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Transforming Welfare Services: From Child Relief to Women's Empowerment: The Child Support Grant in Rural South Africa

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Abstract

This paper presents qualitative findings from a broader study conducted with beneficiaries of social assistance grants in Nkonkobe Municipality, South Africa, guided by Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and a Feminist Political Economy perspective. It specifically examines the impact of the Child Support Grant (CSG) on women residing in rural areas with limited economic opportunities. Drawing on the narratives of twenty-five female beneficiaries, the study explores the grant's role beyond child welfare outcomes. Despite its small monetary value, the CSG demonstrated significant and unintended transformative effects. Within contexts of persistent poverty, unemployment, and inequality, the grant contributed to alleviating household hardship and enhancing women's empowerment. Participants reported increased economic agency, autonomy, and decision-making capacity. The CSG also served as a critical resource for women seeking to exit abusive relationships by providing a measure of financial independence, often lacking among survivors of domestic violence. These findings contribute to broader debates on welfare services as tools for equality, diversity, and democracy, highlighting the CSG's potential to advance gender empowerment and social inclusion. However, the grant alone remains insufficient to ensure sustainable economic security. The paper recommends that the CSG be strengthened through increased value and complemented by active labour market interventions that promote women's economic participation.

Keywords: Child Support Grant; poverty alleviation; rural South Africa; women empowerment; welfare transformation

1. Introduction

South Africa has a well-established social protection system, with a large proportion of its social spending directed towards social assistance grants which serve to protect the poorest and most vulnerable people in the society [1]. The fundamental purpose of the right to social assistance is to ensure that people living in poverty are able to access a minimum income sufficient to meet their basic subsistence needs. This right is enshrined in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa, Section 27 (1) (c), which indicates 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" [2]. In September 2025, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) reported that there were 19,229,680 beneficiaries of social grants, excluding the nearly 7 million beneficiaries of the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant [3]. This shows that almost 42% of South Africa's population receives a social grant; this is up from 6.5% in 1994 [4].

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The South African government is obligated to support children when their parents or caregivers are too poor to adequately support them [2]. One of the means is through social assistance grants. Social assistance grants have been widely recognised as essential instruments for promoting child well-being and reducing child poverty. For example, one study demonstrated that financial support at the household level improves children's cognitive, emotional, and social development by providing access to necessary resources and opportunities [5]. Another study highlighted that targeted financial interventions can positively influence children's knowledge, behaviours, and engagement in educational activities, contributing to overall life skills and development [6]. More recently, it was emphasised that social assistance not only alleviates material deprivation but also supports multidimensional aspects of child well-being, including health, education, and social inclusion [7,8]. Among the different types of grants provided in South Africa that support children is the Child Support Grant (CSG). The CSG refers to a grant paid to a primary caregiver of a child who satisfies the criteria defined in Section 6 of the Social Assistance Act of 2004 (Act No 13 of 2004). It has a value of ZAR 530 (approximately USD 30) per child per month (as of April 2025) and is given to caregivers of children between 0 and 18, with a possible extension to 21 years [3] on the basis that the caregivers have very low incomes or no incomes at all. Statistics indicate that by 30 September 2025, the number of children receiving CSGs amounted to 12,977,677, with a growth rate of 2.15% over the year [3].

Social protection interventions, including cash transfer programmes such as South Africa's CSG, are widely recognised as essential mechanisms for alleviating poverty, improving household food security and enhancing child health and educational outcomes [9,10]. In South Africa, the CSG was introduced post-apartheid to address high levels of child poverty and inequality, forming a cornerstone of the country's social welfare system. Traditionally, research has focused on child-centred outcomes such as school attendance, nutrition, and health, reflecting the grant's primary purpose [11]. While these outcomes are critical, growing evidence highlights that social grants yield significant benefits for women themselves [12].

As primary recipients of the CSG, women frequently allocate the grant toward broader household needs, including food, utilities, health, and shelter, generating positive spillover effects on overall household welfare [13]. Studies in South Africa demonstrate contributions to labour market participation [14,15], increased control over household finances [16,17], improved gender relations and empowerment [18], enhanced care practices [19], and improved healthcare and contraceptives [20].

Despite these documented benefits, social grants have attracted criticism regarding sustainability, dependency, and potential misuse [21,22]. Empirical evidence, however, largely refutes these concerns, showing that the CSG reduces child hunger [23], supports children's health and school enrolment [24,25], and provides mothers with a reliable income post-childbirth [26]. Broader evidence from across African countries [27], including Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, as well as global reviews, shows no significant negative effects of cash transfers and, in some cases, reductions in non-essential consumption among recipients [28,29]. These findings highlight the broader social and economic significance of cash transfers beyond child welfare.

Nonetheless, a critical gap persists in the literature concerning the lived experiences of women beneficiaries, particularly in rural areas where alternative income sources are limited. Most studies either focus exclusively on child outcomes or consider women's economic empowerment in isolation, rarely exploring how social protection intersects with women's agency, household welfare, and protection from gender-based violence. Understanding these intersections is particularly important in rural South Africa, where women face compounded vulnerabilities linked to poverty, patriarchal norms, and restricted access

to formal employment and social services. This study seeks to address this gap by centering the voices of women recipients and examining the broader socio-economic implications of the CSG in these contexts.

This study is guided by Amartya Sen's Capability Approach [30,31], which emphasises individuals' ability to attain meaningful outcomes and live lives they have reason to value. Within the context of social grants, the Capability Approach frames the CSG not merely as a financial resource but as a tool that expands women's capabilities, enabling them to make informed and meaningful choices for their lives and households. By strengthening economic agency, decision-making power, and social participation, the CSG fosters women's empowerment and resilience, extending its impact beyond child-focused outcomes to broader household and societal well-being.

In addition, the study draws on Feminist Political Economy Theory, which situates women's economic empowerment within broader social, political, and structural inequalities [32]. This perspective highlights how social protection programmes like the CSG can challenge gendered economic vulnerabilities, providing women with resources to negotiate household power dynamics, increase autonomy, and potentially exit abusive relationships. Combining the Capability Approach and Feminist Political Economy Theory allows the study to examine both the individual-level impacts of the grant on women's choices and the structural dimensions of empowerment and protection, integrating micro- and macro-level analyses.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the perspectives of women beneficiaries on the socio-economic impacts of the CSG, moving beyond the traditional child-focused lens. By situating women's experiences within capabilities and feminist economic empowerment frameworks, the research offers nuanced insights for policy development, social work practice, and interventions aimed at addressing poverty and GBV simultaneously.

In summary, this paper investigates women's experiences of the CSG in rural South Africa, focusing on its broader socio-economic impacts beyond the well-being of children. The study aims to highlight how women, as primary recipients of the CSG, perceive its role in shaping household welfare and their own empowerment. Specifically, the paper has two objectives: firstly, to examine the extent to which the CSG alleviates suffering within households, and secondly, to explore its contribution to women's empowerment, manifested through increased economic participation, enhanced autonomy and decision-making, and the capacity to leave abusive relationships. By foregrounding women's perspectives, the paper situates the discussion within broader debates on social protection, gender equity, and women's agency in contexts of structural inequality.

2. Materials and Methods

The data for this paper were drawn from the qualitative findings of a study of children's social grants that was conducted in Nkonkobe Municipality in Eastern Cape Province, South Africa and used a mixed-method approach. The Eastern Cape region is the fourth highest province in terms of Child Support Grant recipients amongst all the regions, with 1,907,225 recipients [3]. The province inherited a massive legacy of poverty and inequality when the first democratic government took power in 1994. With an estimated population of 7.2 million in 2022, the majority of its residents (87.6%) are trapped in poverty [33].

For the qualitative part of the study, twenty-five participants were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is described as involving searching for cases or individuals who meet a certain criterion [34]. The criterion was women who had been receiving the Child Support Grant for more than five years. Therefore, the participants were purposefully selected to understand how a non-representative group of people understands or perceives the socio-economic impact of CSG. The participants were interviewed using

a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were conducted face-to-face to obtain the participants' views and experiences in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement. Some of the interviews were conducted at the residences of the participants as they felt comfortable there, whilst others were conducted at their vending corners. Each interview took an average of thirty to forty-five minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The collected data were analysed thematically using NVivo software Version 12. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo for systematic coding and analysis. Data were analysed thematically following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke [35], allowing for the identification of patterned meanings across the dataset, beginning with familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and subsequently refined through constant comparison across interviews. These codes were then organised into broader themes that captured recurring patterns related to women's experiences of the Child Support Grant, including economic agency, decision-making, and coping within contexts of structural constraint. Throughout the analytic process, themes were interpreted in relation to Sen's Capability Approach and a Feminist Political Economy perspective, allowing for attention to both individual agency and the broader socio-economic conditions shaping women's lives. To enhance analytical rigour, coding decisions were reviewed continuously, and emerging themes were refined until conceptual clarity and saturation were achieved.

Trustworthiness was ensured through strategies addressing credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability [36]. Credibility was enhanced through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to share detailed accounts of their experiences with the Child Support Grant. Prolonged engagement with the data, including repeated reading of transcripts, supported accurate interpretation of participants' narratives. Dependability was strengthened through a transparent and systematic analytic process, with interview transcripts, coding procedures, and theme development documented using NVivo software. Confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in participants' verbatim accounts and maintaining a clear audit trail of analytic decisions. Transferability was addressed by providing rich descriptions of the study context, participant characteristics, and rural setting, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts.

In terms of ethical considerations, the researcher was first granted an ethical clearance by the university's Research Ethics Committee. Written informed consent was obtained from all the participants, and participation was voluntary. The identities of the participants involved in the study were kept anonymous in the presentation of findings, where pseudonyms were used instead of participants' real names. Furthermore, relating to issues of potential harm to the participants, the topics of the interviews were not sensitive in nature. However, there was provision that should any participant require debriefing or further counselling, the contact details of a social worker who had consented to provide counselling free of charge were provided. However, no participant required such services. As a researcher in the helping profession, there is an implicit responsibility to maintain the dignity and welfare of all participants, which means there is a responsibility of conducting oneself ethically and treating participants in an ethical manner at all times.

3. Findings

The analysis of the participants' responses led to the following results, which are presented according to the two themes. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are presented first.

3.1. Socio-Demographic Information of Participants

The study was conducted with twenty-five women who were receiving the Child Support Grant. Among these women, twenty were black, and five were coloured. The ages of the participants ranged from 25 years to 55 years. According to the results, participants aged 25 to 35 formed the largest group in this study (15). This group was followed by participants aged 36 to 45 years (6) and then by those aged 46 to 54 years (4). The demography of the participants showed that all had either a primary or a secondary education. The majority, sixteen, had a primary education, whilst the remaining nine participants had a secondary education. Regarding the marital status of the participants, nine were cohabiting, seven were single and separated from their partners, four were divorced, three were widowed, and two were married. The majority, eleven participants, indicated that they had five to six people in their households, followed by eight participants who indicated that they had between three and four people in their households. However, four participants stayed in households with more than six people, whilst the remaining two participants indicated that they stayed in households with between one and two people.

The participants were asked to indicate the reasons that influenced their decision to seek the grant. All twenty-five participants indicated that it was the financial instability in their households that forced them to seek the grant. The majority of the participants indicated that they did not have any other source of income besides the receipt of the CSG. Quotes from three participants are as follows:

> As soon as my child was born, we had differences with the father of the child and we separated, so now he is not contributing anything to the raising of the child anymore. I had to take up the Child Support Grant to help me raise my child. (Participant 2)

> I desperately needed the money to be able to take care of my two children. (Participant 12)

> As you can see, I am not working and my child needs to go to school, I need to buy school uniforms and shoes. So, I applied for the grant to help me with the money to buy all those things so that my child can go to school with others. (Participant 7)

For the few that said they had other sources of income, some cited that the money came from the children's fathers as maintenance. Two participants said that the fathers of their children were working but, in most cases, they earned too little money because they were doing 'piece jobs'. Even when they provided for their children, the support was irregular, and it could take months before they were able to contribute financially. Notably, some participants revealed that they had invested in small-scale entrepreneurship like selling sweets, fruits, and cigarettes using the grant money. These small businesses acted as a second source of income.

The following sections present the findings on the transformative effects of the Child Support Grant, starting with its role in supporting household survival and followed by women empowerment.

3.2. Theme One: Grant Money Used for the Entire Household

The results of this study revealed that the CSG was used to support the survival of the entire household. The majority, nineteen participants, stated that they also used the money to contribute towards buying food for the entire household. However, six participants revealed that they used the money only for the needs of the children. The participants who mentioned that they bought food for the entire household indicated that the child does not exist in isolation, which means that if the families cannot provide for themselves, they

cannot provide for the child as well. Receiving the social grant therefore helped the entire household to buy food and thus survive. Some of the participants said:

> When I get the CSG, I buy food that can be eaten by everyone in the house. It is impossible for me as a mother not to consider every family member. Remember we cook and eat together. So, if I manage to buy a pack of 10 kg mealie meal, the children will eat and I will also eat and my brother that we stay with who is not employed. Similarly, if I get some money from my piece jobs, I can use that money to buy diapers for example. So, it's a win win situation for all of us. (Participant 4)

> I stay with my older son here who is not employed. So, whatever that we eat in the house {sic}, sometimes the grant money buys that. Of course, the children who I am receiving the money for are my first priority but that does not mean I will ignore other expenses in the house. Let's say for example I use 50 r to buy electricity, it means the whole family has benefited. (Participant 8)

> Yes, I would say that the CSG benefit the whole family. We used to stress as a family before starting to receive the grant about the child. But since the social worker helped to apply for the grant and I started receiving it, we have peace in the house. And we can use the other money to cater for the other household expenses. (Participant 10)

The majority of the participants indicated that their standard of living had changed. Some participants highlighted that they could afford to pay rent every month, including their electricity and water bills. Other participants also maintained that their standard of living had changed in terms of the family being happy all the time, as there was no more hunger in the house. One of the participants, when asked to describe her standard of living, said that:

> Our living conditions have changed in my family especially with the issue of provision of food. As a single mother who is unemployed, I could not afford to buy healthy food for my two children. My kids and I were dying of hunger now that we are getting a grant it is better, we can afford to buy food that last for a month. (Participant 12)

> Our standard of living has changed because we do not worry about the needs of the children anymore; we just make sure we budget the money and not buy too expensive things and we have less stress knowing that at the end of the month we are guaranteed some money for the children. (Participant 15)

> Chomie (Friend), just take a look at the house I have built. You are able to sit and have this your interview with me today here and I even offered you some juice (she giggles) because of this grant. The grant helped me to start my baking of magwinya (scones) to sell. And this has really changed our lives. (Participant 20)

Nevertheless, some participants noted that their standard of living did not change significantly due to the grant being small and therefore the money was sometimes insufficient. Furthermore, some participants mentioned that their standard of living had also not changed, but the welfare of the children was catered to with the money from the grant.

3.3. Theme Two: Empowerment of Women Beneficiaries

The findings of the study pointed to the fact that the participants felt empowered due to the receipt of the grant on behalf of their children. This reflects economic empowerment, a sense of autonomy, increased decision-making power, and courage to leave abusive relationships.

3.3.1. Subtheme 1: Economic Empowerment

At least seven participants revealed that they had invested in small-scale entrepreneurship like selling sweets, fruits, and cigarettes. One participant had used the money to start a baking business.

> If it wasn't for the social grant that I'm receiving I wouldn't have started my baking business. The grant gave me a start and now my business is successful. Everyone knows me as umama wamagwinya (the woman who sells scones). (Participant 20)

> I realised that the grants money was too little so what I did was to save up 50 rands each month for six months together with my other stokvel friends. I then used that money to start my business of selling airtime, sweets, niknaks and fruits for school children. I sit just outside the school here around the corner. At least I get something. (Participant 5)

> One day at church I met this other lady who was selling Eden perfumes. You know those small ones? Yes. I asked her how she started her business and she told me. I then decided that I wanted to do the same. That lady was so nice to me because she offered to help me. I used the grant money to join the Eden perfumes as an agent. Now I sell these perfumes to teachers and nurses from the hospital around here (Participant 9).

However, some participants said the money was too little and that they had not managed to invest in anything. They were of the opinion that the money was not even enough to cater to all the needs of a child; hence, they insisted that the government should increase the value of the grants. One of the participants said:

> The social grant money is small to invest in anything. It is not enough to cater for all the child's needs. I wish the government can increase, even if it becomes the same as foster care because it's all for children so why should foster be more and the child grant less (Participant 11).

> The money is not enough. We appreciate what the government is doing for us. But with prices going up it is difficult (Participant 13).

> I have thought about starting a small business. But every month the money gets finished before I can save up some. It is because the grant is too little and I struggle to buy everything for my child (Participant 5)

The attitudes of participants towards work were investigated. Fifteen participants were of the view that the money they received was helping them in their search for employment. One said "There is no more hunger and I can look for a job on a full stomach". One of the participants stated that she used the money for transportation to go to East London, a nearby city, in order to search for employment. However, she then stated that the money was too little, and there was not enough to spare for seeking employment.

3.3.2. Subtheme 2: A Sense of Autonomy and Increased Decision-Making Power

The money from the Child Support Grant increased autonomy and decision-making power among mothers in their households. The study found that with the increase in the women's individual incomes, they had greater financial independence and were able to decide how to use their finances without having to depend on other family members. They made decisions about their children's well-being in terms of how they would use the money to cater to the needs of the children. Some of the participants mentioned the following:

> Since I started receiving the grant for my children, I am happy that I can decide what to do with the money without any fear. Previously I would rely on my

husband's parents to support us financially. And they would dictate to me what to buy. Sometimes they would just buy things and give us without asking what exactly we wanted (Participant 6).

Receiving the grant has made me to be happy. Now I feel like I am not a burden to anyone. Every month I just wait for the grant and I use it for my child without having to think that who am I going to ask to help me. As a single mother, it is difficult how people perceive you. People used to scold my child as an illegitimate child without a father (Participant 7).

My sister I don't want to lie to you. I don't care what people might say. This grant has helped me a lot. Even my husband feels envious when he sees me running around shopping for the child. He was so used to dictate everything to me. I feel so empowered that I can decide on what I feel is important for the child (Participant 15).

To tell you the truth the grant makes me a better mother since I am able to do things that other mothers do. I can go to the shops and buy clothes for my child; buy things that are needed in this household. If my children want to go for a trip at school, I can pay for them. Deep down I feel at peace (Participant 8).

3.3.3. Subtheme 3: Leaving Abusive Relationships

Linked to issues of independence and decision-making power, a crucial finding that emerged was the impact of the grant on domestic violence. One of the biggest impediments preventing survivors of domestic violence from leaving abusive partners is the inability to support themselves and their children financially. Three of the participants mentioned that they had stayed with abusive partners because they were economically dependent on them. They did not want to leave the relationship because they feared that they were not going to be able to take care of their children's needs. But the receipt of the grant changed their perspectives, and they eventually left their abusive partners.

My ex-partner who is the father of my two children used to beat me every time when he came home drunk. There was one time when I reported him to the police. Three days later I went to withdraw the case because we needed him to go to work to provide for us. When I started receiving the grant, things changed. I noticed that with that little money I could provide food for my children. One day I decided to leave because I knew I would get money every month to survive (Participant 20).

I left that abuser because I did not need his money anymore. I was getting something and I was happy with that. (Participant 1).

When I started receiving the grant, I noticed that it was not worth it to allow my children to witness and sometimes experience violence from their father. Since I left, we are still surviving with my children and I now also have a peace of mind. (Participant 3).

4. Discussion

The study seeks to examine the broader socio-economic implications of the Child Support Grant (CSG) beyond its original objective of addressing children's basic needs. It draws on the experiences of women beneficiaries residing in the rural Eastern Cape Province, a region characterised by constrained economic opportunities. The study reveals that most participants had not completed Grade 12. This educational disadvantage constrains their ability to secure formal employment. Low educational levels, combined with the structural underdevelopment of the Nkonkobe Municipality, contribute to a cycle of

persistent reliance on social grants as the primary means of livelihood. Therefore, among the group of participants, receiving a child grant was seen as one way of providing income for their households.

It is generally assumed that the Child Support Grant does not impact households because of its small value of ZAR 530 (approximately USD 30) [3]. However, the results of the study have shown that the CSG provides a predictable and reliable source of income which can have a significant effect upon the capacity of households to invest in human and physical capital, as was previously found in [37]. The CSG is therefore a form of financial support and a safety net for poor households. This means that women beneficiaries use the grant money in order to alleviate hardship and provide a safety net for their children and their entire household.

Evidence from cash transfer programmes globally demonstrates their potential to support asset accumulation and expand women's economic participation [28]. This study similarly shows that the CSG enables women to invest in small businesses and pursue employment opportunities. Framed within the Feminist Political Economy Theory, these findings highlight how empowerment is shaped by structural inequalities: the CSG not only enhances individual agency but also challenges gendered economic barriers, redistributes resources, and addresses the systemic conditions that sustain women's marginalisation. As underscored, women's empowerment is central to poverty reduction, advancing women's rights, promoting gender equity, and fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth [28].

Another factor of women's empowerment highlighted in the study was increased decision-making power. Most of the participants expressed that they were in control of how the grants money was used. They received the money themselves and exercised control over spending decisions. They did not depend on the men or other family members to provide for their children. As highlighted in the study, women developed a sense of dignity and non-reliance on men which made them leave abusive relationships that they may have stayed in without the grant. This was an important finding in the light of the high rates of gender-based violence in South Africa. Violence against women erodes dignity, liberty, and human rights, with murder being its most extreme form of silencing the individual [38]. The United Nations Women reported that economic instability has restricted women's ability to leave abusive relationships [39]. Ensuring survivors have access to affordable child care would alleviate the financial burden of providing child care and allow survivors more financial freedom to leave abusive partners. Conversely, it is posited that increased women empowerment programmes may diminish GBV by accumulating women's power to leave abusive relationships, whilst again there are risks that amplified empowerment could impede household patriarchies and aggravate violence [40].

Nonetheless, no matter how much the recipients appreciated the money from the government, they still argued that it was too little and wished the government would increase it. Women play a very important role in the family structure, carrying the burden of caring for the whole family. The CSG amount is too low to meet any basic needs of children considering the economic crisis which has greatly impacted South Africa's economy. The grant recipients are not exempt from inflation. The crisis has cultivated the already existing intergenerational poverty in South Africa among social grant recipients in terms of household food consumption, housing conditions, the household clothing situation, and children's schooling.

The findings of this study can be interpreted through the lens of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Feminist Political Economy Theory, which emphasise both individual agency and structural inequalities in shaping women's empowerment. Sen's framework suggests that true empowerment occurs when individuals have the freedom and capabili-

ties to make choices that improve their lives [30]. In this study, the Child Support Grant (CSG) functioned not only as a financial resource for child welfare but also expanded women beneficiaries' capabilities by enabling economic decision-making, household control, and the pursuit of small-business or employment opportunities. Similarly, Feminist Political Economy Theory highlights how gendered structures constrain women's economic agency [32]. The grant, while modest, provided women with resources to negotiate household power dynamics, reduce dependency on male partners, and leave abusive relationships, reflecting both an expansion of individual capabilities and a challenge to patriarchal economic structures. These theoretical perspectives underscore that social protection mechanisms like the CSG can have transformative, unintended benefits for women, linking financial support to empowerment, dignity, and enhanced agency, particularly in contexts of rural poverty and gendered economic vulnerability.

5. Conclusions

It is important that the significance of social grants is demonstrated and that their impact is illustrated, despite ongoing discussions about their feasibility, sustainability, and limitations. This paper contributes to this by focusing on how CSGs might be used to enhance developmental impact by bringing together evidence of some of their positive unintended consequences. The CSG has certainly tried to alleviate suffering among children, and its positive impacts in this regard are well documented. This paper has certainly provided evidence of the positive socio-economic impact amongst mothers receiving the grant on behalf of their children, notably including some level of women empowerment. This empowerment is evident in women gaining economic independence, which allowed them to have decision-making power on how to spend the money in the household or on children. Some have managed to leave abusive relationships. Many women who are living in abusive relationships are very aware of the two choices they have, which are poverty or abuse. Therefore, women's economic independence and security is necessary for the elimination of abuse against women.

This paper therefore concludes that the CSG can create positive dynamics for women's empowerment even though it was not intended for this purpose. While the CSG design was not overtly gendered, its impact may be greater on women because it is paid primarily to mothers rather than to fathers. The limitation, however, is that we cannot rely on social assistance alone to adequately maximize women's economic independence and security. In its current state, social assistance in the form of social grants is structured to provide income which is below poverty lines. Specifically, while the CSG is of essential use for children, it cannot be expected that child poverty can be eliminated without household poverty also being eliminated.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and discussion, the following recommendations are suggested:

- The current amount (ZAR 530/month) is insufficient to meet household and children's needs, especially given inflation and persistent rural poverty. Increasing the grant amount could enhance its developmental and empowerment impact.
- While the CSG provides short-term relief and empowerment, combining it with skills development, job creation, and active labour market programmes could facilitate women's long-term economic independence and reduce dependence on social assistance.

- Even though the CSG was not overtly gendered, its impact demonstrates the importance of recognising women as primary caregivers. Policies should explicitly consider women's empowerment, protection from GBV, and household decision-making authority.
- Given the connection between economic independence and the ability to leave abusive relationships, social grants could be paired with accessible support services for GBV survivors, including counselling, legal aid, and affordable child care.

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