DISTANCE PARENTING – IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Boitumelo Khothatso Seepamore

Many families in the Global South are inclined to split in order to survive the complex socio-economic conditions in which they find themselves. Labour migration is entrenched in South Africa and so is parenting from a distance. This paper contests the normalisation of split families and distance parenting, and considers the associated implications for children, their parents and substitute caregivers. It further discusses the persistence of stereotypical gender roles in parenting, even where both parents are absent from home. Finally, some recommendations are made for both practitioners and policy makers in relation to distance parenting.

DISTANCE PARENTING – IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Boitumelo Khothatso Seepamore

INTRODUCTION

The value and significance of the family are evident in communities throughout the world both as a building block of society and as a space for the provision of emotional, physical and collective social support for its members. There is no doubt that the macro environment has a bearing on families as they continue to struggle against the odds in environments that are not conducive to family stability and cohesion. Many families in the global South have had to develop ingenious survival strategies in response to "convulsed economic transition", poverty, underemployment and increased consumption needs (Pantea, 2011:379). With a history of labour migration and widespread poverty, the phenomenon of children not co-residing with their biological parents is pervasive in South Africa (Mkhize, 2006; Smit, 2001). Circular migration from rural to urban areas is entrenched, and labour migrants continue to have a "base" in the home of origin, to which they return periodically during the year after lengthy periods of absence. Families are thus involuntarily split when their dependants are left behind in the care of others.

To contextualise this paper: it begins with an analysis of the factors that lead to families living apart, specifically as a consequence of rural-urban migration. This is followed by a discussion on the impact of this distance on families, parents and their children. It then concludes with a consideration of the implications for social work practice in relation to distance parenting. For the purposes of this paper, distance parenting refers to parents who do not physically reside with their children, but have made arrangements for substitute caregivers to provide day-to-day care. These parents send remittances to the caregivers, keep in contact with their children and go back home periodically.

Background

Globally people migrate from countries with weak, developing economies to work in more urbanised and industrialised areas as eldercare workers, nurses' aides, doctors, nannies, nurses or domestic workers (Parreñas, 2001). Apart from economic migration, other reasons for families to split may be "marriage, partnership formation and dissolution, housing, education and training" (Bennett, Hosegood, Newell & McGrath, 2014) or a desire to pursue one's own interests and growth (Hill, Hosegood & Newell, 2008; Kielty, 2008). New family formations such as marriage may lead to split families where children are left in the care of relatives (Langa, 2010; Schatz, 2007). It is common for children to be left with relatives such as grandparents, uncles and aunts when their parents leave for home for any reason, or start new families. Partnership formation has significance in that new partners also have a "decisive role" in restricting or facilitating relationships between children and their parents (Rabe, 2007:167). New partners can either facilitate or prevent the interaction between parents and their children left in the care of substitute caregivers. These are normally people who are unable to work, for

instance, the elderly, children and people with disabilities. To meet their material needs, separation becomes necessary, in order to keep the family together (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Richter & Morrell, 2006). Parenting children from a distance through a substitute caregiver has become normalised in South Africa mainly as a result of migrant labour, which has reconfigured the notions of family and parenting.

Migrant labour

In South Africa colonialism and the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand heralded an era of economic, social and political transformation. In addition to a growth in the mining sector, together with laws such as hut and poll taxes, as well as the land tenure system, many African men were forced to leave their homes in order to go and earn a living in urban areas to support their families (Siqwana-Ndulo,1998). The over-representation of Africans in rural areas with limited opportunities and resources rendered this population group vulnerable, and hence the economic distance between Africans and whites is disproportionately wide (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007). Influx control laws which rendered much of the African population temporary residents in urban areas, and the Urban Areas Act (1923) controlling the movement of African people in cities, and also the Native Laws Amendment Act (1937) preventing African people from owning land in urban areas (Smit, 2001), sustained the migrant labour system following the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand and diamonds in Kimberley. The trend in apartheid South Africa was for men to migrate to places of employment and send remittances home (Bennett *et al.*, 2014; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Posel, 2010; Smit, 2001). Not only have men migrated to places of employment, but so have women too. By 1875 black women were already dominating the domestic worker sector as wet-nurses, cleaners, seamstresses and housekeepers (Ally, 2009; Gaitskell *et al.*, 1984). Circular migration has become so entrenched that it is not surprising that after 22 years into democracy it remains entrenched in South African communities. The perpetuation of this circular migration may partly be the result of the current neoliberal policy which was adopted formally through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, whose aim was to stimulate economic growth, reduce debt, liberalise trade and industry, and also create jobs (Padayachee, 2005; Sewpaul, 2013a). Although GEAR promised the reduction of unemployment from 1996 when it was implemented, this has not been realised. Instead, by the end of 2001 – five years after its inception – it had failed to deliver the 1.3 million new jobs that had been projected, and neither were the private and welfare sectors reformed (Natrass, 2006; Triegaardt, 2009). This maintains the status quo of circular labour migration and the need for a stimulation of local production, manufacturing and provision of services, so that people are more likely to work near home and thus stay with their families.

FAMILIES AND PARENTING

Globally families are exposed to new values, urbanisation and increased access to education, health care and technology; this offers numerous benefits, but also has disadvantages. In the face of the socio-economic and political elements that impinge on the families, they continue to function. In spite of having to adapt to new ways of life,

traditional lifestyles remain but change constantly to reflect lifestyles in a globalised world. The value of the family should not be underestimated and its role in the provision of emotional, physical and material support to members is critical. Because families are heterogeneous and live in diverse contexts and spaces, they operate in terms of different norms, values, cultures and traditions. A distinction is deliberately made between families and households, as Amoateng and Richter (2007) note that these concepts are not interchangeable. Definitions of families vary and may be based on birth, adoption or marriage, with connections between members being emotional, physical or based on shared resources, time and space, and mutual benefit (Amoateng & Richter, 2007). Families may also comprise people who consider themselves to be a family, either by living together, or through marital or kinship connections (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). A household, on the other hand, may be comprised of families, but is defined by Statistics South Africa as a person or persons who co-reside in a dwelling for at least four days a week and share food and other daily living essentials. Therefore households may be made up of people who are not necessarily related, however families generally share a residence and make up the household which may also be multi-generational. The extended family usually comprises people who live together and have kinship or marriage ties, and consider themselves to be a family. Because African families tend to be extended, the care of children becomes the responsibility of all members of the extended family, not just the nuclear unit.

It was estimated that there were over 14.3 million households with about 18.6 million children and 34.4 million adults living in South Africa in 2013 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Of these children, 7.3 million (39.5%) lived with their mothers but not with their fathers, and only 3.3% of children resided with their fathers only (Meintjes, Hall & Sambu, 2015). A further 6.4 million children lived with both parents and 22% (4.1 million) of children in South Africa did not live with either parent for various reasons. Meintjes *et al.* (2015:102) explain that as a result of "historical population control, labour migration, poverty, housing and educational opportunities", children live separately from their parents. A provincial breakdown shows that KwaZulu-Natal has just over 4 million children, who represent over 22% of all children in South Africa; this is followed by Gauteng at 19% or 3.5 million children (Statistics South Africa, 2014). It is interesting to note that in the poorest households (those living below the poverty line of R671 per month in 2013) children were not likely to live with both parents as only 19% of them lived with both biological parents. In terms of population group, "less than one third (29%) of black children lived with both their parents, while the vast majority of Indian and White children (84% and 77% respectively) were resident with both biological parents" (Meintjes *et al.*, 2015:103). The rural-urban divide, coupled with high levels of poverty and unemployment, are some of the structural factors that force families to become economic migrants, thus having the effect of normalising distance parenting, for the most part in black communities. Absorption into the labour force enforces the prevalent pattern of leaving children with substitute caregivers, preventing the child bearer from being the child carer (Russell, 2008).

Parenting involves love and connecting with children, monitoring them and providing warmth, guidance, support and protection (Grolnick, Deci & Ryan, 1997; Woodcock, 2003). Parents also model behaviour and set boundaries for children; however, this may be a challenge where they are already parenting under extreme conditions such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, or lack of resources (Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015). It is therefore even more difficult in a situation where parenting occurs through a substitute, often a relative in the extended family. The extended family has a meaningful role to play where members can offer support, ranging from the provision of emotional support to material resources (Padi, Nduna, Khunou & Kholopane, 2014; Smit, 2001). Each person, regardless of age, is able to add value to the household as the elderly are often caregivers, and children help with chores around the house (Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007). Children learn customs and traditions, and are removed from negative cultural contexts, particularly when they reside where their parents are employed and are able to give adequate adult supervision (Ramphele & Richter, 2006). Irrespective of the reasons for parents not staying with their children, they still have the obligation to maintain their children, albeit from a distance, through a caregiver.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISTANCE PARENTING

Not living with their children destabilises families. The effects of labour migration in South Africa are well documented, with consequences such as desertion and infidelity (Rabe, 2007; Ramphele & Richter, 2006), or limited face-to-face family interaction (Posel, 2010). As a result of long periods of absence, a cultural gap may develop between the parents and the family (Heymann, Flores-Macias, Hayes, Kennedy, Lahaie & Earle, 2009; Ramphele & Richter, 2006). The absence of parents in the formative and teenage years of their children's lives may erode family relationships and contribute towards an inability to form and maintain a sense of unity and common purpose (Madziva & Zontini, 2012; Van Breda, 1999); teenage delinquency may also increase (Smit, 2001). There is no doubt that children are affected by distance parenting, notwithstanding their ages or level of family care and support; this is discussed next.

Consequences for children

The detrimental consequences of parent-child separation for extended periods of time include increased emotional distance, erosion of family relationships, discipline issues, and disruption of family roles and household routines (Pantea, 2011; Richter & Morrell, 2006; Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998; Van Breda, 1999). Families may also become "sites for manifestation of power" (Pantea, 2011:385), where parental authority is challenged or undermined. Teenagers may also want to assert their independence from absent parents and establish their own ways of coping with extended and frequent separation. Placing children in the care of relatives may be perceived to be a good strategy, because the roles of relatives such as uncles or aunts, as "father" or "mother" respectively, may reduce feelings of isolation or of missing the absent parent. Because African families tend to be extended, the care of children becomes the responsibility of the entire extended family and not just the nuclear unit. Therefore the caregiving arrangement is informal and it is almost taken for granted that others will act as substitute parents in the absence of

biological parents. However, this may have negative consequences for the children. Children living in households with a migrant parent are more likely to experience frequent illnesses, chronic illness, and emotional and behavioural problems compared with children living in households where the parent is present (Heymann *et al.*, 2009). Parreñas (2001) and Millman (2013) emphasise the detrimental consequences of separating parents from their children for extended periods of time, leading to increased emotional distance between parents and their children, erosion of family relationships, discipline issues, disruption of family roles and household routines. As children are cared for by a sequence of different caregivers in the extended family, this may result in insecurity and confusion on the part of children. Children may have feelings of abandonment, anger and loss even in the rare instances that the decision to migrate was communicated or discussed with the children beforehand (Boccagni, 2012; Pantea, 2011). The propensity for abuse increases with children who are left in the care of multiple caregivers. Children may also be prone to absenteeism from school, teenage pregnancy, engagement in criminal activity and misbehaviour as they are left on their own or without adequate adult supervision. In some cases the children begin having discipline problems at school and some lose respect for their parents as authority figures (Pantea, 2011). Many teenagers have not developed the capacity to make responsible decisions and may engage in risky behaviours and require relationships characterised by warmth, support and communication. The fear that adolescents may become uncontrollable is real for many parents, more so for parents not staying with their children.

Consequences for parents

The care of children is clearly outlined by the Children's Act, promulgated in 2005 in line with section 28 of the Constitution. It protects the rights of children from birth to 18 years and replaces the Child Care Act (No. 74 of 1983). The Children's Act outlines the rights and responsibilities of parents, caregivers and others who are involved in children's lives formally or informally. Chapter 3 of the Children's Act (henceforth referred to as "the Act") focuses on parental responsibilities and rights, while section 7 addresses the best interest of the child. Within the milieu of external factors impinging on the family, the Act safeguards children and ensures that their constitutional right to care and protection is achieved, and that they live in an environment that nurtures them holistically. Application of the criterion of the best interest of the child needs to take many factors into consideration and it is acknowledged that "best interest" may differ in each family or community. Factors such as the relationship between child and caregiver, attitudes of parents or caregivers, mitigating poverty, and the capacity to raise children and meet their needs are essential to their welfare.

The Act recognises the role played by the extended family and the importance of culture and tradition in children's upbringing, which contributes to a stable family environment. The Constitution and the Children's Act emphasise the need for a child to be brought up in a stable family environment or an environment resembling it as much as possible, which also prohibits deliberately putting children in harmful situations such as maltreatment, abuse, neglect, exploitation or degradation, or exposing children to

violence, exploitation or any other harm. Richter and Dawes (2008) assert that despite the protection intended by legislation and civic structures to safeguard children's rights, wrongs are perpetrated against a large number of South African children every day and families can be complicit in the abuse of children. The standard of care and level of support may be related to micro-level factors such as the child's age, maturity and stage of development, gender, background, and intellectual and emotional development, including any disability or chronic illness. Therefore all these factors need consideration when children are placed in care or sent to live with substitute caregivers. The Children's Act recognises that people with parental responsibilities towards a child are biological parents, and prospective adoptive or foster parents, as well as the Department of Social Development, together with designated child-protection organisations managing the case, or any other person admitted or recognised by the court as a party.

The impact of parenting from afar on migrant parents is documented, as well as the paradoxes related to distance parenting that affect both the parents and their children. Absence from home means that they are unable to personally care for sick children, guide them and be emotionally involved (Contreras & Griffith, 2012; Doucet, 2000; Parreñas, 2008; Rabe, 2007). Parenting involves being able to meet the needs of children, be they emotional, material or developmental, to protect them from harm and to be able to provide a caring and nurturing environment (Woodcock, 2003). Children interact with peers, other adults, households and the community (Doucet, 2000). Parents have a crucial role in managing and facilitating these interactions. Negotiating parenting through a substitute party thus impacts on this relationship and there is guilt associated with being unable to provide hands-on upbringing of their children (Doucet, 2000). The need for closeness coupled with a desire for involvement in every aspect of raising children may lead to an intensive mode of parenting (Chib, Malik, Aricat & Kadir, 2014) or becoming what Stewart (1999:539) refers to as "Disneyland dads, Disneyland moms". Children as thus smothered with attention, gifts and a great time, with no space to grow and realise their own independence.

Maternal caregiving

The anxiety over leaving their children on their own or with inadequate parental supervision may also convey a lack of trust in both the caregiver and teenagers, who may need independence at this stage of development. In order to deal with problems at home, it may also become necessary for parents to miss a season abroad, or return earlier than anticipated (Boccagni, 2012) and enlist the help of extended family members (Parreñas, 2008). With high levels of poverty, many parents cannot afford to miss a season from work or stay at home too long. In order to cope with the challenges related to parenting, a flight response may manifest itself through the emotional absence of parents from the responsibilities of parenting, or physical absence for prolonged periods. Sending children off to the rural areas to be cared for by extended family members or relatives may be another way of disengaging themselves from parenting responsibilities. Some see the practice of sending children off to live with relatives as a way of strengthening family ties (Anderson, 2005; Oduro, 2010), or the opportunity to get to know extended family members; however, they still do not reside with their children.

Parents depend on substitute caregivers, who may be in a better position to provide a stable environment, although these caregivers tend to be single-parent, female-headed households in many rural areas in South Africa (Schatz, 2007).

Caregiving remains a predominantly feminised function all over the world, even when the father is present in the household (Boccagni, 2012; Madziva & Zontini, 2012; Parreñas, 2008; Richter, Chikovore & Makusha, 2010; Schatz, 2007; Smit, 2002). It is not surprising that women continue to be constrained by care-giving roles even when they do not physically reside with their children. In situations where both women and their partners do not live with their children, the role of carer and home-builder still rests with the woman, notwithstanding spatial and temporal re-arrangements (Carling, Menjívar & Schmalzbauer, 2012). However, there may be an increase in the involvement of men in the day-to-day care of children and other sick adults in the house. Montgomery, Hosegood, Busza and Timæus (2006) saw a surge in the involvement of men in the care of other adults and children, particularly in the era of HIV/AIDS. They found that more men took part in caregiving duties when there was no other person to do this in the household. This implies that they undertook these duties because there was no other choice; had there been a choice then the role of men would be minimal.

Smit (2002) explains that in dual-earner families the entry of women into the workforce also alters gender roles. Although parenting should ideally be a shared task between men and women, mothers often take primary responsibility for the care of children, even when neither parent co-resides with their children (Ally, 2009; Richter, Chikovore & Makusha, 2010). Father involvement in nurturing and caring for their children is equally important (Padi *et al.*, 2014). The migration of women spurs the reconfiguration of the gendered divisions of labour in the household, while men's migration preserves it by conforming to norms of breadwinner and financial provider (Hill *et al.*, 2008; Parreñas, 2008). In the SADC region about 37.4% of labour migrants are women, and they tend to work in the informal economy as hawkers, vendors or informal traders, junk sellers and traders, and as informal factory workers (Ojong, 2012), with 70% of them working across the South African and Zimbabwean border.

Their improved financial independence enables women to access resources and opportunities which are otherwise not always open to them (Carling *et al.*, 2012; Contreras & Griffith, 2012), such as acquiring assets, or paying off debts, and achieving a higher standard of living. This financial freedom not only benefits the woman, but allows other family members opportunities such as furthering their own education and training (Boccagni, 2012; Contreras & Griffith, 2012; Pantea, 2011; Parreñas, 2001), and improving the living conditions of the entire family. By leaving the household in order to earn an income, many women challenge traditional gender roles where the man is the breadwinner and they are homemakers.

Yet despite women being breadwinners, the provision of emotional support to children remains their responsibility, a space where the man has very little involvement (Contreras & Griffith, 2012; Kielty, 2008; Millman, 2013; Richter, Chikovore & Makusha, 2010), thereby reaffirming women's role as caregivers. While transgressing

gender roles by becoming financially independent and providing for their families, these women also continue to affirm gender roles through their caregiving and child-rearing roles, albeit from a distance. Motherhood is therefore shaped by a combination of factors, such as gender roles and cultural norms that have become inscribed into the very fabric of society (Sewpaul, 2013b).

Paternal caregiving

Men's role in caregiving remains peripheral and they usually step aside for female relatives to assume child-rearing and care responsibilities in the absence of their partners. As well as the provision of financial support, increased participation of men in domestic tasks and child rearing is normally not by choice, but through necessity (Doucet, 2000; Montgomery *et al.,* 2006). The role of men as providers is not changed by the distance from home (Khunou, 2006). Even if they are not able to go home every night, they still provide for their families, albeit from a distance. This arrangement mirrors that of men who stay at home and work during the day. By providing materially for his family, the man may view this as fulfilling his obligation and responsibility, and this is socially accepted (Khunou, 2008; Smit, 2002). His role is reduced to that of material provider, or as Rabe (2007:162) puts it, "economic fatherhood". This does not imply that fathers do not want emotional closeness with their children, but issues such as distance, poverty, or the lack of some provision in the law like paternity leave may preclude them from developing intimacy with their children and having an emotional bond.

Various factors contribute to increased contact between non-resident fathers and their children, some of which are fathers' levels of education (Padi *et al.*, 2014), marriage to the children's mother (Rabe, 2007), father's payment of child support (Khunou, 2006), gender of the child, and if there was ever any co-residence. Cheadle, Amato and King (2010) found that children's gender is associated with increased contact for male children over female children. A man's age at the birth of his first child and geographical distance from children also has an impact on their relationship. Cooksey and Craig (1998) found that physical distance from children reduced the frequency of father visits. Also, those fathers staying less than 100 miles from their children were more likely to visit and be more involved in their children's daily activities than those who lived further away. With migrant parents and fathers living in different cities or countries from their families, the likelihood of contact and involvement decreases.

The ubiquitous absence of fathers from their children's lives has wide-ranging implications for their future relationships (Langa, 2010; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011). With frequent and prolonged absence male authority may be threatened and thus reduce men's active involvement in socialising with their children (Mkhize, 2006). Another factor that may have an impact on parenting is stress, particularly in situations of poverty where parents are less likely to have the support to reinforce good behaviour, and are less nurturing, leading to increased levels of physical punishment, weakened communication and diminished expression of affection (Dore & Lee, 1999; McLoyd, 1990).

Since large parts of South Africa are patriarchal and power is accorded to men over women and children, men are expected to show authority in their households, which may take the shape of physical discipline and punishment. Combined with this are cultural practices and beliefs that have the potential to put women and children at a disadvantage or subject them to long-term harm (Richter & Dawes, 2008). The men's authority stands, even in their absence, and is transferred to other male relatives in the extended family (Mkhize, 2006), but so do their protection and responsibility to the family. While the role of disciplining children tends to be the responsibility of fathers, doing this in a loving and involved manner nurtures children. Having to fulfil this role from a distance may not be as difficult, particularly when there are other male relatives to help to fill this gap. However, some children do not know or live with their fathers or father figures. The stigma of having an absent father impacts negatively on children (Khunou, 2008; Langa, 2010; Nduna, Kasese-Hara, Ndebele & Pillay, 2011; Nduna & Jewkes, 2011). Children may experience feelings of shame and illegitimacy when they do not know their fathers (Langa, 2010), or even be envious of others who know or live with their own fathers. Padi *et al.* (2014) argue that fathers can be absent fully, partially economically or emotionally. Although absence may be inevitable where fathers are deceased, incarcerated or are unaware of the existence of their children, those who deliberately remove themselves from their responsibility to care for their children put a further strain on their families. With relatives taking on this substitute parenting role, some children never live with their parents all their lives. Absent fathers may also be knows or unknown to the child (Nduna & Jewkes, 2011) and still remain absent. However, some fathers do maintain contact with their children, send remittances home and are interested in their children's lives, even if they are not physically present.

Monetisation of parenting

Parenting becomes monetised and a scarce commodity when the provision of material needs supersedes other aspects of the parent-child relationship. Boccagni (2012) refers to "monetisation" of the relationship between migrant parents and their children and caregivers. Parenting becomes constructed in economic terms as the gap created by migration is filled with material items, gifts and benefits. In order to compensate for physical absence, material items tend to feature centrally in the discourse of parenting from afar. Although mobile phones, email, Skype and other computer programs may be used to increase the frequency of communication with their children and offer some level of closeness (Boccagni, 2012; Chib *et al.*, 2014; Hondagneu-Sutelo & Avila, 1997; Illanes, 2010; Parreñas, 2008), they may also be used as gifts to compensate for the parent's absence. Children may acquire new clothes and gadgets that they did not have access to when the parents were still staying with them. The general accessibility of mobile phones, technological advances and increased affordability in many communities means that text messages, voice calls and social network platforms are tools that may be used by spatially separated parents and their children to maintain a continuous "absent presence" (Uy-Tioco, 2007 cited in Chib *et al.*, 2014:78). Face-to-face interaction, intimacy and parenting therefore become an expensive commodity. In addition, other factors such as the age of the child at separation from parents has an effect on the

frequency of contact (Cheadle *et al.*, 2010). Because younger children may not have the ability to communicate directly with their parents, separation from their parents for extended periods may be very traumatic for them (Carling *et al.*, 2012). As children go through the different stages of development, they get accustomed to parental absence and bond with their caregivers. However, for adolescents the experience may be somewhat different in that they may have direct communication with parents through phones and can articulate their needs more clearly.

Consequences for caregivers

Caregivers may or may not be related to their charges; however, it is typical that relatives will act as substitute caregivers. Because of the nature of informal placements of children with their extended families, there is no court placement of children. Guardians are either "appointed" or children are informally placed in the family's care through a family meeting. This informal foster care arrangement is neither legally binding nor enforced or monitored. Although related foster care is rife in Africa (Gallinetti & Sloth-Nielsen, 2010), the treatment and care of these children in foster care may vary. Placing children in the care of relatives or a sequence of different caregivers may not be in the best interest of children. Informal care arrangements have multiple concerns, some of which are children not having access to resources that they are entitled to such as the Child Support Grant (CSG) or Foster Care Grant (FCG), access to school, or having a lower quality of life than when parents are hands-on in their upbringing (Carling *et al.*, 2012; Contreras & Griffith, 2012; Van Breda, 1999). The CSG is one of the social protection commitments to ensure income security for all children through family/child benefits such as health care, education, housing and improved nutrition (Meintjes *et al.*, 2015). About 58% of children in South Africa live below the lower poverty line (Hall, 2013). The CSG was introduced in 1998 as part of social protection to reduce poverty, empower women and distribute resources more equitably (Hölscher, Kasiram & Sathiparsad, 2009). It is means tested and South African children whose caregivers earn an income not exceeding R3,000 per person per month or a combined income of R6,000 per month are eligible. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) estimates that only 76% of eligible children have access to the CSG (Hall, 2013) which is due to, among other things, insufficient documentation such as birth certificates and parents' identity documents. In addition, the dearth of social workers and children's courts intensifies backlogs and excludes many children, particularly those living in rural areas or in informal care arrangements from accessing these social grants. The inability of social workers to complete their investigations timeously to enable the children to receive grants, or prevent the lapsing of grants when the two-year period expires means that the constitutional rights of many children are not met. Section 27(1)(c) of the South African Constitution gives everyone the right to have access to social security and social assistance. The social grant continues to be a lifeline for many South Africans, as "the grant not only helps to realise children's right to social assistance, but is also associated with improved nutritional, health and education outcomes" (Hall, 2013:92). Caregiving entails not only material provision but emotional

involvement; therefore caregivers also need support. The next section is a discussion of the consequences of distance parenting for children, their parents and caregivers.

Despite substitute care arrangements not being ideal for parents and their children, the presence and involvement of other relatives such as uncles, aunts or grandparents may reduce feelings of isolation or missing the absent parent. These relatives take on the role of 'father' or 'mother' respectively, and thus treat children in their care as their own, making the situation more bearable. Caregivers also need support, mainly when they are elderly, have a disability (Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007), or are children themselves (Pantea, 2011). These caregivers may not be in a position to care for young children or teenagers. They may also be unable to fill the emotional gap left by migrant parents. However, Casale and Crankshaw (2015) found that caregiving can be ameliorated by emotional and instrumental support. Emotional support of the caregiver in the form of love, comfort and care may come from other family members, neighbours and support groups. Instrumental support in the form of food, money and healthcare may also elevate levels of coping with this caregiver role. Casale and Crankshaw (2015) also found a positive correlation between any form of support and positive parenting, such as playing with the children, helping them through problems and general positive caregiver-child interaction when they (caregivers) were more relaxed and felt supported.

The removal of stressors such as food insecurity may make caregiving easier. Hill *et al.* (2008) argue that caregiving falls disproportionately on older persons, who tend to use their own resources (Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007), particularly the older person's grant. However, they also depend on remittances sent to them by their own children and may be engaged in other income-generation efforts such as selling vegetables or selling grass mats (Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007). The spending patterns between men and women are also very different, with men most likely to spend their social grants on food, fuel and education, while women usually spend most of their income on food, insurance and clothing (Case & Deaton, 1998 cited in Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007). The social grant is stretched and benefits not only the intended beneficiary but the entire household. Even when children qualify for the child support grant, there are obstacles such as a lack of documentation such as parents' ID documents, or children's birth certificates, thus hindering access to social assistance that can make caregiving easier.

Caring for children is not only about meeting their material needs; the caregiver needs to connect with the children (Doucet, 2000). The interaction of children with other social institutions such as the school, church or clinic visits is arranged by the caregiver; therefore, this person has to be in tune with their needs. The frequency and duration of contact with the parent is often through this caregiver and their responsibility for the wellbeing of these children requires 24-hour attention. However, this is normally unpaid work, especially for women and girl children in the home (Ally, 2009). Caregivers, by implication women, are often not always given the recognition and payment they deserve in their work in the home. Childcare is emotionally, mentally and physically demanding, and therefore the care of other people's children should be paid work, especially in situations of substitute care.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

Healthy families add value to healthy communities, thereby enhancing society and the economy. Social work has a pivotal role in supporting families from the individual member of the family to policy formulation. Collaboration with other sectors facilitates a holistic developmental service. From a policy perspective, services should support families to function to their optimum level. This implies that the environment has to be supportive and facilitate quality family life. In this section the White Paper on families has significance.

Family-specific legislation

The White Paper on Families aims to "undertake activities, programmes, projects and plans to promote, support and nourish well-functioning families that are loving, peaceful, safe and stable" (DSD, 2013:9). This policy further aims to assist families to be economically self-sustaining, and to provide care together with physical, emotional and psychosocial support for families. The aim is to support a review of legislation and advocate for policies that will enable families to stay together. It is critical that appropriate protocols and resources are made available for the reintegration and reunification of families where members have been separated for extended periods of time. The role of social workers in lobbying for change and advocating for family health is therefore crucial.

Social security

The state social grant continues to positively benefit vulnerable people, and has been associated with an increase in food security and nutrition for children (McEwen, Kannemeyer & Woolard, 2009), high levels of school enrolment particularly for girls (Samson Lee, Ndlebe, Macquene, Van Niekerk, Gandhi, Harigaya, & Abrahams, 2004) and general wellbeing. Beneficiaries of the social grant have an increased chance of seeking employment and gaining access to child care (Samson *et al.*, 2004). Although the provision of social grants may not eradicate structural poverty, it does ameliorate the effects of poverty in families and communities.

Family support

Family strengthening and support are important. Social workers, together with communities, need to ensure that caregivers are supported emotionally and materially (Casale & Crankshaw, 2015). Members of the extended family, particularly grandparents as caregivers, play a critical role in bridging the gap between children and their migrant parents. Their wellbeing and mental health also promote positive parenting, and this needs to be supported.

Parenting is itself challenging, and substitute parenting even more so; therefore parenting programmes need to bear in mind the multifaceted challenges faced by different types of families. Evidence-based parenting programmes and early childhood development interventions may add value to parenting from a distance. Hearing alternative stories about what it means to be a present-day parent and having the opportunity for debate on what constitutes "motherhood" and "fatherhood" (Kielty,

2008) within the current socio-economic climate may also help not only to raise consciousness, but also build relationships with children.

Conditions of employment

In communities with high levels of poverty children's health, development and education improve when the home has a working adult (Hall, 2013) who has access to health insurance, unemployment insurance (UIF) and other social security benefits. However, there is a need to revisit some of the provisions of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) as they seem to entrench the already dominant constructions of motherhood and fatherhood. The current provision of three days paid paternity leave further entrenches dominant gender roles, with women being solely responsible for child nurturing and care. An increase in the number of days allocated towards paternity leave may provide fathers with the space to be more involved in parenting, and "allow fathers to be active parents rather than helpers to their female partners" (Rehel, 2014:110). The more time fathers are able to spend with their children, the better.

Because migration plays a significant role in distance parenting, social workers can continue to lobby, in the case of employees such as miners, for single-sex hostels to be converted into family dwellings (Rabe, 2007; Ward *et al.*, 2015). This shift towards a family-focused policy, albeit in a male-dominated sector, can help families stay together at the parents' place of employment. For other workers such as domestic workers, a campaign can be launched for domestic workers to co-reside with their children in their backrooms, or stay with them over the holidays. Alternatively, parents may be given the flexibility to take extended leave when they visit home, or be able to go home frequently. Giving live-in domestic workers and other migrant parents over 21 days annual leave may be one way of allowing more face-to-face interaction with their children. Social workers must actively engage in contemporary debates on the basic conditions of employment and lobby for amendments in policy in order to make them more family friendly.

CONCLUSION

As raisers of consciousness and agents of change, social workers can be catalysts in bringing about awareness of the impact of distance on families. The danger of living in a society where taken-for-granted assumptions abound is that they become ingrained, normalised and invisible (Sewpaul, 2013b). Keeping the issue of distance on the national agenda is necessary in order to change the status quo; therefore social workers need to make communities aware of the abnormality of this situation. Together with communities, they should lobby for family-friendly legislation and socio-economic conditions that will not have a negative impact on family life.

The decision to parent children from afar has many far-reaching consequences. Even when they live apart, families continue to find alternative ways of survival. The parent-child relationship is affected, parenting by proxy is normalised, and face-to-face interaction becomes expensive. Structural factors rooted in neoliberal policy that perpetuate poverty and inequality have to be contended with strategically and holistically. In order to stem the tide of rural-urban migration, employment has to be

created where families are living. Funding and relevant resources have to be put in place to support policies that advance the pro-poor agenda. Government has to prioritise the interventions geared towards the preservation of families, monitor the creation and sustainability of meaningful employment and amend policies so that they are more family friendly.

REFERENCES

ALLY, S. 2009. **From servants to workers: South African domestic workers and the Democratic State**. South Africa: UKZN Press.

AMOATENG, A.Y. & RICHTER, L.M. 2007. **Families and households in post-Apartheid South Africa: socio-demographic perspectives**. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.

ANDERSON, K. 2005. Relatedness and investment in children in South Africa. **Human Nature**, 16:1-31.

BENNETT, R., HOSEGOOD, V., NEWELL, M. & McGRATH, N. 2014. Understanding family migration in rural South Africa: exploring children's inclusion in the destination household of migrant parents. **Population, Space and Place**. DOI:10.1002/psp.1842 (online publication).

BOCCAGNI, P. 2012. Practising motherhood at a distance: retention and loss in ecuadorian transnational families. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies**, 38(2):261-277.

CARLING, J., MENJÍVAR, C. & SCHMALZBAUER, L. 2012. Central themes in the study of transnational parenthood. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,** 38(2):191-217.

CASALE, M. & CRANKSHAW, T. 2015. "They laugh when I sing": perceived effects of caregiver social support on child wellbeing among South African caregivers of children. **Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health**, 27(2):149-155.

CHEADLE, J.E., AMATO, P.R. & KING, V. 2010. Patterns of nonresident father contact. **Demography**, 47(1):205-225.

CHIB, A., MALIK, S., ARICAT, G. & KADIR, S.Z. 2014. Migrant mothering and mobile phones: negotiations of transnational identity. **Mobile Media & Communication**, 2(1):73-93.

CONTRERAS, R. & GRIFFITH, D. 2012. Managing migration, managing motherhood: the moral economy of gendered migration. **International Migration**,50(4):51-66.

COOKSEY, E.C. & CRAIG, P.H. 1998. Parenting from a distance: the effects of paternal characteristics on contact between nonresidential fathers and their children. **Demography**, 35(2):187-200.

DORE, M.M. & LEE, J.M. 1999. The role of parent training with abusive and neglectful parents. **Family Relations**, 48(2):313-325.

DOUCET, A. 2000. 'There's a huge gulf between me as a male carer and women': gender. Domestic responsibility, and the community as an Institutional Arena. **Community Work & Family**, 3(2):163-184.

GAITSKELL, D., KIMBLE, J., MACONACHIE, M. & UNTERHALTER, E. 1984. Class, race and gender: domestic workers in South Africa. **Review of African Political Economy**, 27/28:86-108.

GALLINETTI, J. & SLOTH-NIELSEN, J. 2010. Cluster foster care: a panacea for the care of children in the era of HIV/AIDS or an MCQ? **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 46(4):486-495.

GROLNICK, W.S., DECI, E.L. & RYAN, R.M. 1997. Internalization within the family: the self-determination theory perspective. **In**: GRUSEC, J.E. & KUCZYNSKI, L. (eds), **Parenting and children's internalization of values: a handbook of contemporary theory**. New York: Wiley, 135-161.

HALL, K. 2013. Income poverty, unemployment and social grants. **In**: BERRY, L., BIERSTEKER, L., DAWES, A., LAKE, L. & SMITH, C. (eds), **South African Child Gauge 2013**. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

HEYMANN, J., FLORES-MACIAS, F., HAYES, J.A., KENNEDY, M., LAHAIE, C. & EARLE, A. 2009. The impact of migration on the well-being of transnational families: new data from sending communities in Mexico. **Community, Work & Family,** 12(1):91-103.

HILL, C., HOSEGOOD, V. & NEWELL, M. 2008. Children's care and living arrangements in a high HIV prevalence area in rural South Africa. **Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies: An International Interdisciplinary Journal for Research, Policy and Care,** 3(1):65-77.

HÖLSCHER, D., KASIRAM, M. & SATHIPARSAD, R. 2009. "Deserving" children, "Undeserving" mothers? Multiple perspectives on the Child Support Grant. **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 45(1):11-26.

HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, P. & AVILA, E. 1997. "I'm here, but I'm there": the meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood. **Gender and Society**, 11(5):548-571.

HOSEGOOD, V., McGRATH, N., HERBSTA, K. & TIMÆUS, M. 2004. The impact of adult mortality on household dissolution and migration in rural South Africa. **AIDS**, 18:1585-1590.

ILLANES, J.C. 2010. Migrant mothers and divided homes: perceptions of immigrant peruvian women about motherhood. **Journal of Comparative Family Studies – Transnational Families in the South**, 41(2):205-224.

KIELTY, S. 2008. Working hard to resist a 'bad mother' label. **Qualitative Social Work**, 7(3):363-379.

KHUNOU, G. 2008. Paying your way and playing with the girls. **South African Labour Bulletin**, 31(5):48-50.

586

KHUNOU, G. 2006. Fathers don't stand a chance: experiences of custody, access and maintenance. **In**: RICHTER, L. & MORRELL, R. (eds), **Baba: men and fatherhood in South Africa**. Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 265-277.

LANGA, M. 2010. Adolescent boys' talk about absent fathers. **Journal of Psychology in Africa**, 20(4):519-526.

MADZIVA, R. & ZONTINI, E. 2012. Transnational mothering and forced migration: understanding the experiences of Zimbabwean mothers in the UK. **European Journal of Women's Studies**, 19(4):428-443.

McEWEN, H., KANNEMEYER, C. & WOOLARD, I. 2009. Social assistance grants: analysis of the NIDS Wave 1 Dataset. **National Income Dynamics Study: Discussion Paper**, No. 10.

McLOYD, V.C. 1990. The impact of economic hardship on Black families and children: psychological distress, parenting, and socio-emotional development. **Child Development**, 61:311-346.

MEINTJES, H., HALL, K. & SAMBU, W. 2015. Demography of South Africa's children. **In**: DE LANNOY, A., SWARTZ, S., LAKE, L. & SMITH, C. (eds), **South African Child Gauge 2015**. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

MILLMAN, H.L. 2013. Mothering from afar: conceptualizing transnational motherhood. **Totem: The University Of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology**, 21(1):72-82.

MKHIZE, N. 2006. African traditions and the social, economic and moral dimensions of fatherhood. **In**: RICHTER, L. & MORRELL, R. (eds), **Baba: men and fatherhood in South Africa**. Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 183-196.

MONTGOMERY, C.M., HOSEGOOD, V., BUSZA, J. & TIMÆUS, I.M. 2006. Men's involvement in the South African family: engendering change in the AIDS era. **Social Science and Medicine**, 62:2411-2419.

NATRASS, N. 2006. Disability and welfare in South Africa's age of unemployment and AIDS. **In**: SOUTHALL, R. & DANIEL, J. (eds), **The State of the Nation, 2007**. Pretoria: HSRC.

NKOSI, B. & DANIELS, P. 2007. Family strengths. **Marriage and Family Review**, 41(1-2):12-26.

NDUNA, M. & JEWKES, R. 2011. Undisclosed paternal identity in narratives of distress among young people in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. **Journal of Child and Family Studies**, 20(3):303-310.

NDUNA, M., KASESE-HARA, M., NDEBELE, M. & PILLAY, N. 2011. Prevalence and characteristics of unresolved paternal identity in families of a South African community. **Journal of Psychology in Africa**, 21(4):589-594.

ODURO, A.D. 2010. Formal and informal social protection in Sub-Saharan Africa. Paper Prepared For The ERD 2010. Final Report.

PADAYACHEE, V. 2005. The South African Economy. **Social Research**, 72(3):549-580.

PANTEA, M. 2011. Young people's perspectives on changing families' dynamics of power in the context of parental migration. **Young**, 19(4):375-395.

PADI, T., NDUNA, M., KHUNOU, G. & KHOLOPANE, P. 2014. Defining absent, unknown and undisclosed fathers in South Africa. **South African Review of Sociology**, 45(2):44-59.

PARREÑAS, R.S. 2008. Transnational fathering: gendered conflicts, distant disciplining and emotional gaps. **Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies**, 34(7):1057-1072.

PARREÑAS, R.S. 2001. **Servants of globalization: women migration and domestic work**. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

POSEL, D. 2010. Households and labour migration in post-apartheid South Africa. **Journal of Studies on the Economy and Econometrics**, 34(3):129-141.

RABE, M. 2007. My children, your children, our children? Fathers, female partners and household structures. **South African Review Of Sociology**, 38(2):161-175.

RAMPHELE, M. 2006. Migrancy, family dissolution and fatherhood. **In**: RICHTER, L. & MORRELL, R. (eds), **Baba: men and fatherhood in South Africa**. Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 73-81.

REHEL, E.M. 2014. Paternity leave, gender, and parenting. **Gender & Society**, 28(1):110-132.

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA. 1997. **Basic Conditions of Employment Act**. Act no 75 of 1997. Pretoria: Government Printers.

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA. 2005. Department of Social Development. **Children's Act No 38 of 2005**. Government Gazette Vol 492. No. 28944. Cape Town.

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA. 2012. **Draft White Paper on Families**. Department of Social Development.

RICHTER, L., CHIKOVORE, J. & MAKUSHA, T. 2010. The status of fatherhood and fathering in South Africa. **Childhood Education**, 86(6):360-365.

RICHTER, L. & MORRELL, M. (eds). 2006. **Baba: men and fatherhood in South Africa**. Pretoria: Human Science Research Council.

RICHTER, L.M. & DAWES, A.R. 2008. Child abuse in South Africa: rights and wrongs. **Child Abuse Review**, 17:79-93.

RUSSELL, M. 2008. Are urban black families nuclear? A comparative study of Black and White South African family norms. **Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies**, 29(2):153-176.

SAMSON, S., LEE, U., NDLEBE, A., MacQUENE, K., VAN NIEKERK, I., GANDHI, V., HARIGAYA, T. & ABRAHAMS, C. 2004. **The social and economic impact of**

South Africa's social security system. Cape Town: Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI).

SCHATZ, E. & OGUNMEFUN, C. 2007. Caring and contributing: the role of older women in rural South African multi-generational households in the HIV/AIDS era. **World Development**, 35(8):1390-1403.

SCHATZ, E.J. 2007. "Taking care of my own blood": older women's relationships to their Households in rural South Africa. **Scandinavian Journal Public Health Supplement**, 69:147-154.

SEWPAUL, V. 2013a. Neoliberalism and Social Work in South Africa, **Critical and Radical Social Work**, 1(1):15-30.

SEWPAUL, V. 2013b. Inscribed in our blood: challenging the ideology of sexism and racism. **Affilia**, 28(2):116-125.

SIQWANA-NDULO, N. 1998. Rural African family structure in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. **Journal of Comparative Family Studies**, 29(2):407-417.

SMIT, R. 2001. The impact of labor migration on African families in South Africa: yesterday and today. **Journal of Comparative Family Studies**, 32(4):533-548.

SMIT, R. 2002. The changing role of the husband/father in the dual-earner family in South Africa. **Journal of Comparative Family Studies**, 33(3):401-415.

STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA. 2014. **General Household Survey 2013**. Pretoria.

STEWART, S.D. 1999. Disneyland dads, disneyland moms? How nonresident parents spend time with absent children. **Journal of Family Issues**, 20(4):539-556.

TRIEGAARDT, J. 2009. Pursuing a Social Development Agenda in the context of globalisation: a South African perspective. **Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk**, 45(1):1-10.

VAN BREDA, A. 1999. Developing resilience to routine separations: an occupational social work intervention. **Families in Society**, 80(6):597-605.

WARD, C., MAKUSHA, T. & BRAY, R. 2015. Parenting, power and young people in South Africa: what are the connections? **In**: DE LANNOY, A., SWARTZ, S., LAKE, L. & SMITH, C. (eds), **South African Child Gauge 2015**. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

WOODCOCK, J. 2003. The social work assessment of parenting: an exploration. **British Journal of Social Work**, 33(1):87-106.

Ms Boitumelo Khothatso Seepamore, Department of Social Work, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban Howard College, Durban, South Africa.