





# Exploring the Policy Environment Deficit Associated with the Care of Children by Grandparents in Libode, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the policy environment associated with the care of children by grandparents, believing that such policies provide guidance, clarity, and accountability of the grandparents-children care. The study utilized a qualitative research approach and a qualitative paradigm. Data collection involved in-depth interviews of 5 social workers from the social development Libode service office and 5 teachers from Zwelakhe Secondary Primary School (SPS) in Libode, Eastern Cape. While empirical findings revealed the absence of a policy to guide family caregiving issues, secondary data also found no specific policy for the care of children by grandparents. The researchers recommend that the government and other child-friendly and elderly-friendly organisations such as NGOs develop specific policies to guide the care of children by their grandparents, provide requisite resources, and provide necessary information on caregiving and available support systems. Conclusively, this study can inform factors that favour or confound the caregiving of children by their grandparents. Secondly, it might help to inform policymakers on the need to buttress some policies that will ensure that requisite resources are provided to the grandparents to adequately meet the care of their grandchildren. Moreover, the study will widen the horizon of literature on the topic under inquiry by bringing new insights into the scholarship.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Eastern Cape province, caregiving of children by their grandparents has become a normal practice.<sup>1</sup> This is not a provincial practice, but in South Africa as a whole, there appears to be a paradigm shift where the majority of the country's children are taken care of by their grandparents, usually their grandmothers.<sup>2</sup> This paper therefore seeks to explore the policy environment deficit

<sup>1</sup> Aseza Soganga, "Challenges Faced by Grandparents Caring for Their Grandchildren in Mdlankomo Location, Libode, Eastern Cape" (University of Fort Hare, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Aseza Soganga and Simon Murote Kang'ethe, "Exploring Reciprocity in Grandparent-Grandchildren Care: The Case of Mdlankomo Location, Libode in the Eastern Cape, South Africa," *Social Work* 59, no. 1 (2023): 99–111.

associated with the care of children by grandparents in Libode, Eastern Cape province, South Africa with the hope of improving the care environment, both in practice and policywise.

According to Williams and Nussbaum, although South Africa has the most admired constitution in the world, the phenomenon of grandparents caring for their grandchildren in South Africa has not attracted requisite policy concern.<sup>3</sup> Disappointingly also, the role of grandparents has not adequately been documented and acknowledged in the South African welfare and care system. There is a great need for the development and implementation of the grandparents-children policies that should strengthen the interventions of children care in the hands of their grandparents. The apparent existing grandparents-children care gaps herald an absence of requisite caregiving gap, and possible failure to implement any other childcare-linked policies making the care practice problematic. The current study seeks to unearth the policy gaps that weaken grandparents' care of their grandchildren. This is with the hope of advocating to the government and other children-caregiving-friendly organizations to strengthen their policy enforcement and implementation.

The South African government's focus on children is provided according to section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa where section 28 (b) provides that a child has a right to family care, parental care, or appropriate care; (c) provides that a child has a right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and other necessities; and (d) provides that a child should be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation.<sup>4</sup>

As the number of grandchildren under the care of grandparents increases, this means that those carers play a vital role and fulfill the requirements of the aforementioned sections of the law for being responsible for the children's care.<sup>5</sup> The unfortunate scenario is that older grandparents do not only take care of but are also expected to provide for all the needs of their grandchildren. This is dire especially when the children's parents cannot do so.<sup>6</sup>

The three prominent services, which were designed by the South African government in the form of cash grants, free health care, and free education are observed to be helpful.<sup>7</sup> However, there are gaps, especially in the implementation of the programmes seeking to promote the enjoyment of these rights.<sup>8</sup> This is especially apparent when the grandparents undertake the responsibility of caring for children despite their limited financial resources or their health challenges. The difficulties they experience in obtaining services add to their stress and a lack of attention to their own needs.<sup>9</sup>

There are good reasons to believe that continuity in care is a constitutive element of children's wellbeing, in particular, continuity in care is essential to their well-being and development.<sup>10</sup> However, to achieve this, it is important for those who formulate and implement national and international policies to adopt grandparent-friendly support programmes to enhance their carer roles. Such social policies should address their health and well-being as carers, by enhancing their resilience in caregiving. This is because grandparents who are successful in carer roles are an investment in the future generations of sub-Saharan Africa and can revert the lives of children who would have had their health and well-being compromised.<sup>11</sup>

In an endeavour to enhance the caregiving of children by older persons, the former South African President, Thabo Mbeki announced the overhaul of the South African retirement funding system in February 2007. He revealed that the new social security system was based on the principle

<sup>3</sup> Angie Williams and Jon F Nussbaum, *Intergenerational Communication across the Life Span* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> South Africa, *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, Act No 108 of 1996* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> S. M. Bejane, E Van Aswegen, and Y Havenga, "Primary Caregivers' Challenges Related to Caring for Children Living with HIV in a Semi-Rural Area in South Africa," *Africa Journal of Nursing and Midwifery* 15, no. 1 (2013): 68–80.

<sup>6</sup> J M Mokone, "Challenges Experienced by Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: An Exploratory Study," *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 42, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>7</sup> B. J. Clements et al., *Equality and Fiscal Policy* (Washington: International Monetary Fund, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Bejane, Van Aswegen, and Havenga, "Primary Caregivers' Challenges Related to Caring for Children Living with HIV in a Semi-Rural Area in South Africa."

<sup>9</sup> Phillip McCallion and Matthew Janicki, *Grandparents as Carers of Children with Disabilities: Facing the Challenges* (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Carolyn Meggitt and Tina Bruce, *NCFE CACHE Level 3 Child Care and Education (Early Years Educator)* (Hodder Education, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> David W Shwalb and Ziarat Hossain, *Grandparents in Cultural Context* (Routledge New York, NY, 2018).

of social solidarity among other factors.<sup>12</sup> However, there is still a great need for support for grandparents with their caregiving duties and in their efforts to obtain vital social and health resources. Such policies may help to reduce stressors and improve the health and well-being of members of this growing caregiving population. Importantly also, grandparent caregivers have a right to live with dignity. This is fostered in the preamble for the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that “the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”<sup>13</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many factors besetting the caregiving of children by grandparents. Kang'ethe denotes that caring for children by older grandparents involves a constellation of challenges.<sup>14</sup> Because grandparents are caring for children in different situations such as parental death, incarceration, military employment, substance abuse, domestic violence, or divorce.<sup>15</sup> Many older people have unfairly been forced to care, sometimes involuntarily, which is sometimes too difficult for them to bear with the possibility that the caregiving may lead them to death before time. They do this without any other choice as these grandchildren could be orphans whose both or the only known biological parent is dead, or they could have relocated to other areas for economic needs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, grandparents have been taking care of their grandchildren even when their parents are still alive.<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, hugely, grandparents may have full custody of their grandchildren, particularly after the death of the parents. But this is especially true in Southern Africa, given the high mortality rates emanating from the HIV disease among younger child-bearing parents.<sup>17</sup> This leaves the grandparents as the only individuals forming a shoulder for these grandchildren to lean on.<sup>18</sup>

### Health hazards

Regarding health hazards, the evidence suggests that grandparents who undertake intensive grandparenting roles, in particular the custodial carers for grandchildren are often among the most disadvantaged and experience the poorest health status.<sup>19</sup> The role confusion and stress many grandparents experience are linked to their parenting skills. This is because of their aging bodies that need to relax and not be stressed. Further, caregiving by grandparents also carries some significant pangs of stigma. This exacerbates the stress levels of especially the older grandparents doing caregiving.<sup>20</sup> This full-time responsibility has proven to be strenuous to older caregivers.

### Aging

Regarding aging, the negative health outcomes experienced by carers due to aging may impact their ability to provide paramount care for children.<sup>21</sup> The physical health of carers is a main factor affecting their coping and adjustment, where deteriorations in health may disturb caregivers' ability to manage

<sup>12</sup> Nicoli Nattrass, “AIDS and the Scientific Governance of Medicine in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *African Affairs* 107, no. 427 (2008): 157–76.

<sup>13</sup> Tina L Peterson, “Changes in Health Perceptions among Older Grandparents Raising Adolescent Grandchildren,” *Social Work in Public Health* 32, no. 6 (2017): 394–406.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Kangethe, “Occupational Care Giving Conditions and Human Rights: A Study of Elderly Caregivers in Botswana,” *Indian Journal of Palliative Care* 16, no. 2 (2010): 79.

<sup>15</sup> Jared R Anderson and William L Turner, “When Caregivers Are in Need of Care: African-American Caregivers' Preferences for Their Own Later Life Care,” *Journal of Aging Studies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 65–73.

<sup>16</sup> Sheila Shaibu, “Experiences of Grandmothers Caring for Orphan Grandchildren in Botswana,” *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 45, no. 4 (2013): 363–70.

<sup>17</sup> Evalyne Nyasani, Erna Sterberg, and Helen Smith, “Fostering Children Affected by AIDS in Richards Bay, South Africa: A Qualitative Study of Grandparents' Experiences,” *African Journal of AIDS Research* 8, no. 2 (2009): 181–92.

<sup>18</sup> Susan L Neely-Barnes, J Carolyn Graff, and Gregory Washington, “The Health-Related Quality of Life of Custodial Grandparents,” *Health & Social Work* 35, no. 2 (2010): 87–97.

<sup>19</sup> K. Herlofson et al., “Fatigue in Early Parkinson's Disease. Minor Inconvenience or Major Distress?,” *European Journal of Neurology* 19, no. 7 (2012): 963–68.

<sup>20</sup> B Hayslip and Gregory C Smith, “Resilient Grandparent Caregivers,” *Routledge* 10 (2012): 9780203803905.

<sup>21</sup> Robin L Lumsdaine and Stephanie J C Vermeer, “Retirement Timing of Women and the Role of Care Responsibilities for Grandchildren,” *Demography* 52, no. 2 (2015): 433–54.

the physical and emotional demands of rearing grandchildren.<sup>22</sup> Growing old brings with it several physiological changes, people when they grow old usually find that their endurance has declined relative to what it was 20-30 years earlier; and that their hearing has declined. Age-related vision changes can significantly affect people's ability to function in their environment. Similarly, age-related changes in hearing also have this effect and interfere with people's ability to communicate with others. Hearing loss is especially one well-known normative changes associated with aging.<sup>23</sup> The aging phenomenon and reduced caregiving responsibilities among aging grandparents find support from the aging theory which postulates that organisms have some energy to expend in their lifetime, but changes in the way hormones are produced and used in the human body as aging takes a toll.<sup>24</sup>

### **Caring for the new generation**

Parenting is the process of supporting and promoting physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development starting from when a child is born to adulthood.<sup>25</sup> Regarding caring for the new generation, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, pointed out that grandparents play a significant role in sustaining a healthy family; because caregiving makes older adults make significant shifts in the roles that they hold in their families central to the transition to caregiving.<sup>26</sup> This paradigm shift requires grandparents to become involved with the children's school, typically after the older adults have been disengaged from the school system for many years or have never been there. This, therefore, adds to the stress related to parenting grandchildren.<sup>27</sup>

### **Taking care of children with special needs**

Regarding taking care of children with special needs, it is largely and historically known that African grandparents have raised their grandchildren with a sense of pride and dedication. However, today, grandparents have to contend with increased tasks of taking care of children with special needs. Specifically, in the countries largely affected by HIV/AIDS such as South Africa and Botswana, grandparents are the primary caregivers to the burgeoning HIV/AIDS orphan population.<sup>28</sup> Under the scourge of HIV/AIDS, grandparents face many tragedies: the challenge of losing their children to AIDS-related death that goes with losing the source of economic support; and having to raise grandchildren with paltry or dwindling resources. These challenges are further exacerbated by the state of stigma that caring for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS carries.<sup>29</sup>

### **Social Functioning**

Regarding social functioning, social isolation, and inadequate social support are significant problems for custodial grandparents. Many grandparents report that taking on full-time responsibility for their grandchildren results in social isolation from their age peers.<sup>30</sup> Further, the task of caregiving for their grandchildren may also result in loneliness, and a lack of time and space to socialize and even attend to important socio-cultural processes. Erik Erikson emphasized the concept of generativity in his 7th developmental task in midlife as an important element in human development; and how it significantly

<sup>22</sup> Bert Hayslip Jr, Heidemarie Blumenthal, and Ashley Garner, "Social Support and Grandparent Caregiver Health: One-Year Longitudinal Findings for Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren," *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 70, no. 5 (2015): 804–12.

<sup>23</sup> R.V. Kail and J.C. Cavanaugh, *Grandparents of Children with Disabilities: Theoretical Perspectives of Intergenerational Relationships* (Switzerland: Springer, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Kail and Cavanaugh, *Grandparents of Children with Disabilities: Theoretical Perspectives of Intergenerational Relationships*.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Akinlabi Falana, Festus Olatunji Bada, and Christian Junior Ayodele, "Single-Parent Family Structure, Psychological, Social and Cognitive Development of Children in Ekiti State," *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology* 2, no. 2 (2012): 158–64.

<sup>26</sup> S. Devereux and R. Sabates-Wheeler, "Transformative Social Protection" (Brighton, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Youjung Lee and Lisa V Blitz, "We're GRAND: A Qualitative Design and Development Pilot Project Addressing the Needs and Strengths of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren," *Child & Family Social Work* 21, no. 4 (2016): 381–90.

<sup>28</sup> Shwalb and Hossain, *Grandparents in Cultural Context*.

<sup>29</sup> Daniël Reijer, "Grandparents as Parents: Skipped-Generation Households Coping with Poverty and HIV in Rural Zambia," 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Rebekah Doley et al., "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Investigating Factors Associated with Distress among Custodial Grandparent," *Journal of Family Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015): 101–19.

impacts one's ability to age successfully. He stated that older people should maintain a dignified generative function.<sup>31</sup>

This stage is characterised by a contribution to the next generation usually through having a family. Additionally, the role of grandparents is often a fulfilling one for older adults with clear connections to self-concept and generativity.<sup>32</sup> However, because many grandparents are being forced by different circumstances to care for children, they may feel stagnant, socially inactive, and unproductive. Further, Erikson in his last stage (Integrity vs. despair) mentioned that older persons make sense of their lives, either by having integrity or by embracing a state of desperation. Many grandparents caring for their grandchildren cannot make sense of their lives but they feel shame and guilt related to their children's inability to parent their children; their children abandon and abdicate their parental responsibilities as parents; leaving them to the task that they are not well-equipped to handle.<sup>33</sup>

### Financial constraints

Concerning financial constraints, the biggest stressor is that they are not only taking care of their children but are also expected to provide for all the other needs of their grandchildren.<sup>34</sup> Every parent's wish is for his/ her children to get everything they want and not to experience the hardships they went through. However, the environment's harsh economic situation usually leaves many grandparents financially malnourished. This is because they rely on fixed amounts of money from either child support or foster care grants which are 'inelastic' while inflation in the country has been unrelenting all the time. Therefore, those grandparents who want to adequately care for their grandchildren are disappointed when their financial position hinders their wishes.<sup>35</sup>

### METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative research approach, amid a qualitative paradigm that allowed the exploration of ten participants for their attitudes, perceptions, insights, and thinking about the policy deficit surrounding the care of children by their grandparent caregivers. Design-wise, the study used explorative and descriptive designs but specifically a phenomenological cum case study design. This is because the investigation was carried out on only a few people (case study) and also entailed investigating the lived experiences (phenomenological design) of the grandparent caregivers. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants. This method helped researchers get information from knowledgeable and more experienced participants. To collect data, this study employed a non-probability sampling method, specifically a purposive technique because this method is based on the judgment of the researcher to choose samples with relevant characteristics and samples that are rich in data. The choice of the social workers and teachers can be justified in that both provide services to the children and are deemed knowledgeable about the policy milieu regarding the services rendered to the children, especially the vulnerable ones. In the unit of analysis, the total number of sample participants was ten (10) consisting of 5 social workers and 5 teachers. The researchers respected the significance of the information gathered more than the number of participants interviewed as advised.<sup>36</sup> The study used an interview guide as a data collection instrument where the questions were prepared in English, and the participants gave back their responses in English when they were free from their own paid work. The data collection process was cross-sectional as it was conducted within a short period.

<sup>31</sup> Angela Schoklitsch and Urs Baumann, "Generativity and Aging: A Promising Future Research Topic?," *Journal of Aging Studies* 26, no. 3 (2012): 262–72.

<sup>32</sup> Jordan Soliz et al., "Communication in Grandparent-Grandchild Relationships," *Widening the Family Circle*, 2014, 35–50.

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen Meara, "What's in a Name? Defining and Granting a Legal Status to Grandparents Who Are Informal Primary Caregivers of Their Grandchildren," *Family Court Review* 52, no. 1 (2014): 128–41.

<sup>34</sup> J.R. Kaakinen et al., *Family Health Care Nursing: Theory, Practice and Research*, 5th ed. (Canada: FaDavis Company, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Paul H Harnett, Sharon Dawe, and Melissa Russell, "An Investigation of the Needs of Grandparents Who Are Raising Grandchildren," *Child & Family Social Work* 19, no. 4 (2014): 411–20.

<sup>36</sup> J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015).

## Research Domain and Justification of Choice

The study was conducted in Libode in the Eastern Cape through the assistance of the social development Libode service office social workers and Zwelakhe Secondary Primary School teachers. The researchers consider the domain relevant as the phenomenon of grandparenting is normalized in the study area. Also, most of the children being cared for are either in the foundation phase, intermediate phase, or senior phase, the teachers of Zwelakhe Secondary Primary School were found to be the right ones to shed the light on policy milieu pertaining to the care of the grandchildren by their grandparents.

## Data Analysis

For the presentation of study findings, the researchers used thematic content analysis, which is defined as a set of techniques used to analyze textual data and elucidate themes. Its key characteristic is the systemic process of coding, examining meaning, and providing a description of the social reality through the creation of themes.<sup>37</sup> The study's thematic findings are 3: (1) Poor care predisposition perfidiously affected educational outcomes of the care for grandchildren (2) Insufficient resources especially grants (3) Lack of programmes specifically directed to caregivers because of the absence of the specific policy.

## Ethical Considerations

The principal researcher asked for consent from the Libode service office Manager and the school principal and was then referred to relevant teachers and social workers. The permission was granted but the respondents asked the researcher to write down the questions so that they may reply to them expeditiously without limits because, during working hours, they attend to clients and school periods. The respondents were willing to address the questions and were looking forward to recommendations.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

**Table 1: Biographical information of teachers**

No	Pseudonym	Qualification	Year of experience	programme
1	Teacher No.1	Diploma	8	Foundation
2	Teacher No.2	Diploma	8	Foundation
3	Teacher No.3	Diploma	10	Intermediate
4	Teacher No.4	Degree	4	Intermediate
5	Teacher No.5	Degree	7	Senior

The majority of teachers interviewed had over four (4) years of experience in the education field, which implies that they were well experienced in teaching and learning, as well as assumed they had developed a relationship with learners and children's parents or guardians. They had degrees in education and were therefore qualified, professional teachers. The study assumed they had some understanding of the policy milieu that guided the grandparents.

**Table 2: Biographical information of Social workers**

No	Pseudonym	Qualification	Year of experience	programme
1	Social Worker No.1	Degree	Above 5 years	Administration
2	Social Worker No.2	Degree	Above 5 years	Older persons
3	Social Worker No.3	Degree	7 years	Care and support to families

<sup>37</sup> M.Vaismoradi, and S. Snelgrove, "Theme in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20 no. 3 (2019): 23-34.

4	Social Worker No.4	Degree	4 years	Social relief and distress
5	Social Worker No.5	Degree	4 years	Child & youth care

The majority of the interviewed social workers had between four (4) and seven (7) years of experience in the field. This suggests they were knowledgeable in their field and familiar with the phenomenon under inquiry. Education-wise, they all had a degree in social work, which indicates that they were professionals and fully qualified social workers. They were expected to be knowledgeable enough about the policy milieu of the grandparents' care of the grandchildren.

**Table 3: The Emergent Themes**

No	Thematic findings
1.	Poor care predisposition perfidiously affected educational outcomes of the care for grandchildren.
2.	Lack of programmes specifically directed to caregivers due to the absence of a policy
3.	Insufficient resources especially grants

### **Thematic finding 1: Poor care predisposition perfidiously affected educational outcomes of the care for grandchildren**

The participants revealed that most cared for children due to poor caregiving predisposition were perfidiously affected in their educational outcomes. Some grandparents could not assist in schoolwork, and were overly poor, and unhappy, while some were overwhelmed by the larger number of grandchildren they cared for. On the other hand, some children were also not happy with the quality of care they got from their grandparents. There was a need for the South African government to design a grandparent-grandchildren policy that would cater to the requisite needs of the cared-for children such as education, health services, and provision of support grants to improve the potential and overall well-being of the children, children with special needs, and older persons in the country.<sup>38</sup>

The teachers had the following sentiments:

*"If the child does not eat, or is not clean, those things affect the academic record of a child. Sometimes these grandparents raise over ten children from different mothers (their daughters). They do not get proper care and love, so all those things can affect the mind of a child. The only government programme in schools is the nutrition programme"- (Teacher No.1).*

*"Children especially the young ones are very vocal and they compare themselves with others. So if another child finds that his/her situation is not the same as the other he/she gets frustrated. There should be programmes even in schools to address such cases"- (Teacher No.2).*

*"Those taken care of by their grandparents have a problem with doing homework, late coming, absenteeism and cleanliness. I think the problem is that grandparents are too old to take on some responsibilities such as minding the affairs of the school. Some of them are illiterate so it is difficult for them to help with their homework"- (Teacher No.4).*

### **Thematic finding 2: Lack of programmes specifically directed to caregivers due to the absence of a policy**

The Social workers interviewed found the lack of policy as having a negative impact on service delivery, and in meeting their client needs with excellence because their programmes are not guided by the document specifically designed for different categories of clients. The participants shared the following sentiments:

<sup>38</sup> Claudia Martin, Diego Rodríguez-Pinzón, and Bethany Brown, "Human Rights of Older People," *Universal and Regional Legal Perspectives*, Dordrecht, 2015.

*“There is no policy focusing on family caregivers specifically grandparent caregivers hence you will find that they are not satisfied or fully assisted because they are treated like others with no exceptions”- (Social Worker No.4)*

*“We conduct home visits just like we do to other foster care beneficiaries, not that we conduct it since they are caring for grandchildren, there is no such programme”- (Social Worker No.4).*

*“The department offers counselling to vulnerable groups. If the older person or child is abused emotionally or physically, when the case is reported, social workers conduct home visits to their home and assess living conditions. It then depends on the situation at hand if the older person is found abused. The social worker considers other alternative care maybe family, relatives or elderly home”- (Social Worker No.1)*

*“However, we barely receive these cases, older persons barely visit our service offices, and we assume it is the lack of knowledge and lack of other means to do so such as finances”-(Social Worker No.1).*

### **Thematic finding 3: Insufficient resources especially grants**

The Social workers interviewed revealed that grandparents were struggling financially to meet both their own and those of their grandchildren's needs. The old age pension amount is inadequate. There are also allegations that for those caring for grandchildren while their parents are alive, parents tend to misuse the money and not send it monthly to grandparents.

*“As social workers, we have been receiving complaints concerning (CSG). Some grandparents are complaining that their daughters are misusing the CSG grants and the grandparents have no choice but to use their old age grants to offer care. It is barely enough to meet household needs, both for themselves and their children.”- (Social Worker No.2).*

*“This old age grant cannot cater for the whole household. Grandparents have to buy their medication, pay burial schemes or societal schemes, household needs, children's needs, and pay the debt. This is why there are child support grants meant for each child and unfortunately, there are no other means of support without grants and social relief of distress - (Social Worker 3).*

Indeed, grandparents engaged in grandchildren caregiving face dire financial challenges that make caregiving both an arduous and an uphill task.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Thematic finding 1: Poor care predisposition perfidiously affected educational outcomes of the care for grandchildren**

The findings of this study revealed that grandparents are not conversant with documents required at school, how to assist children with school tasks, and also give guidance and support because of their age and low level of education. The findings also revealed that learner-parent school interaction is vital, grandparents are old to support, assist with school tasks, and attend school meetings. This implies that, in terms of education, they do not contribute towards the learning of their grandchildren hence poor performance.

Education for All (EFA) was marked as a global movement towards providing quality basic education to all children and youth.<sup>39</sup> However, children who are cared for by their grandparents and other

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<sup>39</sup> Dana Donohue and Juan Bornman, “The Challenges of Realising Inclusive Education in South Africa,” *South African Journal of Education* 34, no. 2 (2014).



vulnerable children go to school without food, assistance with school work from home, and other basic needs such as clothing.<sup>40</sup>

### **Thematic finding 2: Lack of programmes specifically directed to caregivers due to the absence of policy**

The study identified a lack of specific resources targeted to assist family caregivers, resulting in older persons being treated as middle-aged individuals. If they are accessing foster care grants on behalf of their grandchildren, they are regarded as foster parents. This means that social workers visit them just like any other foster care parent. Besides old age grants, there is no policy, or programme targeted to assist older caregivers. The guarantee in section 27(1) (b) of the South African constitution provides that “everyone has the right to have access to social security, including if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance”. In light of this section, the state has to take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of the citizens as stipulated under the constitution. The fact that there are no programmes for grandparent caregiver support implies that there is a gap in the implementation of this section.

### **Thematic finding 3: Insufficient resources especially grants**

The study participants established that Child Support Grant (CSG) does not always fulfill its purpose due to its inadequacy and misuse by grandchildren’s parent/s. The South African Child Support Grant was first introduced in 1998. Over the past years, South Africa’s social grant programme has evolved into one of the most comprehensive social protection systems in the developing world.<sup>41</sup> The Child Support Grant is the state’s largest social assistance programme in terms of the number of beneficiaries reached; the primary objective of the grant is to ensure that caregivers of young children living in extreme poverty can access financial assistance in the form of cash transfers to supplement, rather than replace household income.<sup>42</sup> (However, there are still gaps.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Social workers, teachers and other stakeholders must identify the resources to fulfil the needs of caregivers, and the best interest of children, through: improving service delivery, policy-making, information provision, monitoring and linking resources with caregivers. There is also a need for assessment to know, understand, figure out and further gather relevant information about the challenges so that decisions can be made about potential solutions; to explore whether caregivers are able to provide protection for themselves as a vulnerable population and children under their care; to explore the living conditions of the families to check whether it is a poverty-stricken family or not and to check the support systems available and which roles they play in the lives of the older caregiver and in the lives of children under their care. The researchers make a call to policymakers to develop an interest and be inquisitive enough about certain aspects that need much attention in the caregiving of children by their grandparents.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study has explored the policy environment associated with the care of children by grandparents in Libode in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study has established a lack of a policy to guide grandparent caregiving of their grandchildren, amid their challenges of aging and working in an environment bereft of adequate financial resources. The findings have also established that most caregivers do the task involuntarily due to their biological children’s various vulnerabilities that make

<sup>40</sup> Bejane, Van Aswegen, and Havenga, “Primary Caregivers’ Challenges Related to Caring for Children Living with HIV in a Semi-Rural Area in South Africa.”

<sup>41</sup> Department of Social Development, *The South African Child Support Grant Impact Assessment: Evidence from a Survey of Children, Adolescents and Their Households* (Pretoria: UNICEF, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Aislinn Delany et al., “Review of the Child Support Grant: Uses, Implementation and Obstacles,” *Johannesburg: Community Agency for Social Enquiry*, 2008, 1–65.

them unable to care for their children. Therefore, it is recommended that grandparents who serve as caregivers should be treated as a panacea that needs to be both acknowledged and documented. The government and other child-friendly and elderly-friendly organisations such as NGOs should work both collaboratively and synergistically to ensure both the vulnerable children and the elderly caregivers are provided with the requisite resources to live a functional life.

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