



Dignity and the Child Support Grant: findings from the focus groups

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Dr Phakama Ntshongwana



Outline

- Brief introduction to the CSG
- Dignity & applying for the CSG
- Dignity & collecting the CSG each month
- Dignity & CSG as an income stream
- Dignity & the status of CSG recipient

The CSG: qualifying criteria

- The primary care giver must be a South African citizen, permanent resident or refugee;
- Both the applicant and the child must reside in South Africa;
- The applicant must be the primary caregiver of the child/children (aged 0-17) concerned;
- The applicant and spouse must meet the requirements of the means test of R36,000pa (single) or R72,000pa (married);
- People cannot apply for more than six non biological children;
- The child cannot be cared for in State institution;
- Children aged between 7 and 18 years must attend school.

The Child Support Grant

- Administered by South African Social Security Agency (SASSA)
- Paid to caregiver per child aged 0-17 inclusive, at a level of R300 per month
- Over 11m children receiving CSG
- Used to be necessary to show applicant's South African ID book, and child's birth certificate, but now alternative forms of identification can be provided.
- Once the grant has been awarded, the caregiver and child need to register biometrically with SASSA – all 10 finger-prints are captured along with a voice recording and a photograph.
- Caregiver is given a payment card by SASSA, or can be paid into bank account or at paypoint.

The Child Support Grant

- Many studies that highlight its positive impact
- But for the purposes of our project it was important to highlight that the CSG is not intended for the material needs of the caregiver:

“Women mediate social assistance and deliver it on behalf of the state. They claim it, collect it and are then expected to turn it into food, shelter, clothing, education, health and other aspects of a child’s maintenance through their own labours. [...] Unemployed, impoverished women (and some girls) are expected, without any means to feed themselves (or meet any of their other needs), to provide child care services for the society, in exchange for nothing’ (Goldblatt, 2005: 242).

Dignity & applying for the CSG (i)

Long queues erode dignity because it implies that people's time – and safety – is unimportant:

“We come at 8pm the night before SASSA comes. Sleep in the queue, still, it doesn't mean you'll get the help you need. They'll help 20 that day. You can repeat the same arduous process 3 times.” (Paarl, FG28)

“We shouldn't have to queue up at 4am in order to register for the grant and still get rudely turned away after having risked our safety.” (Khayelitsha, FG5)

Dignity & applying for the CSG (ii)

Burdensome and unclear qualifying criteria erode dignity because it is costly (time and money) and demeaning:

*“To apply for the grant erodes my dignity. First of all, I have to borrow money to go and apply for it, I get there and I’m told this or that is missing I must come back another day when I have those things. Back and forth, I go, with what money? Borrowing over and over again.”
(Butterworth, FG25)*

“You are sent from pillar to post, all the while you are starving, hunger written all over your face, where’s the dignity in that.” (Khayelitsha, FG5)

Dignity & applying for the CSG (iii)

Some officials do not treat applicants with respect:

“It affects our dignity. They are rude to us, the welfare officers, in front of everyone they’ll ridicule you. Maybe it would be better if nobody else could hear.” (Nyanga, FG1)

“Like I say, they don’t care if you came in 5am or you sitting there since 4am...How you came there, they don’t care. And the way they sometimes speak to us...is like we are nothing. It’s almost like they are giving you the money.’ (Mitchells Plain, FG13)

Dignity & applying for the CSG (iv)

Some officials speak pejoratively to applicants about their caregiver/lone parent status:

“It’s very bad, there’s no dignity there, at least for us. People from SASSA will tell you that you become pregnant for the grant, they ask you where the father of the child is?” (Khayelitsha, FG3)

“Sometimes people at SASSA are very rude to us younger mothers. They don’t even know how your child came about, some of us were raped walking to school in the rain. Now to have somebody from SASSA saying you’re too young to have a child....” (respondent tapers off with emotion). (Butterworth, FG25)

Dignity & collecting the CSG each month

Less detrimental to dignity than the application process, based on the focus group material. Main issues raised were the stigma of being seen to be collecting the grant:

“If you go to town at the beginning of the month, the first or the third, people always remark that “oh, you’re going to get the grant again”. It’s demeaning and it affects my sense of dignity negatively.” (Butterworth, FG26)

Dignity & CSG as an income stream (i)

Enhanced role as caregiver (for some):

“The grant helps us a lot, I use it for clothes for the children and food for us all. I don’t know what I’d do if it wasn’t there. Now I can go and look for work knowing that I left my kids with food.” (Alice, FG20)

“I’m not disputing what they are saying, but the CSG is a small amount. That’s what it boils down to for me. It’s certainly not enough for just the child. I sell paraffin so that I can buy my child winter clothes, for example. What I’m saying is that the CSG does not protect my dignity, at all, it’s not enough to do that for me or my children.” (Langa, FG8)

Dignity & CSG as an income stream (ii)

A vital income stream but there is conflict over scarce resources:

“It helps a lot when the child is eating food [i.e. on solids] that the rest of the family eats because on the grant date, you can buy 12kg mealie meal so that everyone at home can benefit. When the child is on formula you spend the whole money on their needs and it’s not even enough, that creates tension in the family because they will say you don’t even buy meat.” (Alice, FG21)

“The fathers of the children, they want a part of it as well, they want a share. How can you share such little money?” (Nyanga, FG1)

Dignity & the status of CSG recipient (i)

Stigmatising aspects of being a CSG recipient:

“I’m just going to speak as I see it or according to my experience because you said there is no wrong answer. I think it’s crucial for people’s dignity to be protected, especially women, young and old. For example, the fathers of our children don’t support them, that’s an indignity. The CSG can both protect and erode your dignity. It helps with the children on the one hand, but there’s youth, people my age with jobs, they that do not need the CSG, they tend to undermine one, you know, look down on us. That affects my dignity, negatively.” (Nyanga, FG2)

Dignity & the status of CSG recipient (ii)

“Even though the grant is intended for good, people use it, verbally, to erode our dignity. (Butterworth, FG26)

*“We need this grant but it comes at a very high cost, it costs us our dignity at the end of the day.”
(Masiphumelele, FG29)*

“It affects dignity because if you had money, you wouldn’t get a grant, the fact that you go there, your dignity is lowered because you are supposed to work and this money is too little.” (Khayelitsha, FG3)

Concluding Remarks: not just a success story

- The CSG helps protect dignity of lone mothers by providing a vital and regular income stream to help with looking after children
- For many however, the CSG was seen as being too small to *protect dignity* in any meaningful way
- The application process in particular was experienced as being erosive of dignity
- Although the CSG provides a vital income stream it is contested over within families, and recipients reported feeling stigmatized within their communities
- For some it is emblematic of their lack of autonomy, of their poverty and lack of employment.