

The Impact of Social Assistance Programmes on Poor Households in South Africa: A Case of Child Support Grant Policy at Mamelodi

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Abstract: This paper aims to demonstrate the significance of providing social assistance, particularly the CSG, to poor households. The research's objective is to assess the impact that the CSG has on poor households. A mixed methods research design was applied. The study administered an online survey to 174 CSG beneficiaries in Mamelodi, Gauteng Province in South Africa. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with three key officials from the South African Social Security Agency local office in Mamelodi. Data was supplemented by research publication, including journal articles and research reports. The paper provides empirical insights on the impact that the CSG has on poor households. It indicates that 83% of households are of the view that they would be worse off without the provision of the CSG. Evidence from the literature and research data reflects the CSG to have positive effects on children's health, education and schooling, and provides women empowerment. Furthermore, the results illustrate that the grant is utilised on basic children's needs such as diapers, food, and school related expenses for instance, uniform, transportation fare and lunch. The limitations of this study encompassed the prevalence of Covid-19; thus, an online survey was administered in collecting data from the research participants. Consequently, the request to participate in the study was at times met with scepticism and seldomly, rejection. Furthermore, due to familiarity with technology, a majority of the research participants were 40 years old and below, conducting the survey in person might have included additional older persons who possibly could have had differing viewpoints. The paper includes implications for the continued provision of the CSG. Finally, this paper fulfils an identified need to illustrate not only the significance, but also the relevance of the CSG in reducing child poverty.

Keywords: Child support grant, Poverty alleviation, Social assistance, Social policy

1. Introduction

Programmes that are of social assistance in nature, such as SA's CSG are designed with the aim of alleviating child poverty in poor households. Social assistance refers to the provision of material support from the government to citizens who battle to sustain themselves. This support is provided through cash transfers/in-kind or a combination thereof (Delany et al., 2016). In-kind support consists of benefits that are not of cash but rather goods and services such as housing and education (Kennedy, 2013) whereas cash transfers signify receiving money directly from the government. The CSG is paid out in cash to beneficiaries. Several other States have also introduced cash transfer programmes as a mechanism for combatting poverty. According to Delany et al., (2016), 67% of countries in the world had at a minimum one cash transfer programme in 2015. Furthermore, the authors indicate that 1.9 billion people in developing countries are dependent on non-contributory cash transfer programmes with Africa having more than 40 countries making use of unconditional cash transfers.

Without the provision of social assistance such as the CSG, many poor households will struggle for survival and will be confronted with all consequences linked to child poverty such as malnutrition, illnesses, and poor school attendance. Therefore, to address the issue of child poverty, government must continue to provide social protection to those in need in the form of the CSG, and where possible, enhance it and complement this with other basic services such as healthcare and education. The current paper begins by providing a background to the CSG policy and its impact on poor households. The methodological approach is presented next. The analysis, interpretation, and findings of the study are then outlined. Finally, the conclusion and recommendations on the study are provided.

2. South Africa's Child Support Grant (CSG) Policy

Following the Apartheid era, new laws were introduced in South Africa that would promote equality and seek to redress past imbalances.

A Lund Committee was commissioned to conduct an assessment on social welfare especially with regard to black people. The recommendation from the committee was that there should be a CSG which all eligible children should have access to. The CSG was thus implemented in April 1998 (Xaba, 2016). The intention of the CSG is to reduce child poverty (Khosa & Kaseke, 2017) by supplementing household income (Delany et al., 2008). The grant is paid out to beneficiaries using a cash transfer method (Moodley & Slijper, 2016) and is unconditional as beneficiaries are not expected to alter their behaviour such as expected with conditional cash transfers (Delany et al., 2016). Like many government programmes which develop overtime, incremental changes have been applied in the administration of the CSG over the years. The amount of the grant was initially R100 monthly when the programme commenced in April 1998 (Gomersall, 2013) and it later amounted to R460 monthly as from April 2021 (SASSA, 2021). The age threshold of the CSG also increased from 7 years in 1998 to 18 years in 2012 (Gomersall, 2013).

The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) administers the CSG. In the 2019/2020 financial year, SASSA administered the CSG to approximately 12.7 million children (SASSA Annual Report, 2019/20) which represents 60% of the children's population (Shung-King et al., 2019). What is concerning is that 50% of CSG caregivers reside in households where not a single person is employed (PSPPD, 2017). This figure reflects South Africa's challenge with high rates of unemployment, currently (July 2021), SA's unemployment rate sits at 32.6% and child poverty is said to be linked to adult unemployment (Grinspun & Nyokangi, 2016:24).

3. The Impact of South Africa's Child Support Grant on Poor Households in Mamelodi

The section below demonstrates the significance of providing the CSG to poor households.

3.1 Poverty Alleviation

The CSG contributes to poverty alleviation. Barrientos and DeJong (2006) concur that cash transfer programmes such as the CSG are effective tools in reducing child poverty, however, cash transfer programmes need to be complemented by basic services, for example, water, shelter, basic

healthcare, transport, and education. Therefore, the grant on its own is not strong enough to combat poverty. UNICEF (2015) also cites programmes that would promote access to basic services as an important part of social protection intervention. Barrientos (2015) further states that reducing or eliminating costs of basic services assists with poverty reduction. Cash programmes such as the CSG have been said to reduce the number of poor people as well as income inequality (Delany et al., 2016). The provision of the CSG thus reduces income inequality and levels of poverty in SA. There is a vast consensus regarding the provision of CSG alleviating poverty. Tanga and Gutura (2013) deem the CSG as a successful government programme. Xaba (2016) also posits that the CSG alleviates child poverty. Grinspun (2016) states that the CSG is the most successful of all social grants considering its targeting and coverage and that albeit it is not the first policy preference for eradicating poverty, it helps in the absence of employment. Furthermore, the lockdown restrictions that have been implemented in SA during the Covid-19 period have had negative effects on the poor. In this regard, the government topped up the amount of the CSG with R300 in the month of May 2020. Following that, from June 2020 to October 2020, the government took a decision to rather provide R500 to each CSG caregiver (Köhler & Bhorat, 2020).

3.2 Improvement in Children's Health

The CSG contributes positively to the health of children. The previous section indicated that basic services such as healthcare were essential for alleviating poverty. South Africa's Constitution states that "every child has the right to basic health care services". Studies indicate that when eligible children receive the CSG between 0-2 years, it makes it simpler for their growth to be monitored and their likelihood of sickness is lower compared to those who receive the CSG after the age of 2 (DSD, SASSA & UNICEF, 2012). Furthermore, a study by UNICEF (2015) concurs that children's likelihood of illness is significantly reduced when they are enrolled for the CSG in the first two years of their lives. This period of a child's life is imperative for monitoring their growth as this is when they are at a greater risk of growth faltering, a case where the child's weight does not coincide with their age and sex. Failing to monitor a child's growth comes with the risk of them developing stunting which could be irreversible and affect them their entire lifetime (Grinspun, 2016).

Children from impoverished backgrounds are more prone to health issues such as malnutrition and limited access to healthcare services (Delany et al., 2016). Furthermore, according to the Taylor Committee (2002), disability tends to be common among poor people due to several reasons such as not having adequate nutrients owing to lack of food and the inability to access basic healthcare. The CSG, *inter alia*, is accredited to addressing such issues. For instance, the CSG provides opportunity for caregivers to take their children to clinics for immunization, check-ups as well as when they are ill. It also makes provision for purchases of medicines (UNICEF, 2015).

Additionally, the existence of the grant allows for the caregiver to provide food for their dependents which is significant when it comes to health. Through the grant, caregivers have reported to purchasing more and different kinds of food with hunger subsequently decreased (Grinspun, 2016). The CSG therefore improves children's nutrition (Mudzingiri et al., 2016). However, Manley & Slavchevska (2018) indicate that cash transfer programmes such as the CSG do not yield enough evidence to prove that nutrition is improved due to receipt thereof, they state that an array of other issues must be considered as nutrition is not only based on diet. Having clean water, residing in a hygienic environment, and having healthcare are among issues for consideration pertaining to nutrition. Furthermore, Zembe-Mkabile et al. (2015) state that the grant does not sufficiently provide greater dietary diversity. The authors are of the view that the CSG improves children's nutrition, evidence illustrates that caregivers purchase larger quantities of food. It is important to note that a single type of food, regardless of quantity, can have several nutrients in it thus positively impacting on a child's body. Any amount of food purchased with the CSG is certain to make a difference as opposed to not having money to purchase at all.

3.3 Better Quality Education

In the previous sections, education was identified as one of the imperative basic services in alleviating poverty. South Africa's Constitution states that "everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education". The CSG is associated with good outcomes pertaining to the education of recipients, especially on school enrolment, attendance, and schooling (Plagerson & Ulriksen, 2016).

Caregivers express that the CSG is utilized for school related activities such as transportation costs, school fees and school uniform (DSD, SASSA & UNICEF, 2011). Additionally, the CSG enables caregivers to provide food for their children prior going to school and for lunch in other instances. Hunger is reduced and greater attendance in schools is recorded (Xaba, 2016). A study by Patel et al. (2013) revealed that 100% of CSG children who were of school-going age regularly attended school and 74% of them had never failed a grade. The CSG also contributes to decreasing the probability of a pupil repeating a grade due to being present at school with increased concentration levels as a result of having had received a meal (Coetzee, 2014). A study conducted by UNICEF (2015) found that children who received the CSG from birth were expected to perform better in their studies compared to their peers who were enrolled at 6 years old.

3.4 Empowerment of Women

Most of the CSG caregivers are females (Twine et al., 2007) and (Delany et al., 2008). Women in SA, particularly those in female headed households, are one of the most susceptible groups to poverty. According to The World Bank (2018:xxii), the likelihood of households headed by females falling into poverty is 10% while the prospective of coming out of poverty is only 2%. The provision of the grant thus provides empowerment to these women (Patel & Plagerson, 2016) and assists with keeping them out of poverty. In the past, women exclusively depended on their male counterparts for money and receiving the CSG has altered those social dynamics. It is reported that women who receive the CSG make key financial decisions in their households (Patel et al., 2013). Increasingly, cases of men requesting money from women are being reported, for instance, for airtime or cigarettes. Women are therefore in better positions than they previously were as they can either provide or withhold the cash requested from them by their partners (Granlund & Hochfeld, 2019). This is a positive outcome for women considering that they are one of the groups that are most susceptible to poverty.

Some women are able to plan for the future with the aid of the CSG. Plagerson & Ulriksen (2016) revealed that some caregivers were saving and investing the CSG, for instance, by partaking in stokvel activities (an informal saving scheme). Additionally, the CSG leads women to having a sense of dignity in

their community as they too can assist in times of need and earn respect on that basis (Granlund & Hochfeld, 2019). Delany et al., (2016) also associate social grants with human dignity. Society tends to pass judgement to individuals based on what they have or do not have. By receiving the CSG, some women finally feel valued by their community given their ability, for example, to contribute financially when there is a local fundraising or any community event. The CSG enhances relations between children and caregivers. CSG Caregivers are more likely to partake in childcare activities than non-CSG beneficiaries (Patel et al., 2013). The financial independence that females gain through the grant positively impacts the child as reports indicate that the child will experience less health-related problems and that the caregiver will be more present, for example, by playing or walking the child to school (Patel et al., 2015).

4. Methodological Approach

4.1 Research Design

According to Mukherjee (2019), the purpose of a research design is to provide a framework for the various tasks that are undertaken in the research process. A descriptive research design was applied in conducting the study. The outcomes arrived at from assessing the impact that the CSG policy has on poor households were described using descriptive techniques. The mixed method approach was employed in conducting the research study. This was conducted through an online survey, face-to-face interviews, and document analysis. The combination of these data collection methods fit with the mixed methods approach as the survey represents an aspect of both quantitative and qualitative approach while the interview and document analysis represent that of the qualitative approach. Daniel & Harland (2019) indicate that interviews combined with surveys are a typical example of a mixed method approach. The selected research design was suitable to address the research question of *'what impact does the CSG have on poor households?'* as employed data collection instruments, outlined below, were able to generate appropriate responses to this question.

4.2 Population

The target population for the study consisted of beneficiaries of the CSG who reside in the Mamelodi

township which is situated in the City of Tshwane Municipality in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The township is demarcated into 54 sub-places with an area size of 45.19 km² (Frith:n.d.). Data from the 2011 census indicated Mamelodi to have a population of 334 577 residents with 110 703 households (STATS SA, 2011). Out of the township's 54 sub-places, Mamelodi Sixteens was the studied area for the purpose of this study. There are 912 households in Mamelodi Sixteens with 3,422 residents in an area of 0.21 km² (Frith:n.d.). The other target population consisted of officials from the SASSA local office in Mamelodi. Information received from the local office in Mamelodi was that the office had a population of 19 officials.

4.3 Sampling

The snowball sampling technique was employed in selecting the survey research participants from Mamelodi. The snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that is made use of when it is difficult to locate members of the population. The snowball sampling technique entails collecting data from the few members of the population that the researcher finds, thereafter, the researcher requests those few members to refer him/her to others who share similar characteristics and who too are in turn requested of the same task and so forth. The sample thus accumulates as each study subject directs the researcher to other study subjects (Babbie, 2008).

Due to lockdown restrictions because of the Covid-19 global pandemic, this sampling method was relevant for the study as the researcher would have otherwise found it difficult to locate research participants at a time where field research was limited. Monette et al., (2010) state that the snowball sampling technique is useful when researching topics that are sensitive. There is a stigma attached to receiving a social grant, therefore, making use of referrals assisted the researcher in acquiring a sample that would open-up. There are 912 households in Mamelodi Sixteens and 20% of that figure was taken as the population. Therefore, a total of 182 (n) households were selected. The first research participant was the researcher's former colleague's friend who resided in Mamelodi Sixteens and was a CSG beneficiary. This first participant was requested to self-administer the survey as well as refer the researcher to other CSG beneficiaries that they knew from the same area. The researcher

requested the additional research participants to also refer to other CSG beneficiaries that they knew from the same area. This was done until a sample size of 182 was reached. 174 responses were valid and the remaining 8 were duplications.

Purposive sampling was used in drawing a sample from SASSA officials at the local office in Mamelodi. Purposive sampling belongs under non-probability sampling and entails the researcher selecting specific units founded on specific purpose rather than a random one. Participants chosen using this method are chosen because they are believed to hold information relevant to the topic being studied (Teddle & Yu, 2007). The sample from the officials in Mamelodi consisted of staff members who are administrators of the CSG, which meant that they directly dealt with the CSG beneficiaries. The administration unit has a population of 19 employees, interviewing all 19 officials would have been beneficial to the study. However, due to Covid-19, 3 key staff members.

4.4 Data Collection

An online survey was designed for the study and was administered to 174 CSG beneficiaries residing in Mamelodi. Additionally, in person interviews took place with three key officials from the SASSA local office in Mamelodi.

5. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this study is based on the following themes: a) Child support and poverty

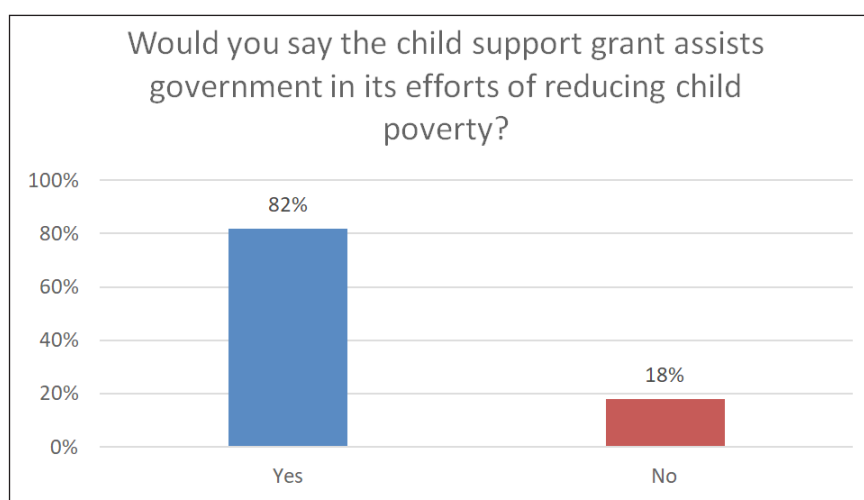
alleviation, b) Child Support Grant pertaining to the health of children, c) Child Support Grant in relation to education/schooling, d) Child Support Grant pertaining to women empowerment, e) Child Support Grant and its impact on poor households.

5.1 Child Support Grant and Poverty Alleviation

Respondents were to respond as to whether they think CSG helps the government in reducing poverty. Figure 1 below shows the responses.

82% of the research participants indicated that the CSG assisted the government in its efforts of reducing child poverty while 18% disagreed. The main reason why 18% of the respondents disagreed was that the amount of the grant was said to be insufficient, these respondents therefore focused on their perceived low value of the grant rather than to respond to the question on whether the amount currently received alleviated child poverty or not. The study ultimately found that the CSG does in fact, reduce child poverty, as per its intended purpose, given that the majority (82%) of the respondents agreed to this. The finding coincides with the literature as several authors deemed the CSG to be a successful poverty alleviation programme. Furthermore, the literature indicates that additional cash transfers were provided to CSG households during Covid-19 as government is aware of the impact that such have on poor households. The finding implies that the support from the government makes a significant difference in poor households.

Figure 1: CSG and Child Poverty Alleviation



Source: Author

5.2 Child Support Grant Pertaining to the Health of Children

Respondents were required to tell if they are of opinion that CSG improves children's health. Figure 2 below shows responses.

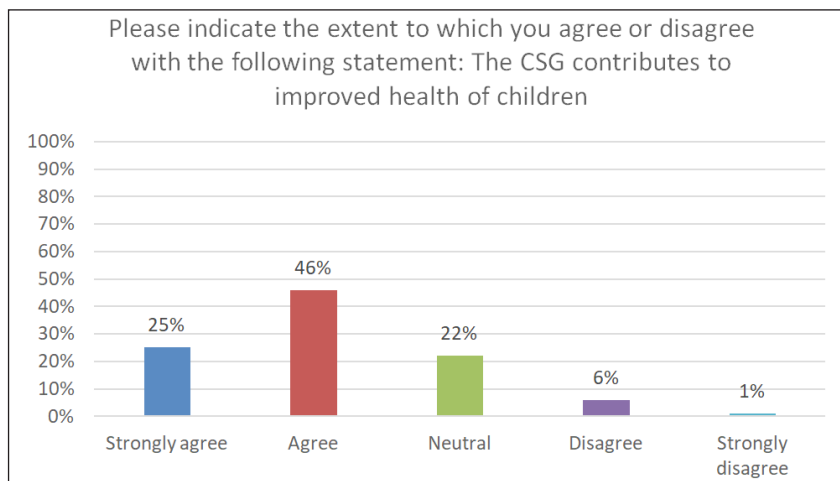
Pertaining to the statement that the CSG contributes to improved health of children, the majority (46%) of the respondents agreed with the statement followed by 25% who strongly agreed. 22% were neutral to the statement while 6% disagreed and only 1% strongly disagreed. The literature review suggests that children living in poverty are more prone to health issues such as undernourishment, limited access to healthcare services and disabilities. The study found that the CSG assists in closing

this gap as a cumulative 71% of the research participants indicated the CSG to improve their children's health. Groceries and baby food were one of the main items purchased. The provision of such helps with keeping children healthy as it assists in providing nutrition and reducing hunger as identified in the literature review. The finding implies that providing the CSG to eligible children assists with preventing, to some extent, illnesses and promotes good health.

5.3 Child Support Grant in Relation to Education/Schooling

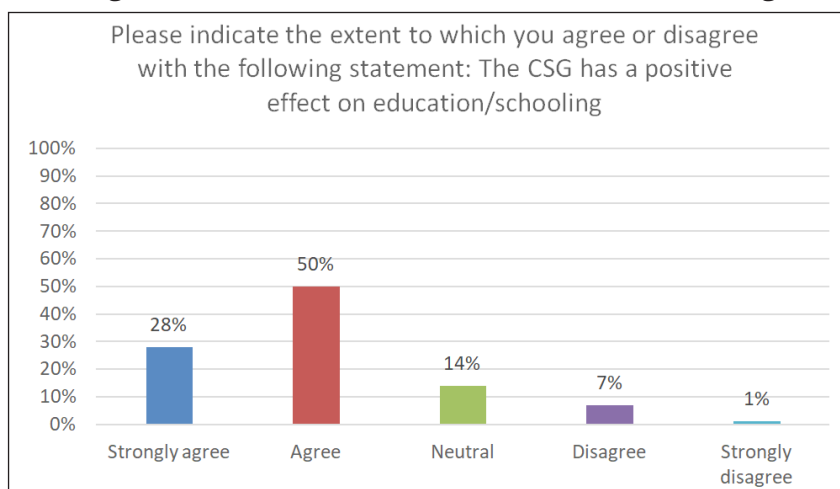
Respondents were required to tell if they are of opinion that CSG has positive effect on education of the poor households. Figure 3 below show responses.

Figure 2: CSG Pertaining to the Health of Children



Source: Author

Figure 3: The CSG in Relation to Education/Schooling



Source: Author

Regarding the statement of the CSG having a positive impact on education/schooling, most of the respondents (50%) agreed with the statement followed by 28% who strongly agreed. 14% were neutral to the statement while 7% disagreed and only 1% strongly disagreed. Findings revealed that most of the respondents, 78%, were of the view that the CSG had a positive effect on education/schooling. Some caregivers indicated that they utilised the CSG to cater for school related expenses such as fees, school uniform, transportation fare, and lunch. The literature view supports the study's research findings as it reflects that the existence of the CSG has several positive effects pertaining to education such as improved school enrolment and attendance. Moreover, it is reported that 74% of children who are CSG recipients had never failed any grade, this is because they have a good attendance record at school and are able to concentrate in class considering that the grant also provides food for them. This finding implies that eligible children who are CSG recipients are more likely to acquire an education and complete schooling compared to their counterparts who are not in receipt of the grant.

5.4 Child Support Grant Pertaining to Women Empowerment

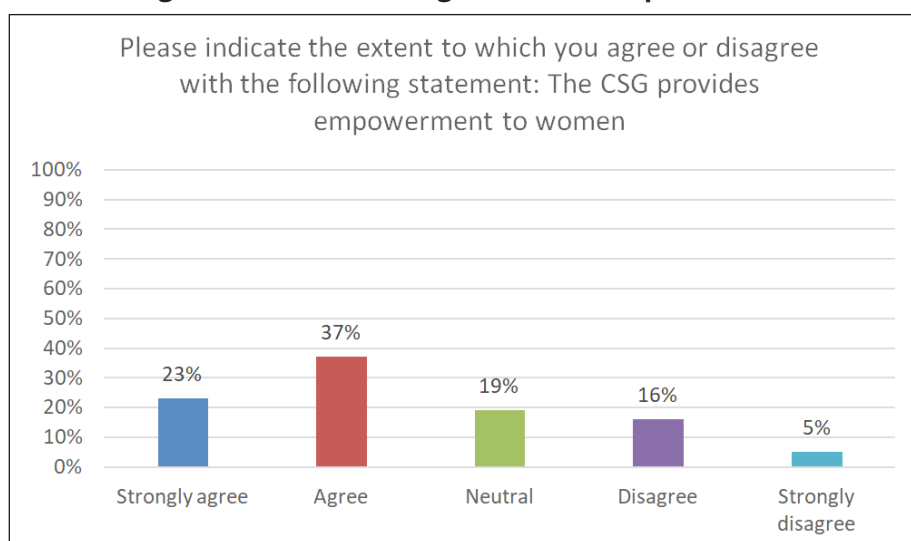
Respondents were required to respond to as to whether they are of the view that CSG provides empowerment to women. Figure 4 below show the results.

Concerning the statement that the CSG provides empowerment to women, the majority (37%) of the respondents agreed with the statement followed by 23% who strongly agreed. 19% were neutral to the statement while 16% disagreed and only 5% strongly disagreed. The study found that a majority of CSG caregivers are women. 90% of the research respondents in the survey study were mothers. Therefore, the CSG is more impactful on women, thus the study further found that the grant contributes to empowering women. Women, particularly those in female headed households are said to be one of the most susceptible groups to poverty in the literature review. The study found that the CSG empowered women with making key financial decisions in the household. Additionally, some women planned for the future with the aid of the CSG. Furthermore, women who receive the CSG were more likely to participate in recreational activities in comparison to their counterparts. Moreover, the study found that the CSG provided women with a sense of dignity given that they had financial means to care for their families and contribute in their communities. These findings imply that women can also participate in economic activity and contribute to economic growth.

5.5 Child Support Grant and its Impact on Poor Households

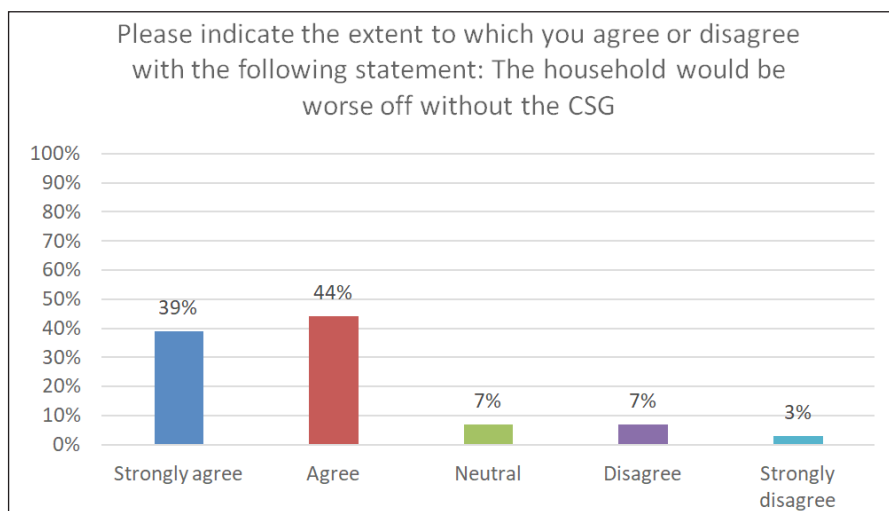
The respondents were required to tell if they are of the opinion that poor households will be worse off without CSG. Figure 5 on the following page provides results.

Figure 4: CSG Pertaining to Women Empowerment



Source: Author

Figure 5: Impact of the CSG on the Household



Source: Author

Pertaining to the statement that the household would be worse off without the CSG, the majority (44%) of the respondents agreed with the statement. 39% strongly agreed, 7% were neutral to the statement while 7% disagreed and only 3% strongly disagreed. 83% of the research respondents were therefore of the view that they would be worse off without the CSG. Therefore, this supports the finding of a cumulative 82% of the research respondents who indicated that poverty was indeed alleviated by the CSG thus having a positive impact on poor households.

5.6 Improvements on Social Grant Applications at SASSA

Through interviews, the study found that applications for the CSG may be made using a SASSA online portal, although this was not known by all caregivers given that it was a relatively new feature having been only introduced on 14 September 2020 (The Republic of South Africa, 2020). The online feature assists officials with managing long queues, as well as applicants from being delayed by the same queues. The study also found that the application process of the CSG had been reduced to one-day turnaround time thus 77% of the respondents, combined, deemed the application process to be easy or satisfactory. Furthermore, it was discovered that applicants no longer had to travel to police stations to have their documents certified as a Commissioner's office was available at the SASSA local office for such an activity. The improved application processes thus imply that the uptake of the CSG is improved.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper aimed to illustrate the significance of providing social assistance, particularly the CSG, to poor households. The aim of the research was to assess the impact that the CSG has on poor households. The mixed method research design was employed in conducting the study. An online survey was administered to 174 CSG caregivers in Mamelodi and 3 face to face interviews were conducted with key SASSA officials from the local office in Mamelodi. The study's contribution is that it makes a strong case for the continued provision of the CSG given the evident positive impact that it has on poor families, especially in the period of Covid-19 where lockdowns affect them the most.

Further research should be conducted on measures that should be taken to empower CSG caregivers with employment opportunities so that they may provide for their families without the assistance of the CSG. This would reduce the government's burden of providing social assistance and improvements in economic activity would be realised. The study concludes that providing social assistance, such as the CSG, is critical in addressing the challenge of alleviating poverty. It was also revealed that the CSG had long-lasting positive effects in children's health and education. The study also found that women, a group typically exposed to poverty, made up the majority of CSG caregivers thus it was deemed that the grant empowered them. Finally, the study concludes that the CSG is a good programme for alleviating child poverty, however, the overall mission of government

should be to eradicate poverty and evidently, this can be achieved through employment opportunities.

The following recommendations are made:

- Evidence from this study illustrated that the CSG indeed alleviates child poverty. Government should therefore continue with the programme and where possible, enhance it to make it further accessible and impactful.
- Given that the study found the CSG to have positive outcomes on the health of children, the Department of Health should assist with ensuring that eligible parents of newborns apply for the CSG. This can be done by making the CSG application forms available at healthcare facilities such as clinics and hospitals. Furthermore, there should be pamphlets from SASSA on the CSG available at healthcare facilities and regular talks provided by nurses on the importance of swiftly applying for the CSG for those who may be in need of it.
- The study revealed the CSG to have positive effects on schooling. To further assist with this educational aspect, once or twice a year, SASSA should visit public schools and provide a presentation to the parents and teachers about the CSG. This will assist by providing information to parents and improving the take up of the grant. Furthermore, parents can share the same information with the rest of the other members in their communities.
- The CSG was said to provide empowerment to women, however, not all eligible women receive a CSG for their dependents. Therefore, there should be various community programmes promoted where women who are receiving the CSG are to empower other women to receive the grant too by assisting them with all the necessary information pertaining to access.

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