their children receive a CSG (Patel *et al.*, 2012).

### **Claiming women's rights, personal empowerment and gendered beliefs**

The young women grant beneficiaries in the survey largely (84%; n=31) agreed that they had the confidence to confront things they did not like in their lives. This suggested a degree of personal empowerment and a belief in themselves. Three quarters (76%; n=28) of the women believed they had the power to manage their lives and only 11% (n=4) believed they did not. When they were asked to respond to the statement: "*My partner treats me like I have no say in the house*", of those who have partners who answered, 91% (n= 21) disagreed with the statement, thereby implying that they had confidence in themselves and positive self-esteem. Mpho, aged 23, stated the following about how she perceived herself:

*"You call me poor, you call me rich: that's your opinion of me. [But] I know me, I am me and I am going to be me... [you can ] talk until your mouth gets dry, but I am me."*

Two of the young women grant beneficiaries explained how the grant enabled their independence:

*"I am not working ... Not everything should be my mother's responsibility ... My mother runs this ... tuck shop, she makes vetkoek, I sometimes assist her. They think that my mother will assist me. I say to them: this is not my mother's child, she is mine. This is why I get the grant."* (Zandile, 24 years old)

*"The grant helps me from begging or asking money from my boyfriend or family ... We are able to buy Nan [powdered infant milk], food and other things."* (Shaddi, 26 years old)

Talking about choices she makes on how to use the CSG money, Ayanda comments: "*A person must not force you on something you do not want*" (21 years old).

The young women's gendered beliefs indicated that, although they reported positive self-esteem and personal empowerment, and believed that they had a voice to challenge things they did not like, they generally did not challenge the gendered beliefs that helped to reinforce gender inequality within their households. Our results indicate that the

burden of care for children still falls primarily on women and that the women in our sample were still trapped in taking on the lion's share of domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning. Women themselves believed this was 'natural' or normal to do so. The survey results showed that 49% (n=18) of the women in the study believed that certain jobs in the house remain woman's work, compared with 43% (n=16) who disagreed. Forty-nine percent of women (n=18) believed that women have more empathy with hungry children than men do, and 78% (n=29) believed that women are better at looking after families than men.

The interviews supported these results, with the young women commenting on the rigid way in which 'women's work' is defined. For example, after Thab'sile explained that in her household boys only wash dishes and they don't clean or cook or wash clothes, she said:

*"We grew up with things like that and they will always remain the same."*  
(Thab'sile, 20 years old)

Our results show that despite the greater sense of personal empowerment experienced by young women, many also held traditional gendered beliefs. It appears that while the women were empowered in some dimensions of the empowerment matrix, their gendered beliefs reinforced the sexual division of labour in the home.

### **Community participation**

Forty-one percent (n=15) of the young women in the study had a desire to improve their lives by attending meetings at school, street committees and church as part of the process of improving their lives. It appears that about half of our sample (49%; n=15) benefited from participating in the above-mentioned forums and activities, including also stokvels and burial societies. This is markedly lower than findings from the bigger household survey: 75% of women in the larger group attended school, community or church meetings, and 64% benefited from these events, including stokvels and burial societies (Patel *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, while the data illustrate a measure of community empowerment among young women CSG beneficiaries, their participation is at lower rates than that of older women, which implies fewer community networks and social capital. This might be why young women's participation does not seem to translate into collective empowerment whereby young women are challenging gender inequality or the structural barriers to women's advancement, such as the causes of poverty and the low levels of employment of women compared to men.

### **DOES SOCIAL PROTECTION MITIGATE THE VULNERABILITY OF EARLY MOTHERHOOD?**

Young women receiving a grant for a child in a poor urban community in Soweto are living under difficult conditions and have multiple needs. The results of this research indicate that the CSG is helpful to them in two distinct and significant ways. The first is the material support it provides, which is used predominantly for food security and expenses related to schooling for their child. These usage patterns are very similar to

national findings on how women recipients use the grant more generally (Agüero *et al.*, 2006; Delany *et al.*, 2008; Neves, Samson, Van Niekerk, Hlatshwayo & Du Toit, 2009).

The second area is in giving young women more control over their lives and the lives of their children. They largely make the decisions about how the CSG money is spent, even if this is in consultation with other family members, and many believed they did not need to defer to anybody on how their lives are to be managed. The CSG, therefore, supports a degree of independence, control and self-confidence that reduces young women's stark vulnerability and level of need.

These are positive outcomes, but they are limited in the face of the range of needs and support necessary to give the young women a chance not only to be the kind of mothers they would choose for their children, but also to nurture and help realise their dreams for their future as adults. Some of these limitations have been documented elsewhere, such as the urgent need for the CSG to work in a more synergistic and integrated way with other social services (Patel *et al.*, 2012; Patel *et al.*, unpublished), or the critical need for employment opportunities for women (Posel & Rogan, 2012). Very few young women were engaged in income generation, either in a formal job or more informally. The majority were unemployed, had no work experience, no tertiary education, and very little hope of secure livelihoods now or in the future.

It is a matter of concern that, while young women have self-confidence and believe they have the capacity to manage their own lives, they do also seem to accept traditional beliefs about gender roles such as cooking, cleaning and caring for children, as a natural and culturally acceptable part of their lives. In this respect, the CSG plays a role that is consistent with the definition of a woman's role as mother and caregiver, as it equips the women with the means with which to discharge the duties expected of them as women and/or as mothers and caregivers. Fathers of the children are minimally or not at all supportive financially or, often, socially. This is a nationwide phenomenon, but for these young women the result is that they are forced to be unduly dependent on their extended family (Van Bercum, 2013). It is unlikely they can attain financial or other independence in the foreseeable future without help from the fathers or other external help.

What is unique about this group of women is their particular needs as young people in a transition to adulthood. While childcare can be burdensome because of the intense investment of time and the physical and emotional labour involved, the young women in the study were not unduly burdened with additional child-care responsibilities in the sense they were looking after one or sometimes two children, primarily their own biological children. But their futures as individuals are compromised by their motherhood status; it is in this niche area that social workers can intervene in ways that could have positive long-term outcomes for them. We now turn to the implications of the findings for developmental social work with young women receiving a CSG.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

Despite the benefits of the CSG in reducing the vulnerability of young women, by itself it is not able to address the wide-ranging needs of women faced with early motherhood. Social grants therefore need to work together with other social interventions to promote the effective transition of women to adulthood. Four key recommendations are made below.

First, interventions are needed that build skills, knowledge and the self-development of young women. Developmental social workers could act as brokers and facilitators to link them with resources, accessing training, skills development programmes and opportunities to complete secondary education or post-schooling and higher education to improve their life chances and social mobility. This could take the form of a referral to a service, or through facilitating client access to resources such as an application for a grant, participating in programmes to promote youth employability, for example, public works or youth service and volunteering, as well as positive youth development and mentoring programmes (Keller & Pryce, 2010).

Second, counselling support and linking young women with support groups could assist with psycho-social issues, mediating the tensions in partner and family relations and in the development of a sense of self and personal empowerment. Social workers may also act as educators by sharing information, the transfer of skills, coaching and mentoring and in building parenting capabilities.

A third area of intervention relates to promoting enhanced access to services, social networks and assets. A critical role for the developmental social worker is to facilitate access to services such as reproductive health, access to contraception and the right of women to freedom of choice in whether to have children, choice of family size and in increasing sexual health and empowerment in sexual relations. Access to free basic services in communities such as water, electricity and sanitation is being automatically extended to CSG beneficiaries by some local authorities, as well as applications for exemptions for the payment of school fees, among others. Access to social networks and social support is critical for those women who do not have family support or who have low levels of social capital. Facilitating access to these networks might be a more sustainable way of providing social support for this group of young women. Growing their financial capabilities through promoting financial literacy and a savings culture could lower indebtedness and encourage both banking and savings (Sewamala, Sperber, Zimmerman & Karimli, 2010).

Fourth, developmental social workers need to develop interventions to engage fathers in the provision of support, in the care of children and in being involved in the lives of the child even if they are non-resident fathers. Additionally, young women could be supported in challenging gender stereotypes and beliefs. It is vital that social workers do not ignore men in working with young women experiencing early motherhood. In this way, they will be challenging structural inequality and socio-cultural systems that are at the root of gender inequality in our society. The advocacy on behalf of young mothers is

needed to challenge stereotypes and the stigma of young women receiving social grants, to raise the awareness of their particular needs and thereby defend and promote their social rights.

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