

Social Grants Impact on Poverty among the Female-Headed Households in South Africa: A Case Analysis

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n8p160

Abstract

The social security system in South Africa plays an important role in mitigating the impact of socio-economic challenges among female-headed households (FHH). Social grants are expanded by the government as a measure of reducing poverty and improving the socio-economic indicators of the poor. South Africa's social grant system is advanced and covers a wide range of vulnerable individuals over their life course from childhood to adulthood; into old age. Policy discourse surrounding the social grants focuses on the sustainability of the system and the implications to livelihood and socio-economic development. It is therefore important that the significance of social grants is shown and particularly highlight their impact on poor FHH. This study investigates the effectiveness of social grants as a safety net among FHH in Bophelong, South Africa. Data was collected from a total of 262 sampled FHH. A significantly larger proportion of FHH qualified for social assistance. Access to the old age pension, child support grant and disability grant remained relatively stable, highlighting the high take-up rate of this grant. Results indicate that social grants play an important role in poverty alleviation among FHH; this translates into a significant reduction of the incidence and severity of poverty in affected households.

Keywords: Female-headed households, poverty, social grants, South Africa.

1. Introduction

There is a growing need to address extreme poverty, risk and vulnerability particularly when it relates to women. This need has impelled governments to adopt more ambitious goals on poverty alleviation, inequality reduction and women emancipation (World Bank, 2012), for which South Africa has made notable strides since 1994. Poverty is a multidimensional concept capturing a wide range of definitions which may include deficits in income or consumption, deprivations, social exclusions and lack of various capacities (Mbuli, 2008). The policy instruments employed by most governments to reduce poverty include the expansion of a set of instruments broadly classified as social protection (Bhorat & Kanbur, 2006). Social protection refers to a collection of programs that address risk, vulnerability, inequality and poverty through transfers in cash or kind (Fiszbein, Ringold & Srinivasan, 2011) and the government social grants are an example. For many countries, expanded social protection programs are important enablers in other key development areas like health, education and also alleviates poverty and hunger (Berhane, Hoddinott, Kumar, & Taffesse, 2011), especially among the female-headed households (Sekhampu, 2012).

The impact of social protection programs has facilitated their expansion even in low income countries and drawn research attention (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Since 2009, under the threat of the global economic turndown, countries have created new social protection programs, expanded old ones, and improved their administrative systems to make the programs more efficient (Fiszbein et al., 2011). With their aim of redistributing income in favour of the vulnerable groups (Kanbur, 2010), social security directly impacts on both poverty and inequality, serving to reduce both the incidence and the depth of poverty. Other targets include achieving human developmental goals like investment in health, education and nutrition with potential future benefits (Grosh, Ninno, Tesliuc & Ouerghi, 2008).

The study well acknowledges a body of literature that has highlighted the role of social assistance in South Africa in alleviating poverty (Lekezwe, 2011; Bhorat, Poswell & Naidoo, 2004; Reddey & Sokomani, 2008; Makiwane, 2010; Du

Toit, 2011). Much of the earlier work focused on the success of the old age pension (Case & Deaton, 1998; Jensen, 2004), the importance of this source of income for household security and household food security (Lund, 1999) and social safety in mitigating chronic poverty if welfare transfers are invested in income-generating activities (Devereux, 2002). These studies have made meaningful contribution to the broad subject. However, a gap has remained on the impact of social grants in reducing poverty among the female-headed households in a Township of a country marked with high inequality like South Africa. This study will therefore attempt to cover this gap. Furthermore, the following scenarios have prompted this study: Poverty is seemingly rising in South Africa yet the expenditure on grants is expanding, both in the amount received by individuals and in absorbing the new poor. FHH have been found to be the major grants recipients yet they continue to be regarded as the poorest households. Then the question that remains is: Are social grants effectively reducing poverty among FHH? The remainder of this paper is divided as follows: Section 2 looks at the insight of the South African economy, section 3 covers the methodology of the study, section 4 gives the results and discussion. Section 5 concludes and makes some recommendations and section 7 gives the implications for further studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Insight into the South African Economy

South Africa is regarded as an upper-middle income country yet some of its social indicators are comparable to those of the poorest countries of the world (Bhorat, 2005). Its development profile shows some contradictions with per capita income proportionate with middle-income countries, yet its non-income social indicators lag behind those of comparable countries (Lekezwa, 2011). The apartheid government focused mainly on poverty among Whites, paying little attention to poverty among the Black majority (Seekings, 2007). This skewed approach had limitations, where previous research data was used to promote strategies that reduced White poverty at all costs, often at the expense of Blacks (Wilson & Ramphela, 1989). Its move into democracy in 1994 brought an urgent concern of overcoming poverty and inequality for all population groups. With enduring structural poverty covering nearly half the population (Lekezwa, 2011), the government comprehended social protection as one of the strategies to alleviate poverty in South Africa. The subsequent section provides a discussion of social security system of South Africa.

2.2 An overview of South Africa's Social Security System

The South Africa government has adopted a broadly pro-poor policy framework, which involves an increased share of government expenditure going to social security in the form of social grants (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). At present, social grants are administered by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), which has made substantial moves to ensure that only legitimate beneficiaries are on the system (Bhorat, Poswell & Naidoo, 2004). Before democracy, the social security system was fragmented with non-comprehensive coverage (Van der Berg, 1997) where the blacks were marginalised and deliberately excluded from the social security system. The democratic government of 1994 embraced social protection as a way of alleviating poverty and redistributing income through policy and administrative reforms (Lopez, Thomas & Wang, 2010). The government made moves to address the legacy of severe poverty, high unemployment and huge socio-economic inequalities through social security (Swartz, 2004).

Since democracy, SASSA has managed to extend social security to the Black population and addressed the socio-economic discrepancies and deepened social inclusion of previously marginalised and poor population (Addison, Harper, Prowse and Shepard, 2008). SASSA has further intensified mechanisms to reduce fraud and corruption within the system by starting the reregistration process of grant beneficiaries, on a comprehensive biometric identification system. Contrary to the above progress, there are some misalignments where the beneficiaries fail to get their grants due to corruption (Reddey & Sokomani, 2008; Makiwane, 2010). Furthermore, Du Toit (2011) mentions that the coverage remains inadequate calling for the need to further expand social grant expenditure.

Despite a frantic history, social assistance in South Africa is now widely recognised and has transformed as well as increased its access to vulnerable individuals (Reddey & Sokomani, 2008). Initiatives such as lowering the age requirements for the child support grant and increased public awareness have been carried (Pauw & Mncube, 2007). The child support grant is the most common and is increasing remarkably. The number of children receiving grant rose from 9.1 million in December 2009 to 10.9 million in 2011/2012 (National treasury, 2012). In 2012/13, SASSA implemented a new payment system that reduced the unit cost per payment from as high as R32 to a standard rate of R16 (Bisseker, 2013). Beneficiaries are able to receive their grants anywhere in the country and have access to the banking system

(Gordhan, 2013). Generally, social grants in South Africa contribute significantly towards reducing poverty and promoting social development amongst the poor (Samuelson, Macquene. & Van Niekerk, 2004; Barientos & Lloyd-Sherlock, 2002).

The seven types of social security grants currently available to South African citizens are the old-age pensions, disability grants, child support grant, care dependency grant, foster child grant, grant-in-aid, and the war veterans' grants. The war veterans' grants is paid to people of 60 years and more, who served in the South African army during the First World War (1914–1918), the Second World War (1939–1945) or the Korean War (1950–1953); and are unable to maintain themselves due to physical and/or mental disability (Lekezwa, 2011). The rise in the number of social security beneficiaries from 2009/10 to the projected 2015/16 is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Social grants categories & growth per year

Type of grant/Year	2009/10 Actual	2010/11 Actual	2011/12 Actual	2012/13 ¹ Revised estimate	2013/14 Projected	2014/15 Projected	2015/16 Projected	Average Annual Growth
Old age ²	2491	2648	2711	2851	2931	3013	3096	3.7%
Disability	1299	1212	1172	1179	1180	1181	1181	-1.6%
Foster care	489	490	518	529	569	604	633	4.4%
Care dependency	119	121	122	130	135	140	146	3.4%
Child support	9381	10154	10675	11406	11699	11937	12116	4.4%
Total	13779	14625	15198	16095	16514	16875	17172	3.7%

¹Projected numbers at fiscal year end; ²Includes recipients of war veterans grant

Source: National Treasury, 2012

Table 1 shows progress in the recipients of the five common social grants issued in South Africa. The foster care and the child support grants increased the most during the period under review. This development has coincided with global trends towards increased publicly-funded cash transfer to the poor and vulnerable (Smit & Mpedi, 2010:160) notwithstanding debates, research and advocacy about the effectiveness of these transfers (Barrientos, 2010:18).

The average annual growth in the number of grant recipients was 5.3% over the four years to 2012/13, and is projected to moderate to 2.2% a year over the period ahead. For the period ahead, the Department of Social Development has proposed exploring ways to improve income support for orphaned children living with their relatives and phasing out the means test for the old age grant in order to prevent the exclusion of vulnerable individuals. As of the end of the year 2012, the number of beneficiaries by province is shown in table 2.

Table.2: Social grants recipients by province (31 December 2012).

Region	Old age	War Veterans	Disability	Grant in aid	Care Dependency	Foster care	Child Support	Total
EC	503,810	78	185,913	9,064	18,359	109,034	1,852,147	2,678,405
FS	169,336	9	88,040	1,132	5,765	38,050	631,210	933,542
GP	416,222	151	123,915	1,548	15,615	56,736	1,559,585	2,173,772
KZN	585,986	88	319,171	28,897	35,913	132,916	2,766,951	3,869,922
LP	391,019	49	88,859	10,629	11,657	53,686	1,570,065	2,125,964
MP	224,968	28	82,200	2,749	8,517	33,598	1,049,136	1,401,196
NW	215,140	18	87,216	3,970	8,291	39,727	746,299	1,100,661
NC	74,023	18	49,795	4,203	4,445	13,408	274,073	419,965
WC	258,117	167	154,954	9,437	10,654	27,738	854,473	1,315,540
Total	2,838,621	606	1,180,063	71,629	119,216	504,893	11,303,939	16,018,967

Source: SASSA, 2012:1

The province with the largest number of grant recipients was Kwa-Zulu Natal followed by the Eastern Cape Province while the Northern Cape had the least recipients. The most common was the child grant with 11 303 939 children receiving it. The war veterans' grant had the least number of people.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The results discussed in this paper are based on cross-sectional data collected through in-house personal interviews by means of questionnaires in a Township of Bophelong in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Townships in South Africa are underdeveloped urban areas that, from the late 19th century until the end of Apartheid, were reserved for non-Whites, thus Blacks, Coloureds and Indians. Like any other Townships in South Africa, Bophelong houses mainly Black residents with 99.12% of the population being Black (Census, 2011). The average household size in Bophelong, calculated from Statistics SA (2007), is 3 persons per household. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 25 respondents. This was done in order to test validity, reliability and applicability of the research instrument; also to ensure that the questionnaire meets the researcher's expectations in terms of the information obtained (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004). Necessary adjustments were made on the questionnaire after which a total of 316 household questionnaires were administered and 172 were found to be headed by women. The second survey was done on 60 female-headed households making a total sample size of 262 households and capturing information for 951 household members. Census (2011) found a total number of 14257 households in Bophelong. This sample was considered representative and was in line with a survey by Slabbert (2009) who had a sample size of 286 households. The questionnaire was adapted from Slabbert (2009) and edited to fit the research focus and then administered by the principal authors with the assistance of four trained interviewers.

3.2 Poverty Measurement

3.2.1 Poverty line calculation

Income poverty line was used where the poor households were those who were below their household poverty line. The study uses the monthly calorie intake of 2261 kilocalories per individual per month as recommended by the African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) (Bhorat & Westhuizen, 2010). Using year 2000 Income and Expenditure Survey data, Stats SA estimated that it costs R211 per capita per month to satisfy a daily energy requirement of 2261 kilocalories. A further consideration was made for other goods and services beyond food by individuals which includes accommodation, energy, clothing, transport and medical services, amongst other things. SAMRC estimates such essential non-food items to be R111 per capita per month, giving a total of R322 per person per month in 2000 prices. Hoogeveen and Özlü (2004) noted the same poverty line of R322 as a lower poverty line, further proposing an upper poverty line of R593 per capita per month using the year 2000 prices. These two poverty lines were later supported by other researchers (Mabugu & Chitiga, 2007; Stats SA, 2007). This study adopted this lower poverty line (R322 per capita per month using 2000 prices). When increased with inflation, the lower threshold amounted to R570 in 2010 (Stats SA, 2011). For this study the lower poverty line was adjusted for inflation up to March 2012 and calculated at R584 per capita per month.

3.2.2 Poverty incidence

Poverty incidence was measured using head-count index which measures the number of poor households falling below the poverty line. The following formula was used according to Makoka and Kaplam (2005):

$$P_0 = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N I(y_i < z) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^q 1 = \frac{Np}{N} \quad (1)$$

Where

N = total population surveyed

$I(\cdot)$ = an indicator function taking a value of 1 (poor) and 0 (non-poor) otherwise

z = poverty line

y_i = welfare indicator e.g income

Np = number of the poor in the population

3.2.3 Poverty Intensity-depth of poverty

Poverty intensity was measured using poverty gap and the poverty gap index. Poverty gap measures the average deficit

in the income of the poor in relation to their poverty line, whereas the poverty gap index measures the extent of the deficit of income below the poverty line. The poverty gap for an individual household was measured by the formula according to (Oldewage-Theron & Slabbert, 2010):

$$Gi(y;z) = z_i - y_i \quad (2)$$

Where: G_i = the income shortfall of a household

y_i = the income of a specific household

z_i = the poverty line of a specific household.

The poverty gap index of a specific household was calculated by the following equation (Oldewage-Theron & Slabbert, 2010):

$$Ri(y;z) = \frac{z_i - y_i}{z_i} \quad (3)$$

Where: R_i = the income shortfall of a household, which is expressed as a proportion of the household's poverty line

Y_i = the income of a specific household

Z_i = the poverty line of a specific household.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The results of the survey are shown below.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Marital Status	N	%	Grants received	N	%	Ages of the recipients	N	%
Married	9	3	Child grant	158	60	0 - 15	149	57
Divorced	87	33	Old age Pension	87	33	16-30	20	8
Widowed	60	23	Foster care	7	3	31-45	0	0
Separated	12	5	Care dependency	5	2	46-60	4	1
Never married	94	36	Disability	5	2	60+	89	34
Total	262	100		262	100		262	100

N in the marital status represents the number of households heads while in the grants received and in the ages of the recipients it represents the total number of household members. In the table, only 3% of the household heads were married, indicating that these were de facto female-headed households, thus heading households where there is a husband in existence. The never married households were 36% while the divorced, widowed and separated were 33%, 23% and 5% respectively. The most common grant was the child grant where 60% of the grant recipients received it followed by the old age pension with 33% of grants recipients were receiving it. The largest age group which received social assistance (57%) was the population aged 15 years and below, who were the child grant recipients, followed by 60+ who mainly were the recipients of the old age pension with 34% of the recipients. The recipient of the foster care grant was the foster parent not the child. No social assistance was received by the population aged 31-45 years in the sample.

4.2 Impact of Grants on Poverty

Poverty incidence, using income inclusive of grants among the female-headed households was 75.12%. The poverty gap R1684 (about USD153) was and the poverty gap index was 0.582 indicating that on average, poor households had a 58.2% deficit in income in respect of maintaining a level of income that would be equal to their respective poverty lines (Oldewage-Theron & Slabbert 2008:95).

Given that a relatively significant proportion of the income of FHH is made up of social grants, it is likely that social grants play an important role in alleviating poverty in these households. Social grants impact was accessed by way of calculating the standard poverty measures both inclusive and exclusive of grants. This allows one to assess the impact of social grants on the incidence (head-count) and the depth (poverty gap) of poverty. These results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Grants impact on poverty

Income	Headcount index (%)	Poverty gap in R	Poverty gap index (%)
Income without child grant	77.95	1801	62.8
Income without old age pension	81.24	1931	68.3
Income without other grants	77.21	1748	60.5
Income without any grant	86	2092	75.2

Social grants played an important role in alleviating poverty in the FHH. In percentage terms, the incidence and the depth of poverty dropped as a result of social assistance. The reduction in the incidence and depth of poverty (i.e. the percentage change in the poverty measure calculated at baseline exclusive of social grants, and the poverty measure calculated at baseline inclusive of social grants) was more significant. The incidence of poverty increased by 10.1% and the depth of poverty rose by 17% as a result of the removal of social grants from households' income. Removing the old age pension from the households' income increases poverty rate and the poverty gap index the most (6.04% increase in poverty rate and 10.1% increase in poverty gap index). Removing the child grant increases poverty head count by 2.75% and poverty gap by 4.6% while removing other grants (foster care grant, care dependency grant, disability, grant in aid and the war veteran's grants) increases poverty by 2.01% and the poverty gap index by 2.3%. In money terms, the poverty gap increases by R247 if old age pension is removed, by R117 if the child grant is removed and by R64 if other grants are removed.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study focused on the poverty reduction effect of government social security system among the FHH in a South African Township using three criteria, poverty incidence and poverty gap and the poverty gap index. Incomes from grants served to reduce both the poverty incidence and the poverty intensity. The empirical evidence indicates that social security helps households escape from poverty and further reduce the poverty gap and the poverty gap index. Social grants bring very poor people closer to the poverty line and lift some out people out of poverty. The effect in poverty reduction however differs with a type of assistance. The old age pension was the most effective grant in reducing both the poverty incidence and the poverty intensity, though received by few individuals compared to the child grant. This is due to the value difference between these grants where the child grant was R270 per recipient per month while the old age pension was R1440 per recipient per month during the time of the survey. The other grants were the least in poverty reduction because they were received by few individuals.

The persistence of poverty among FHH yet social security spending by the government is rising can be caused by a rise in poverty which is more than the government policies on social spending can cope. Social security is however not the only weapon used to fight poverty; others like employment creation are used as well. An increase in the number of FHH due to loss of the male provider can be a possible cause of high poverty reported in these households. Therefore, though FHH are the major recipients of grants, poverty in these households persists.

The following recommendations are made emanating from the study results. In order to effectively reduce poverty in the township, the income threshold used in the means test for affordability should be decreased since households that meet the current means test criteria are already poor, and can always fall into extremely poor, with a slight price rise. Lowering the age limit for the old age pension will increase the number of individuals qualifying and hence reduce poverty. Furthermore, the South African government should consider increasing the absolute size of the child grant since households complained that it was insufficient to cater for the child's needs and also move in with speed in absorbing the new vulnerable individuals into the safety nets.

This paper recommends the retention of grants as an important form of anti-poverty strategy among FHH. The sheer magnitude of poverty in South African townships also requires one to consider the fiscal affordability and sustainability of the social protection system in the future. Findings reported in this paper have proven that grants are worthwhile policy instruments, although they are not the ultimate solution.

6. Implications for Future Research

Even though there is a wide body of literature in social protection and poverty, which have identified poverty among female-headed households, the existing literature is full with empirical evidence pointing out great poverty incidence among female-headed households. The current study was set to depart from these long held attempts to find the effect of

social grants on poverty but investigate this effect among the FHH in a Township set up. Although this study makes significant contributions to both academia and policy-making, it remains limited in some ways, and therefore some future research paths are suggested. First, the data used was cross sectional gathered from a township in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The results would be more informative if panel data was gathered to note the trends overtime. Secondly, future studies should not be limited to South Africa, but rather consider extending to other African countries such as Lesotho for results comparison and also consider comparing the social grants impact with that of male-headed households. Above and beyond, this will immensely contribute new knowledge to the existing body of the subject of poverty in the African setting. The paper further suggests the need for continued research on the causal relationship between poverty and the social grants. The study also suggests expanding the sample size in order to capture a wide range of grants and their significance in poverty reduction.

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