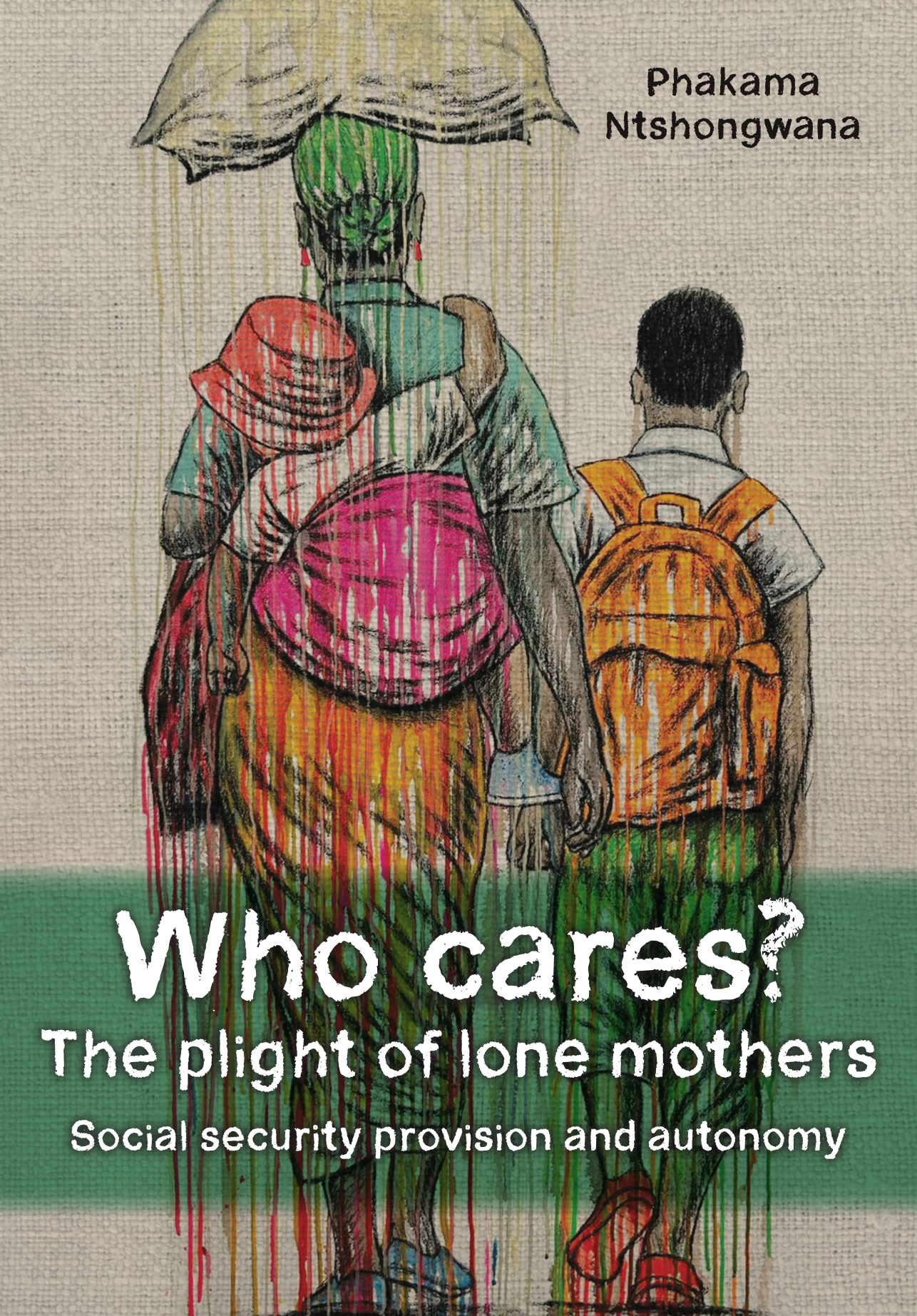




Phakama
Ntshongwana

Who cares?

The plight of lone mothers

Social security provision and autonomy

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Phakama Ntshongwana



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Research justification

Both the protection of dignity and social security provision are constitutional mandates in South Africa. Lone mothers in the country are at the intersection of a range of policies. Society expects them to be full-time caregivers and to be in full-time work, simultaneously. Low-income lone mothers, in particular, easily bear the brunt of such a nexus. In addition, child poverty cannot be addressed without taking into consideration the conditions of relevant caregivers. In this vein, the study investigates the extent to which social security provision for lone mothers encourages dependency and erodes dignity, or promotes independence and enhances dignity.

This academic volume aims to enhance a social-scientific examination of Social Policy in South Africa, utilising interdisciplinary analytical tools that employ historical, political and socio-economic dimensions. The research represented in this book is located within temporal and spatial spheres that are critical components of the characteristic social landscape of South Africa. Empirical data are derived from two pivotal timeframes: a decade following the initiation of the child support grant (CSG) in South Africa (2008) and the year 2021 influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. These particular time periods facilitate policy monitoring to assess the long-term impact of the provision and to illustrate whether, amid prolonged high unemployment rates intensified by the pandemic and lockdown measures, a culture of dependency prevails. The research presented in this book utilises a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. This approach integrates diverse epistemologies to bolster the study and offer additional insights. The qualitative component of the study assists in deconstructing social policy-related phenomena such as family values, attitudes towards work and social assistance. As such, information about possible reasons for the success and/or failure of social policy is collated. In addition, the study was conducted in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces which allowed for the opportunity to explore challenges on economic migration in significant detail with considerable population movement between the two provinces. The quantitative component is nationally representative and spans the qualitative primary research focus periods (2008, 2020 and 2021), demonstrating employment and unemployment trends from 2008 to 2021. Additional themes explored include spatial inequalities, unpaid childcare, dignity and poverty. A significant amount of the manuscript material represents an updated study of research conducted for purposes of a doctoral (PhD) study at the University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom (UK). In its current format, this book adds to scholarly conversations on social policy through an exploration of the lived experiences of low-income lone mothers. The research study unveils distinctive findings that hold significance within its context. The author declares that this book is the result of her own independent scholarly work. Material from the work of other authors is acknowledged.

Phakama Ntshongwana, Department of History and Political Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa.

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I would like to thank my Grandparents, ooTishala noMakheswa, for the gift of unconditional love.

Much thanks to my Father, umQithi uMphenduli, for ever demonstrating the power in words.

To my Mother, thank you for the gift of education - you lived it!

To our Creator - Ukho, ungoWethu.

“The more deeply you share your Truth, the more universal it becomes.”
(Unknown)

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Biographical note

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Abbreviations and acronyms, figures and tables appearing in the text and notes

List of abbreviations and acronyms

AC	African Charter
ACCESS	Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security
ADRU	Applied Development Research Unit
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
ANC	African National Congress
AsgiSA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
AU	African Union
BIG	basic income grant
BIS	basic income support
CANRAD	Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy
CASASP	Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy
CASE	Community Agency for Social Enquiry
CDG	care dependency grant
CoE	City of Ekurhuleni
CoCT	City of Cape Town
CRC	Convention of the Rights of the Child
CSG	child support grant
CSSR	Centre for Social Science Research
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DG	disability grant
DoE	Department of Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	early childhood development
ECDI	Early Childhood Development Initiative
ECDP	Early Childhood Development Programme
EPWP	Extended Public Works Programme
FCG	foster child grant
FOSAD	Forum of South African Directors
FPL	food poverty line

GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GI	guaranteed income
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IDASA	Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa
IEA	International Energy Agency
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LBPL	lower-bound poverty line
MDRC	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
MRC	Medical Research Council
NCPPS	Non-Contributory Pensions and Poverty Study
NDP	National Development Plan
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
NP	National Party
NQF7	National Qualifications Framework 7
OAG	old-age grant
PIT	personal income tax
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RDP	Redistributive Social Democratic Policy
SABC	South African Broadcasting Cooperation
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SASAS	South African Social Attitudes Survey
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDG	sustainable development goals
SMG	state maintenance grant
SoNA	State of the Nation Address
SRD	social relief of distress
SRG	social relief grant
UBI	universal basic income
UBPL	upper-bound poverty line
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USA	United States of America

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A history of social security provision for lone mothers in South Africa

■ Introduction

This research study explores the perception of social security provision for lone mothers and their children in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces of South Africa (RSA). It is an updated study of research conducted for purposes of a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) thesis at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom (UK), which is unpublished.¹ In order to inform social policy in RSA, it employs interdisciplinary tools of analysis – historical, political and socio-economic. As such, the study is

1. It is an updated study of research conducted for purposes of a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) thesis at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom (UK), which is unpublished. Please refer to: Ntshongwana, P 2010, 'Social security provision for lone mothers in South Africa: dependency, independence and dignity', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Social Policy, Social Sciences Division, University of Oxford, Oxford, with Professor Michael Noble and Dr Gemma Wright as supervisors. The author, Dr Phakama Ntshongwana, conducted this research as part of a team with Professor Michael Noble and Dr Gemma Wright. Ethical clearance for the 2011 phase of the study, which contributed to her PhD from the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee at the University of Oxford (ref. no.: SSD/CUREC2/11-35). The Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee provided the last Ethics certificate for the study in 2011. Dr Ntshongwana declares that the 2008 ethics clearance is no longer available in the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee archives at the University of Oxford because of the passage of time.

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located comparatively within temporal and spatial dimensions. It provides a historical perspective that begins with the *Atlantic Charter of 1941*, which pledged the advancement of social welfare to include black Africans in South Africa (later reneged). This is followed by a discussion on the *Africans' Claims* document² containing the *Bill of Rights* published in December 1943, the articulation of which was practically rejected by the Allied Nations (now the United Nations [UN]). The *Africans' Claims* advocated for comprehensive social security, a recommendation that remains relevant and has been made in the country's National Development Plan (NDP) (2021). The temporal perspective then moves onto racially stratified social security provision for lone mothers under the apartheid regime to recommendations by the *Women's Charter of 1954*. Recommendations by the Lund Committee (1996) then followed, which led to the implementation of the child support grant (CSG) in 1998 under the democratic dispensation.

In RSA, as in many other places in the world, lone mothers find themselves at the intersection of a range of policies. By definition, lone mothers are parents: society demands that they provide a good home environment and sound parenting and ensure their children receive a good education and achieve good health. At the heart of the policy agenda is the need to ensure that policies tackle poverty, as this is central to healthy child development (State of the Nation Address [SoNA] 2019). Furthermore, as will be demonstrated, child poverty cannot be addressed without also considering the conditions of relevant caregivers.

Social security provision is at the root of many governments' anti-poverty policies. This may include support for both parent and children (e.g. Danish Family Allowance and Child Benefit) or simply for children (e.g. South African CSG). The provision may be conditional (Rawlings 2005) or unconditional (Development Policy Review 2006), means-tested (Evans 1997; Hill 1990; McKay & Rawlingson 1999; Walker 2005) or universal (Marshall 1963). Support may be geared to allow lone parents to stay at home to look after young children or (increasingly) seen as a short-term bridge towards integration in the labour market (Bernardi & Mortelmans 2017; Lewis 2002). Despite its pivotal role in tackling poverty and providing a bridge to paid employment, social security support for lone mothers is sometimes criticised for establishing 'perverse incentives', including the fostering of a 'dependency culture' (Murray 1990). As such, I shall critically examine the social security

2. Please see Xuma, A.B 1943, 'Bill of Rights and The Atlantic Charter from the African's Point of View', a document adopted by the Annual Conference of the African National Congress at Bloemfontein, 16 December, viewed 28 November 2023, from <https://www.anc1912.org.za/africans-claims-in-south-africa/>.

policy in RSA for lone mothers and whether social assistance encourages dependency, erodes dignity or promotes independence and enhances dignity. Challenges faced by low-income lone mothers when at work or when unemployed will be investigated. The extent to which low-income lone mothers are expected to engage in the labour market and how labour market activity intersects with childcare responsibilities is explored. Central to the research is the tenet held by the government in South Africa that employment translates to independence. Lone mothers' views on whether – in the absence of paid work – social security provision promotes independence and, thus, enhances dignity are investigated. An overview of the role of the government's emergency temporary economic and social relief grant (SRG) in order to alleviate the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and its lockdown measures in the lives of women in receipt of the CSG will also be given.

This monograph provides unprecedented insight into the construction of lone motherhood in South Africa, taking into account the various routes into lone motherhood in the country's context and profiling their circumstances in relation to work and childcare. It also gives a unique insight into the policy nexus of social security provision, work and childcare, taking into consideration the Constitution from a rights-based perspective. This monograph also analyses the role of social security in respecting and protecting dignity.

The research study draws from detailed accounts provided by low-income lone mothers themselves in in-depth individual interviews and semi-structured focus group interviews in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. This analysis is supplemented by some small-scale analysis of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS). Both the qualitative and the quantitative research materials demonstrate the day-to-day lives of low-income black African mothers fifteen years after the advent of democracy and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides a comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of women respondents, which leads to an in-depth discussion on recommendations in relation to the basic income grant (BIG) by an expert panel under the auspices of the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the International Labour Organisation (2021, 2022).

The research questions are located in the context of debates on lone mothers' social security in South Africa and are explored within the framework of the underclass and dependency culture literature, in relation to social citizenship rights. Following this, challenges faced by lone mothers in relation to unemployment, low-paid employment and childcare are explored, and the adequacy of existing social security arrangements is considered.

Dilemmas faced by lone mothers are encapsulated in the following quotation from a woman in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa:

'They think we get pregnant so we can get the [child support] grant. They say we drink and don't want to work. Who is going to look after my child if I am a live-in (domestic worker)? My mother would do it, but she is ill. Where am I going to get money for transport to look for a job it's R16 a day? Sometimes I take from the child's grant and go look for work but it doesn't help it's too expensive.' (Nxarhun, CSG focus group n.d.)³

The woman raises challenges she faces in relation to how lone mothers are perceived in her community and the stigma of lone parenthood. She highlights the need for the provision of care for her child and the fact that if she seeks employment, nobody could care for her child in her absence. That lone mothers in South Africa currently have no direct social security provision in their own right is highlighted by the fact that she has to draw from the CSG in order to pay for transport to look for work. These issues will be unpicked, and conclusions will be drawn with respect to policy options.

Low-income lone mothers are treated simultaneously both as breadwinners and full-time caregivers as already intimated. However, as breadwinners, they have to contend with high unemployment rates, particularly for low-skilled women (LFS 2021). Furthermore, women's role as caregivers is uncoded, and they are treated as invisible within the labour market context (Lewis 2006; Yamane 2021). If they are unemployed breadwinners, there is no financial support available to them: the social security system currently only provides financial support for people who are too old to work (the old-age grant), too ill to work (the disability grant) or too young to work (the CSG). Unemployed, healthy adults of working age have no support apart from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), which reaches only a small proportion of the unemployed (National Labour and Economic Development Institute 2018), and social relief of distress (SRD), which is temporary discretionary assistance payable only in extreme circumstances (Department of Social Development 2018). The SRD has now been extended to October 2023 and may form a foundation for a BIG in the future (DSD 2022).

Although this study considers the lack of social security provision for all unemployed adults of working age, its main focus is on lone mothers for three reasons. Firstly, lone parents experience the highest poverty rates in South Africa (Laframboise 2019; Rwelamira et al. 2000), and lone mothers constitute the majority of lone parents by a large margin (GHS 2018). Low-income⁴ lone

3. The focus groups from which this quotation is drawn are introduced in the methodology section of this chapter.

4. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) refers to four main racial groups (or 'population groups') in South Africa: black Africans, coloured people, Indians/Asians and white people (Stats SA 2005). This racial classification will be used throughout the book, and when I refer to black South Africans, this is used generically to refer to black Africans, coloured people and Indians.

mothers, therefore, are likely to experience severe economic hardship. Black African women constitute the majority of lone mothers in South Africa, and so, there will be a particular focus on black African lone mothers. Secondly, lone mothers are at a policy nexus because of their 'dual identities' as caregivers on the one hand and actual or potential members of the labour force on the other hand. Low-skilled lone mothers can be expected to and have been found to face particularly acute tensions in reconciling paid work and unpaid care (Backett-Milburn et al. 2003; Dex 2003).⁵

Thirdly, in South Africa, lone mothers have been 'singled out' in the media in debates about social security. In these contexts, lone mothers are often referred to in pejorative terms, with suggestions made that they are 'undeserving' recipients of the CSG, they have only themselves to blame for their poverty and they should stop being 'dependent' on the provision of state support.

The following section provides an overview of the history of social security provision for lone mothers in South Africa. Gaps in social security provision for citizens of working age, 'holes in the safety net' (Samson 2001), that directly affect lone mothers will be discussed with particular reference to the Lund Committee (Lund Committee on Child and Family Support Report 1996) and the Taylor Committee (DSD 2002).

In 'Social security provision for lone mothers' and 'Grants for children in addition to or instead of the child support grant', current social security arrangements for lone parents and their children are outlined. This is followed by a discussion of the debates within South Africa with respect to social security provision that serves to set the context for the research questions ('Context of the research question').

In 'Research questions and methodological approach', the research questions, as well as an account of the methodological approach used for the research, are presented. In 'Outline', the remaining chapters are introduced.

■ A history of social security provision for lone mothers in South Africa

Lone motherhood has always been seen as problematic in many historically 'male breadwinner' welfare states, including South Africa (Carabine 2001b). Within this historical context, women raising children outside of a heterosexual relationship have been defined as a 'problem' by the state, society and within the conservative dominant academic literature, although the construction of the nature of the problem has shifted over time

5. The challenges that lone mothers face in relation to paid work and childcare are considered in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

(Hall 2018; Head 2005; Kiernan et al. 1998; Mkhize & Msomi 2016). Indeed, discourses have tended to move between seeing lone mothers as a social problem as they are perceived to morally threaten the pre-eminence of the nuclear family and the morality of society as a whole and seeing lone mothers as experiencing structural problems (Duncan & Edwards 1998).⁶ As such, childcare policies are generally silent on the diversity of family units (South African Child Gauge 2018). In the South African context, the apartheid system exploited kinship care, which is a common socio-economic family strategy. Its policies forcibly fragmented black African families through forced removals and by having men leave their families to work in mines, living in single-sex hostels away from their wives and children. Many of these impediments to family life persist today and are not adequately addressed by policy (Hall 2018). The privileged status of the nuclear family has remained persistent in post-apartheid South Africa and that is sometimes implicit in policies and in the attitudes of those who implement policy (Hall 2018). As a result of such perceptions of lone motherhood, welfare state provision has historically been structured dichotomously around men as workers and women as carers with policies serving to protect this gendered contract at the household level (Lewis & Hobson 1997). As we will see, the South African apartheid government structured its social welfare provision for white families similarly. Under the current South African arrangements, however, lone mothers are treated strictly as workers or breadwinners first and foremost and then as caregivers (Casale & Desmond 2003). This section accounts for the historical development of social security provisions for lone mothers in South Africa.

Before doing so, however, it is important to note that alongside lone parenthood, family demographic transition has been marked by other trends. Rising divorce rates, cohabitation and declining marriage rates in most countries have contributed to changing family structures. Kiernan et al. (1998) highlighted two separations that may fundamentally alter the normative framework within which social security provision for lone mothers could be based – the separation of sex from parenthood and the separation of parenting from marriage. Although she was referring to the UK, this would, in my view, have relevance in South Africa. The acknowledgement of these two separations could reduce the dominance of external moral codes of behaviour in South Africa imposed on women, particularly external religious moral codes. The acknowledgement of an internalised moral framework within which individuals, instead, determined for themselves whether or not their behaviours were morally correct would resonate with the social rights of citizenship within the Constitution. Thus, it could be argued that this internalisation of the moral order and

6. The socio-economic structural challenges experienced by lone mothers in South Africa will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

fragmentation of the notion of the 'proper' family may have implications for social security provision for lone mothers in that their route to lone motherhood would not be judged, and choices they make about care for their child or children could therefore be supported by the state. No state, much less a democratic state, could expect to control sexual behaviour. Indeed, it could be argued that a welfare state ought to take on the role of providing resources to meet the needs within the resulting range of family types.

A considerable number of low-income lone mothers live in households with relatives or other adults (*General Household Survey* 2018; Russel 2004). Adequate social cash transfers for the needs of lone mothers would enable many mothers who had previously been 'concealed' in extended family homes to establish independent households. Furthermore, when parents separate, one party usually parents for the majority of the time, and consistent with literature, this responsibility often falls on the shoulders of women (Children's Institute 2018).

■ Social security for lone mothers prior to democracy

In both the colonial (pre-1911) and racial segregation eras (1911-1948), the social provision in South Africa had been racially stratified, with social security benefits (such as they were) being mainly only available to the white population. There appeared to be some moves towards a more comprehensive cover by the United Party during the 1940s (Van Niekerk 2007). In 1943, the Social Security Committee was established under the then-chairman of the Industrial Development Corporation, HJ van Eck, as part of post-war social policy reconstruction in order to compensate black Africans for their contribution (on behalf of the Republic of South Africa) in the First World War (WWI) (*Race Relations Handbook* 1949). The Committee found that the social security structure at the time was:

Composed of a series of distinct measures, introduced at various times and administered by some nine different authorities, [...with...] considerable gaps. There is no national sick pay arrangement; no national system of family allowances; no general provision for the abnormal costs associated with vital events; no cover against unemployment for the great majority of employees [black Africans]; no grants to invalids if they are non-Europeans; and no pensions for old Natives. (Social Security Committee Report 1944, p. 15)

The Social Security Committee made proposals for egalitarian, comprehensive social security provisions that would cover all racial groups (Seekings 2005). Only three proposals were implemented, however, and they were racially stratified such that whites (who constituted 21% of the population) received 67% of the total benefits, while black

Africans (69% of the population) received 20% of the total benefits (Batson 1944). Coloured and Indian people formed 10% of the population, receiving the remaining 13% of the benefits (Batson 1944). The first proposal to be implemented was the provision of an old-age pension. In 1944, Minister of Finance Jan Hofmeyr extended the old-age pension to black Africans in cities, towns and rural areas (Hansard 1945). Benefits varied according to the location: £12SA per month for city residents, £9SA per month for those residing in towns and £6SA per month for people in rural areas. The comparable white old-age pension was £60SA per month for city residents, £54SA per month for those living in towns and £48SA per month for rural-based white people (Hansard 1945). The second proposal that was implemented was the disability grant to persons of all races over the age of sixteen who suffered severely from mental and/or physical disabilities such that they were incapable of taking care of themselves (*Race Relations Handbook* 1949). The provision of the disability grant was also racially stratified. The third proposal was a pension for blind people given on the same scale as the old-age pension (Hansard 1945). Social security proposals to cover the basic needs of mothers and children were refuted on the basis that:

[C]ash family allowances will often be applied for other purposes than the maintenance of the children [...and...] abuse is far less likely where assistance is given in kind, through health services, free education, differential housing subsidies, school meals and other nutritional measures. (Social Security Select Committee 1944, p. 9)

However, even this was rendered impossible by the government:

[T]he prosecution of the war to a successful conclusion and thereafter the early implementation of the demobilization plan, must receive priority over steps for the improvement and expansion of our social security arrangements. (Hansard 1945, p. 411)

When the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948, introducing a system of 'apartheid' or 'separate development', social security provision for black South Africans regressed (Seekings 2005). The introduction of a homeland system led to the exclusion of millions of black Africans who were given citizenship of the so-called independent homelands of Transkei, Ciskei, Venda and Bophuthatswana⁷ (Jansen 2005). 'Citizens' of these 'homelands' were, as will be seen, not covered by social security

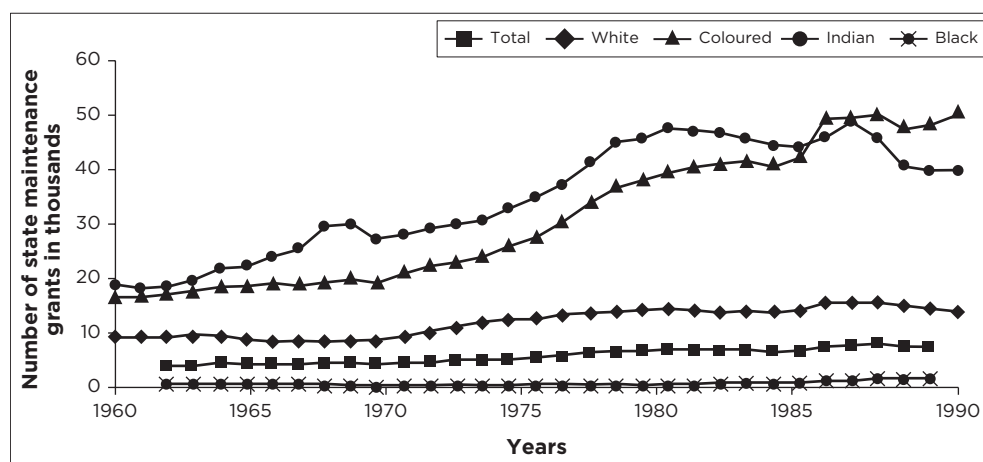
7. Under apartheid, a limited part of the country was designated for black Africans with four 'homelands' receiving 'independence' from government: Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei and Venda. Six other 'homelands' – KwaZulu, kweNgwane, Lebowa, kwaNdebele, Gazankulu and Qwaqwa – were given 'self-governing' status (Mabin 1991). Such independence granted by the apartheid regime to aid the 'separate development' of different racial groups was always subject to apartheid law. For purposes of this book, the term 'former homeland' will be used to identify what is referred to as the 'independent' TVBC states: Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana and Ciskei and the six self-governing homelands.

provision enacted in the rest of South Africa and had to enact (and fund) their own parallel provision if they could. Within the rest of South Africa, social security provision remained racially stratified in terms of eligibility, amounts of benefit paid and the administration system (Lund 2000). The Department of Welfare was divided according to which racial group it was serving and whether people lived in rural or urban areas (Christie & Collins 1982).

The main social security provision that was introduced for lone mothers in the non-homeland areas under apartheid was the state maintenance grant (SMG) in 1947 (Triegaardt 2005). The SMG was designed to respond to widowhood. It was also available for lone parents who had experienced divorce; abandonment by a spouse for more than six months; or had a spouse in prison, a drug treatment centre or a similar institution for more than six months (Lund 2002b). The SMG was paid with respect to the caregiver and the dependent child(ren). Before 1992, the SMG was awarded to up to four children (later two) in a nuclear family and to one 'illegitimate' child where there was a child or children born out of wedlock (Burman & Barratt 1993, p. 8). The SMG was means-tested, and the applicant had to prove that she and later he (in 1992, men could be included) had attempted to obtain maintenance from the partner or other parent of the children through the private parental maintenance system (Seekings & Nattrass 2002).

The programme originally purposefully excluded all black African women, and later, when black Africans were granted eligibility, only a few actually received it as such information was censored during apartheid (Lund 2007). The main beneficiaries were white, Indian and Coloured (Simkins & Dlamini 1992). Some of the homelands did enact equivalent social security provision but with different names and regulations attached to it. It was called a 'capitation grant' in some former homelands and an executive allowance in others (CASE 2000). Bophuthatswana administered only the child allowance for only one child (Lund 2007). Venda independently introduced a single-parent allowance of ZAR200 each per month (Burman & Barratt 1993, p. 8). Former homelands worked closely with the apartheid regime, with constitutional rights being respected only as far as it suited both systems of government (Institute of Security Studies 2006). All low-income women citizens of Venda, for example, were entitled to social assistance; however, there were only ten beneficiaries in 1991, each receiving ZAR200 per month (Lund 2007).

Figure 1.1 reflects the number of SMGs per 1,000 children up to the age of seventeen years (Van Der Berg & Kruger 1995) in South Africa between 1960 and 1993.



Source: Van der Berg, S & Kruger, J 1995, 'Fiscal prospects and options for the South African welfare vote', paper commissioned for the World Bank.

FIGURE 1.1: The number of state maintenance grants per 1,000 children aged zero to seventeen years by racial classification from 1960 to 1993.

The detrimental effects of institutional fragmentation caused by the apartheid regime on social services still plague the lives of low-income families in RSA to this day, particularly those living in rural areas of former homelands. The provinces with the highest rates of poverty are precisely those in which the SMG had either not been administered at all or had been sparsely administered (Lund 2007). The demise of apartheid brought about fundamental changes to South Africa's social security system as will be reflected in the next section, focusing on social security provision for lone mothers during the transition to democracy.

■ Social security provision for lone mothers during the transition to democracy

In 1995, the new democratic government appointed the Lund Committee to make recommendations on how the South African social security system could be transformed into a comprehensive, equitable and integrated structure. The mandate of the committee was to find ways of rectifying racial and spatial bias in disseminating the SMG while taking fiscal constraints into consideration. The Lund Committee was commissioned to:

[U]ndertake a critical appraisal of [... the ...] existing system of state support, in all departments, to children and families; investigate the possibility of increasing parental financial support through the private maintenance system; explore

alternative policy options in relation to social security for children and families as well as other anti-poverty, economic empowerment and capacity-building strategies and develop approaches for effective targeting of programmes for children and families. (Lund Committee Report 1996, p. 2)

During the tenure of the Lund Committee, ZAR1.2 billion was spent on the SMG annually (African National Congress [ANC] 1997). Extending the grant to all eligible black Africans would have cost the fiscal purse up to ZAR20 billion a year (Lund 2007). In 1997, the new democratic government declared that to award the SMG to all eligible South African women and children was fiscally impossible (ANC 1997). In accordance with the then-new democracy however, social security provision for lone parents and children in former homelands had to be harmonised with that of the rest of the country:

A commitment was made to gradually remove racial discrimination in the levels of benefits awarded by rapidly increasing amounts to black Africans, less rapidly increasing amounts to Indian and coloured people, and letting white levels gradually erode. (Lund 2007, p. 44)

With recommendations from the Lund Committee for Child and Family Support, the new democratic government reconfigured social assistance to primary caregivers and their children and started phasing out the SMG, replacing it with the parsimonious CSG that does not have a parent component. The CSG was introduced in 1998 at ZAR100 per month for children up to the age of seven years (Triegaardt 2005).

This translated to many families – 37% of all white children, 36% of all Indian children, 24% of all Coloured children and 0.3% of black African children – losing their original SMG income (Lund 2002a). Until April 2022, the CSG payment is ZAR460 per month after which it increased by ZAR10 for children under the age of eighteen years. In 2020, with the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, ZAR300 per child was added to the CSG for the month of May 2020 only, making it ZAR740 per child (DSD 2020). In addition, each caregiver in receipt of the CSG was granted ZAR500 per month for five months regardless of the number of children on whose behalf they receive the CSG (South African Social Security Agency [SASSA] 2020). These measures were intended for social relief during the months of lockdown period where economic activity was minimal, starting at Level 5 and slowly opening up to Level 1 in September 2021.

It was upon recommendation of the Lund Committee that the CSG should include that the representer of the CSG be present when transferring the child directly to the primary caregiver. This ensures vigilant monitoring of the environment and circumstances in which the child is placed and is given directly to the primary caregiver. The rationale is that most primary caregivers living below the poverty line are women ‘without a voice’ or power in many households (Lund Committee Report 1997). Giving the CSG

directly to women, primary caregivers are said to empower women in the family home (May, 2005). The CSG as implemented is means-tested; single parents earning less than ZAR48,000 and married couples earning less than ZAR96,000 per annum are eligible (SASSA 2020).

The CSG has been criticised for being too small in amount and for not covering children up to the age of eighteen years from the onset (Streak 2005). In addition, the means-test threshold was not adjusted for inflation for ten years since the CSG was introduced in 1998, thus making the eligibility criteria much tighter than when the CSG was first introduced (Budlender & Woolard 2006). Inflation adjustments began in 2008 (DSD 2008).

The CSG's gradual expansion, which expanded the age limit to cover children under fourteen years from 2003 to 2005, under fifteen years in 2009 and under eighteen years from 2010 to 2012, reduced the possibility that ineligible children's requirements would be met with funds from the CSG (SACG 2016). Grants are also used to pay for social services that some argue should be provided by the state for low-income families such as school fees, water and electricity, and transport to school (Goldblatt 2005). Lone mothers find ways to mediate social assistance and deliver it on behalf of the state. They undergo a process of claiming the CSG, collecting it in person and thus incurring transport costs, and they are then expected to cover the costs of food, shelter, clothing, education, health care and other aspects of a child's maintenance. In order to receive the CSG, they should be poor and they must pass a means test. Millions of unemployed, impoverished lone mothers are therefore expected, without any means to support themselves because of high unemployment rates, to provide childcare services for society without any compensation (Casale & Desmond 2003). Black African women, in particular, experience the highest levels of unemployment while reflecting the highest fertility rates (Stats SA 2010). Such a combination makes them more susceptible to the multiple deprivations of basic needs such as a relatively secure dwelling, adequate food supply, sanitation and access to clean water (Noble et al. 2006). The ANC government, therefore, is faced with the challenge of reconciling the tension between unmet constitutional rights for the majority of the South African population and its (the ANC's) leanings towards liberal macro-economic policy. A further example of this tension can be found in the debates surrounding the Taylor Committee.

■ The Taylor Committee

In the *Reconstruction and Development Programme White Paper of 1994* (RSA 1994), the ANC emphasised that the success of South Africa's dismantling of the apartheid system and transition to democracy will

ultimately be judged by the ANC government's capacity to address apartheid's legacy of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. No political democracy can survive and flourish if the mass of our people remains in poverty, without tangible prospects for a better life. Attacking poverty and deprivation must therefore be the first priority of our democratic government (*RDP White Paper* 1994, p. 1).

It is against this backdrop that the RSA DSD appointed the Taylor Committee to examine the then-existing social security system and to devise proposals for comprehensive social security (RSA DSD 2002).⁸ The committee made a number of recommendations that would directly impact the lives of low-income lone mothers and their children. Firstly, the introduction of a universal BIG that would explicitly address the income poverty of unemployed people of working age was recommended (Taylor Committee Report 2002). It was argued that such a grant would positively affect the lives of children as it would minimise the pressure to stretch CSGs to meet the needs of entire families (Triegaardt 2006). As discussed in 'Context of the research question', increased household income is strongly correlated with improvements in children's well-being. Access to a BIG would also enhance the impact of other anti-poverty programmes by increasing their rate of take-up (Seekings 2002). The committee's research yielded results that show that while government programmes, to enhance access to basic constitutional rights such as housing, education, health care and land, were well conceived and potentially well targeted, people from poor households continued to have difficulty in taking advantage of such initiatives as they do not even have the income for transport, food or basic clothing (Taylor Committee 2002). A regular income would enable planning, risk-taking (in terms of using some of the money to seek employment) and a degree of financial self-reliance. In support of the committee's recommendations, academic literature shows that measures to address income poverty are easier to roll out in the short term, allowing the state to buy time for the progressive realisation of other socio-economic obligations (McCord 2005). Without a doubt, a BIG would have gone some way in mitigating the impact of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income families. It is probable that the administrative nightmare of suddenly having to provide economic social relief assistance to millions of people during a pandemic would be avoided (Black Sash 2021).

In conflict with the government's own aspirations to consolidate the social citizenship of poor South Africans, particularly unemployed South Africans of working age, it decided against the implementation of a

8. Until 2000, the Department of Social Development was called the Department of Welfare.

universal BIG. Following a July 2003 cabinet meeting, President Mbeki is reported to have said that:

We discussed BIG some time ago and we have said our approach should evolve through a comprehensive social system that includes old age pensions, disability grants and a free public health system. If you give everybody a R100 a month it will not make a difference. The notion that one single intervention will help is wrong. To introduce a system which indiscriminately gives R100 to a millionaire and a pensioner does not work. (Mbeki 2004)

Such logic in denial of the BIG was deeply flawed for a number of reasons. Firstly, the proposal that the Taylor Committee made for BIG was such that people in receipt of grants like the disability grant and the old age pension would not receive the BIG. Secondly, the proposed universal nature of the BIG would administratively cost much less than if a means test was implemented (Meth & Woolard 2004). It could be argued that Mbeki's view was in conflict with the constitutional framework, which states that 'Everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance' (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 107 of 1996*, p. 27). This constitutional imperative for social assistance is explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

Indeed, both the national DSD (2021, 2022) and the NDP (2021) recommended the provision of the BIG. Current proposals for social security reform are discussed in Chapter 8. President Mbeki's solution for the lack of social assistance for unemployed people of working age is the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP), which is inaptly imported from the United States of America (McCord 2004). This Welfare-to-Work Programme will be explored further in Chapter 4 within the context of a social policy shift in the country from a social democratic stance to a neo-liberal.

The following sub-section gives a brief description of the current social security provision for lone mothers under special circumstances.

■ Social security provision for lone mothers

As indicated above, there is no parent or caregiver component in the CSG. This is considered a major drawback in the struggle for the recognition of women's unpaid care work in South Africa (Goldblatt 2005). There is now no longer any state assistance for the millions of women who contribute to the reproduction of South African society by taking care of children. Their unpaid labour, as feminist theorists note in countries with similar policies, is invisible and taken for granted (Delaney et al. 2016; SACG 2016). It is apparent that in negotiating democracy, racial equity took precedence over gender concerns causing a considerable disadvantage in the general development of the country. Mothers no longer have a claim in their own

right, and they are simply conduits for assistance to children (Goldblatt 2005). Their social citizenship entitlements to a basic level of state support have been subsumed in their children's rights. The need for adequate social security provision for lone mothers was well articulated in the South African *Women's Charter of 1954* six years after the onset of apartheid:

We women share with our menfolk the cares and anxieties imposed by poverty and its evils. As mothers, it falls upon us to make small wages stretch a long way. It is we who feel the cries of our children when they are hungry and sick. It is our lot to keep and care for the homes that are too small, broken and dirty to be kept clean. We know what it is to keep family life going in shanties or in overcrowded one-room apartments. (*Women's Charter* 1954, p. 2)

Even though the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 107 of 1996* enshrines the country's new principles of democracy and prioritises the well-being of its citizens, tension between these rights and the daily reality of poor people's lives in South Africa – which is not far from the descriptions contained in the aforementioned reference from the 1954 *Women's Charter* – still exists.

The remainder of this section describes the limited circumstances in which social security provision is available to lone mothers.

The first is in respect of lone mothers of working age who have been previously formally employed but have lost their jobs. These women may be entitled to the contributory Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).⁹ This is a benefit payable for a maximum of 365 days within a four-year period (*Unemployment Insurance Act No. 63 of 2001:63*, p. 63), depending on prior contributions. Because of the country's high unemployment rate that hit a record high two years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (34.9% according to the official definition) and the long-term nature of this unemployment, only a small percentage of South Africans are entitled to the UIF (LFS 2021).

Lone mothers who are disabled have access to a means-tested disability grant (DG) of ZAR1,860 per month¹⁰ (SASSA 2021). Severely disabled people (including severely disabled lone mothers) who are unable to care for themselves are entitled to a grant-in-aid, ZAR430 per month, which assists in covering care costs (SASSA 2021). People in receipt of a DG, including lone mothers, are entitled to ZAR160,573 housing subsidy and a

9. In accordance with *Unemployment Insurance Act 63 of 2001*, employers and employees contribute to a fund from which employees who become unemployed or their beneficiaries, as the case may be, are entitled to benefits to alleviate the harmful economic and social effects of unemployment (DOL 2008).

10. The means test for the DG for all unmarried, disabled people stipulates that a recipient must have assets worth less than ZAR1,115,400 and an income of no more than ZAR78,120 per year, for a married couple, joint assets must be worth less than ZAR2,230,800 with a joint income of no more than ZAR156,240 per year (SASSA 2021).

set disability variance amount to pay for the cost of any extra features their house may need, for example, a ramp for wheelchair access (RSA Department of Human Settlements 2020).

Women with low income from the age of 60 years are eligible for a means-tested old-age grant (OAG)¹¹ for an amount of ZAR1,860 per month. As mentioned above, kinship care is a common socio-economic family strategy for many a black African family in RSA (SACG 2018). As such, a considerable number of children in the country are being parented by their grandmothers and/or other relatives. Although this is a longstanding cultural practice in the country, parental absence is because of a number of reasons, '[...] including historic population control, labour migration, poverty, housing and educational opportunities, low marriage and cohabitation rates, as well as customary care arrangements' (SACG 2018).

At its worst, the HIV and AIDS pandemic contributed substantially to South Africa's high mortality rate hitting the 'middle generation' the hardest, leaving AIDS orphans mostly dependent on their grandmothers who, as a result, became lone mothers (Children's Institute 2007; Streak 2005).¹² Under these circumstances, the OAG (which is intended to be a poverty relief grant for the aged) becomes a general household grant for many families. Destitute lone mothers are entitled to a general social relief of distress grant for up to six months (SASSA 2020). The grant may be given as cash (in varying amounts depending on the lone mother's circumstances), as food parcels or as a voucher to buy food for a three-month period. Under 'exceptional' circumstances, the period can be extended up to six months.

■ Grants for children in addition to or instead of the child support grant

There are also certain grants available for children of lone mothers either in addition to or instead of CSG. Thus, should a lone mother have a severely disabled child in need of full-time care, she is entitled to a means-tested care dependency grant (CDG) of ZAR1,890 per month (SASSA 2021). A foster child grant (FCG) – currently ZAR1,050 per month – is available to a lone mother who is a primary caregiver for a child who is not biologically hers (SASSA 2021). Children up to the age of eighteen years are eligible, and the FCG can be extended to children up to 21 years of age if the child or children

11. The old-age grant means test is such that only people with an income of ZAR78,120 or less per year are eligible if they are single or have an income of ZAR156,240 or less per annum if married (SASSA 2021).

12. HIV death rates had a distinctive pattern by age in which there was an increase to a given age and then a rapid decline at older ages. This peak occurred at 30–34 years for women and 35–39 years for men (Stats SA 2007).

are still in formal education (DSD 2007c). In 2022, the Department of Social Development made provision for orphaned children and coined a CSG top-up. This is an additional amount of ZAR240 that is added to the standard CSG amount of ZAR480, with the same eligibility criteria (DSD 2022). It allows for relatives caring for orphans to have access to an amount above the food poverty line of ZAR624 per month (Medical Research Council (MRC) 2022) while awaiting a foster care grant that entails an arduous application process (DSD 2022). The next section deals with South Africa's public debates on the relevance of social security within the country. These issues will form the context of the study's research question.

■ Context of the research question

My research question is formulated in the context of prevalent social security and social protection discourses in South Africa. As a self-professed 'developmental' welfare state, South Africa falls outside Esping-Anderson's welfare-state regime typologies: liberal, conservative and social democratic welfare states.¹³ Esping-Anderson disagrees with the notion of a fourth welfare-state regime and argues that a developmental welfare state is a hybrid of conservative and liberal regimes (Esping-Anderson 1997). In the lead up to the first democratic elections in 1994, the ANC's manifesto – the Reconstruction and Development Programme¹⁴ base document – suggested a *Redistributive Social Democratic Policy Framework* (RDP White Paper 1994). However, this vision was modified by successive policy documents once the ANC was in government. Firstly, the *Reconstruction and Development Programme White Paper of 1994* diluted the redistributive proposals in the RDP base document (Van Niekerk 2003), then the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR)¹⁵ macro-economic framework in 1996 effectively introduced a liberal, free-market growth at all costs' strategy, which reinforced neo-liberal social welfare policies (Meth 2002).

13. Esping-Anderson's welfare state typologies refer to activities and efforts (generally by the government) that reduce citizen's reliance on the market (and their labour) for their well-being (Esping-Anderson 1990). He termed this as the level of decommodification from the labour market. In general, social assistance coverage for unemployment, sickness and time to care for young children are used to measure decommodification for comparisons of the welfare state (see Esping-Andersen 1990).

14. The RDP was part of the ANC's manifesto before South Africa's first democratic election. In its base document, the RDP set out to 'meet basic needs, developing human resources, building the economy and democratising the state' (RDP 1994, p. 7). The economic and social policy proposals in the RDP base document suggested a variant of a Keynesian development strategy where the state intervened through public sector interventions to ensure economic growth and the meeting of social needs.

15. The economic strategy used within GEAR was to maintain internal fiscal restraint in order to rapidly eliminate government deficit and to implement economic reforms so as to facilitate a globally competitive export-led growth path that would grow the economy (GEAR 1996). Fiscal restraint translated to austere social security provision with minimal redistribution.

Extended Public Works Programmes dominate the current social protection and labour market discourse, representing the policy instrument of choice to address both poverty and unemployment. The ANC sees these EPWPs as initiatives in harmony with South Africa as a *developmental state* as opposed to social security provision which, it is argued, is often associated with fiscal strain, dependency and a lack of dignity. The EPWPs' approach is seen as being promotive (of work) and more productive than mere social security provision that erodes dignity. Adequate social security provision without the pressure to work is perceived (by the ANC) as a 'handout' and not a 'hand-up' (ANC 2007a; Noble & Ntshongwana 2008).

These associations became policy resolutions in an ANC conference:

Beyond poverty alleviation, interventions must seek to develop exit programmes that capacitate households and communities to empower themselves. It is the duty of the developmental state to achieve this. Grants must not create dependency and thus must be linked to economic activity. Many of these households and communities remain trapped in poverty, are dependent on the state and thus unable to access the opportunities created by the positive economic climate. (ANC 2007a)

Later in the same conference, the following declaration was made: 'We are building a developmental state and not a welfare state given that in a welfare state, dependency is profound' (ANC 2007a).

The authors of this declaration misunderstand the nature of a welfare state that promotes the well-being of its citizens. In the first place, they are equating the use of 'welfare' in 'welfare state' with the American use of the term 'welfare' meaning social assistance. They then simplistically contrast a 'welfare state' in which social assistance is provided with a 'developmental state' where employment is the priority. This is a false dichotomy, as in typical social democratic welfare states employment is always a priority, but this employment is decommodified by the provision of adequate social security when work is not available (see Surender et al. 2010 and my discussion in Chapter 2). This false dichotomy permeates many of the debates in RSA.

In his 2007 SoNA, President Mbeki also emphasised the importance of getting people into work and the need to:

[E]nsure the systematic linkage of beneficiaries of social assistance to municipal services and work opportunities' and for government and others to be 'continuously focused on the task to ensure that as many of our people as possible graduate out of dependence on social grants [...]. (SoNA 2007)

This, however, is not a universal position within the ANC government. The then-Minister of Social Development, Zola Skweyiya, accepted that there is

no dependency culture in RSA (DSD 2007b) and acknowledged the critical role played by social security provision:

[W]hile a comprehensive social security system is too expensive, it is also too expensive not to have it, given its ability to reduce poverty and create safety nets and stable families and communities. (Skweyiya 2007).

Comprehensive social security provision in RSA is an area of unresolved tension within government – as evidenced by the concurrent efforts to identify gaps (in social security provision) by The Forum of South African Directors-General (FOSAD) which I discuss in Chapter 8.

The pressure to work for social grant recipients does not exclude women with young children even though the means test taken for CSG eligibility is evidence of a lack of resources to employ child carers. The Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) under the EPWP (Department of Public Works and Infrastructure) has begun, albeit in small measure, to address the burden of care for low-income lone mothers. In his last SoNA, President Thabo Mbeki committed to doubling the number of children enrolled in early childhood development (ECD) to over 600,000 through 1,000 new sites with more than 3,500 practitioners trained and employed and increasing the number of caregivers (SoNA 2008).

This initiative, however, does not address some people's family values of the desire to care for their own children.

Low-income lone mothers face even greater hardship in their daily lives as they are framed in social discourse as 'grasping and irresponsible' (Lund 2004). There is widespread concern that young women become pregnant in order to access the CSG (Goldblatt 2005). However, research conducted under the auspices of the RSA DSD yielded results that show that there is no evidence of such perverse incentives amongst teenage mothers in particular (Makiwane & Udjo 2007a). The interface between perceived perverse incentives and assumptions of a dependency culture and its relationship to notions of an 'underclass' form the theoretical backdrop to this study.

In an effort to achieve inclusive growth and enhance the quality of life for citizens, South African President Jacob Zuma employed an independent National Planning Commission that draws a strategic plan for development, the *National Development Plan Vision 2030* (NDP 2020). The NDP is aligned with the country's international development commitments such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as per the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the African Union's (AU's) *Agenda 2063* (Mthembu et al. 2021). Social protection is one of the three priority areas in the NDP, along with an inclusive economy and good governance. The NDP has defined a social protection

floor with stipulated basic social security guarantees that are intended to ensure that, over the life cycle, people have access to free basic services and comprehensive social security (NDP 2030). As such, the NDP recommends a BIG that is also accessible to able-bodied people of working age (NDP 2030).

There has been tension between corruption and an inclusive economy, impeding the realisation of socio-economic rights that are a constitutional mandate. Dubbed 'the wasted Zuma years' (2009–2018), the former president's term was marred with corruption which took place, 'with the knowledge and the participation of some ministers, deputies and premiers who served at the pleasure of the president' (Makhanya 2019).

As such, upon recommendation by the former public protector, Advocate Thuli Madonsela, a Commission of Inquiry into allegations of state capture and corruption in the public sector was established in January 2018 (State Capture Report 2022). Led by the current Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, the commission received eight extensions to complete its mandate because of the extent of maleficence 'uncovered'. It is estimated that ZAR1 trillion has been lost to corruption and state capture, with private sector enablers and beneficiaries also identified in the State Capture Report Volume 1: Part 1 (2022) as having contributed to the destruction of the country's economy (Gossel 2022).

The introduction of the underclass discourse from the USA, associated particularly with the work of Charles Murray (1990, 1996), added a new moralistic impetus to most liberal welfare states including South Africa. Murray's earlier work focused on what he saw as the structural disincentives to 'independence' in the USA through the provision of social assistance benefits, and in response, he advocated an abolition of the social assistance safety net to 'incentivise' individuals into paid work and to tackle the morally charged notion of 'welfare dependency' (Murray 1984). In later works, Murray's focus became more behavioural rather than structural. He spoke of the underclass as a distinct and separate subgroup of the population who not only lived differently from 'mainstream society' but also did not share the values and aspirations of 'mainstream society' and had no desire to participate in this 'mainstream society' (Murray 1996). He came to define the underclass by the labels of 'illegitimacy', criminality, long-term unemployment and lone mothers – by which Murray was referring usually only to single unmarried mothers who were a particular focus of Murray's criticism as he stated: 'The time has come to put the stigma back into illegitimacy' (Murray 1996, p. 12). This and other literature engaging with this discourse (including Dean & Taylor-Gooby 1992; Gallie &

Volger 1990; Jencks & Pederson 1991; Mead 1989; Morris 1995) will be reviewed in greater detail in Chapter 2:

In South Africa, the 'dependency culture' debate has some additional twists. Similar to other liberal welfare states, the argument about the link between social security and dependency is sometimes made by people wishing to reduce the cost of social security to the government.

There's too much rural land lying fallow, land that used to be cultivated, and because there are so many social grants, people no longer plant. The State cannot provide everything. (SABC News 2008)

This statement was made by the former South African Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, at the launch of a World Bank Report (2004, p. 10) on growth strategies for developing countries. Research findings from in-depth interviews conducted in 2021 with CSG recipients will demonstrate that low-income mothers continue to experience pressure to be simultaneously in paid work and care for their children.

In a *Business Day* newspaper article, 'Nurturing welfare dependency', Tito Mboweni, who served as Governor of the South African Reserve Bank from 1999 to 2009 and more recently as Minister of Finance (2018–2021), reiterated his stance on social security provision that it engenders a culture of dependency and encourages teenage pregnancy:

When millions of people depend on social grants for sustenance, and urban legend has it that teenagers fall pregnant so as to gain access to grants, are we not running the risk of these social grants becoming an end in themselves and thus nurturing a dependency syndrome, destroying the fabric of our society? [...] South Africa [...], as a developing economy with a young population, should be moving away from an attitude of dependency. It needs to promote education which will in turn foster self-reliance, entrepreneurship, hunger for work and production. It should not be encouraging more reliance on government handouts. (Tito Mboweni quoted in *Business Day* 2009)

'Manuel calls for jobs not handouts', an article in the *Business Times* (Boyle 2004), as the then-Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel made a presentation on a report by the government, *Trends in Intergovernmental Finances*, which suggests that:

[T]he provinces are putting billions into the pockets of the poor through social grants [...] [however,] the government believes that the integration of the poor into the economy [is] a better way to fight poverty than cash handouts. (p. 73)

The Intergovernmental Fiscal Reviews (IGFR) of 2004 cites the uptake of the CSG¹⁶ as the most rapidly increasing amongst all social grants. Discouraging the provision of social grants, the Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, said:

A better balance needs to be struck between fighting poverty through cash transfers and ensuring broad-based development and the creation of

16. see <https://www.gov.za/services/child-care-social-benefits/child-support-grant>

opportunities for the poor to participate productively in the South African economy.¹⁷

In response to public protests on service delivery, the Deputy Minister of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Yunus Carrim, asserted in an article in *Sunday Times* newspaper that the protests could, in fact, also reflect, '[...] a culture of dependency on the state [... which is ...] constantly going to pose a challenge to our democracy' (*Sunday Times* 2010). He reiterated that such a culture of dependency was so deeply entrenched that there were '[...] more protests around the country in the first three months of this year than in any equivalent period since 1994'. His caution to policy makers is that social grants ought not to be a priority for poverty reduction in the country but that job creation is more important and has a long-term effect:

[S]ome people had been excluded for so long, first under apartheid and now under democratic rule, that just giving them what they ask for might not be enough to make them good citizens. (*Sunday Times* 2010)

Commenting on the positive impact a government anti-poverty programme might have in a rural setting in the Western Cape province which entails infrastructural and skills development, a journalist from the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper, Monako Dibetle, wrote, 'almost the entire community is dependent on social grants, a situation which is suspected to have fuelled an increase in pregnancies among young women' (Dibetle 2008).

In her article, 'Teach-em-to-fish', the deputy editor of the *City Press*, Lizeka Mda, affirmed that:

There is a reason for the saying: give a man a fish and you have fed him for today, teach a man to fish and you have fed him for a lifetime. Social grants are fish, whereas the majority of recipients could use some fishing skills. [*we are deeply entrenched in the dependency route ...*] Why should the poor be kept in a position of perpetual dependency? (*City Press* 2009)

Another school of thought sees the provision of state support as undermining traditional support systems, undermining dignity and preventing 'home-grown solutions' to poverty. This latter stance is complicated and may be driven by an association of social security with the former apartheid regime. Whereas in developed countries, the 'dependency culture' debate is clearly aligned with neo-liberal thinking, in South Africa the debate is thus more complex. It could be argued that the South African principle of 'ubuntu'¹⁸ is a statement of social solidarity that

17. Social Development 2004, p. 73, viewed 29 November 2023, from <https://www.treasury.gov.za/publications/igfr/2004/07.%20Chapter%206%20-%20Social%20Development.pdf>

18. The concept of 'ubuntu' is based on the principle that 'each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationships with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of ... [other] ... individual's humanity. *Ubuntu* means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being' (Department of Welfare 1997, Chapter 2, para. 24).

is both 'home grown' and supportive of a comprehensive social security system, and this issue will be explored later. Meanwhile, the pronouncements on social grants leading to the erosion of dignity are not evidence-based but are articulations generally by politicians who are not themselves poor. It is essential therefore that evidence is obtained about the views of ordinary people, and this research study considers the issue in relation to lone mothers in particular.

In contrast to this 'dependency' discourse, there is a countervailing discourse emerging which stresses the role of basic income support in poverty alleviation and as a mechanism for promoting 'independence'. Research evidence shows that the introduction of social security for all racial groups in the form of social grants has significantly reduced poverty (Samson 2006). Two studies that measured the impact of the CSG on poverty reduction show that the CSG has also been associated with increased school attendance, decreased child hunger and increased broad labour force participation (Samson 2006; Woolard 2003). Woolard's quantitative research evidence shows that CSG receipt has impacted the lives of recipients in three significant ways. Firstly, it increases the probability that a school-age child will attend school by over 50%. Secondly, each CSG a household receives is associated with an 8% – 14% decrease in the probability that a child goes hungry. Thirdly, receipt of the CSG has also been associated with an increase of 7% – 14% in the labour market participation of mothers in the past (99% of CSGs are received by mothers) (Woolard 2003).

Reasons for mothers' increased labour participation may vary. Receiving a CSG may give a mother some income stability and alleviate her enough from domestic duties and immediate subsistence needs that she is capable of seeking a job (Samson 2004). Families with low income mostly live long distances from economic hubs where most jobs are located. CSG receipts may be used to transport money to seek and retain employment. Research evidence also shows that the CSG is correlated with an increased willingness to work (Posel et al. 2006). Samson and Woolard's findings on the positive nutritional impact of access to the CSG on children are consistent with other literature on nutrition (Dercon & Hoddinott 2003). The nutrition of young children is important not only because of concern over their immediate welfare but also because children's nutrition has a substantially persistent impact on their physical and mental development (Dercon & Hoddinott 2003). This in turn affects their educational success and later labour market productivity (Samson et al. 2006), subsequently taking into account that improving 'the nutritional status [*for*] malnourished infants and small children may, therefore, have important payoffs over the long term' (Woolard 2003).

Much of the research focus so far has been on the impact of social security on the well-being of children and on adults' work-seeking behaviour.

In contrast, the aim of this study is to explore the impact of social security on the lives of lone mothers, considering their role both as caregivers and as actual or potential members of the labour force by analysing current and proposed social security arrangements, with a focus on the issues of dependency, independence and dignity.

■ Research questions and methodological approach

South Africa has a constitutional imperative to both promote dignity and provide social assistance for those in need (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). In order to investigate this imperative, the primary research question for this study is: To what extent does social security provision for lone mothers encourage dependency and erode dignity, or promote independence and enhance dignity?

In order to investigate these phenomena, the following sub-questions arise:

1. What challenges do lone mothers face when in low-paid work or when unemployed?
2. What are the main issues that arise for low-income lone mothers in relation to the provision of care for their children?
3. What difficulties arise for low-income lone mothers in meeting basic needs during a pandemic and under COVID-19 lockdown measures?
4. What is meant by 'dependency' in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces? Is 'dependency' seen as an undesirable phenomenon? Is there evidence that a 'dependency culture' exists amongst lone mothers? What is meant by 'independence'? If 'independence' is seen as entry into the labour market, to what extent 'should' lone mothers be expected to engage in the labour market and how will it intersect with care responsibilities?
5. What is the relationship between social security provision and dignity for lone mothers?

Empirical evidence is drawn from two critical periods: 2008 (ten years after the onset of the CSG in South Africa) and 2021 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). These specific time frames allow for policy monitoring to evaluate the provision's effect over time and to demonstrate whether, in the context of sustained high unemployment rates exacerbated by the pandemic and lockdown measures, a dependency culture exists. The 2008 qualitative and quantitative research that informs the monitoring exercise is drawn from unpublished research conducted for purposes of my PhD study at the University of Oxford as the first cohort of the study. The second cohort of the research study was conducted with Dr Wanga Zembe as the lead of the Health System Research Unit under the auspices of the unit at the South African Medical Research Council on the impact of social security provision

on the lives of caregivers and CSG recipients during the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown measures (2021). Dr Wanga Zembe was granted approval for the first cohort of the study entitled 'The Child Support Grant and child nutrition: A birth cohort assessing the utilisation of the CSG and its link to dietary diversity, and child growth' by the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) for the period of 23 November 2015 to 22 November 2016 (ethics protocol ref. no. EC036-11/2015), and the application to conduct the second cohort was sought and approved for the period of 27 October 2020 to 26 October 2021 (ethics protocol ref. no. EC036-11/2015). In order to isolate the effects of CSG on child growth, further sub-research questions had to be explored with respect to living conditions, which can also affect child growth. As such, the second cohort of the study investigated challenges related to childcare, caregivers' low and/or lack of income and dwelling type. In addition, the relationship between the pooling of social grants in households, particularly the CSG and the pension for older persons to buy staple foods, is a running theme in the book's primary study. This would include 12 kg of maize meal and 5 kg of sugar, for example, which can be consumed by both children and adults. Given the parsimonious CSG amount, this limits the purchase of diverse food types for dietary diversity purposes. The research study draws from detailed accounts provided by low-income lone mothers themselves in in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. This analysis is supplemented by a quantitative analysis that spans the qualitative primary research focus periods (2008, 2020 and 2021). The analysis demonstrates employment and unemployment trends from 2008 to 2021. The purpose of the timeframe is to demonstrate socio-economic conditions in the country across the specified temporal dimension that informs the research study. In particular, such conditions pertain to:

- employment and unemployment trends
- sources of income
- inequality
- social benefits
- key poverty lines.

The sources of the secondary quantitative analysis are the SASAS (2007 and 2008), the Labour Force Survey (2008–2021), StatsSA (2008–2021) and the *National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) Wave 5 Overview 2008–2019* (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation 2019). Together with a team of researchers at the Oxford University, I designed the Work and Welfare modules in the 2007 and 2008 SASAS from which analysis was conducted using STATA, version 10, software. Over the 2020–2021 period, the SASAS was impeded by the COVID-19 pandemic's social distance stipulations, while the 2022 round is currently being completed

(Developmental, Capable and Ethical State Research Division 2022). Engagement with key informants who formed the expert panel on Basic Income Support (2021) under the auspices of the DSD and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) also informed the study. The nationally representative quantitative research material supplements the qualitative component of the study – a mixed methods approach is employed (Hands 2022).

The qualitative research emphasises the perspective of interviewees when seeking to understand phenomena such as family values, attitudes towards work and social assistance. Semi-structured interviews also help in collating information about possible reasons for the success and/or failure of social policy (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Van der Berg 2001). In general, in-depth individual interview research draws on the fundamental strengths of qualitative methods, such as context, nuance, interpretation, exploration and discovery (Morgan 1998). I conducted focus group interviews in isiXhosa (please see Appendix 1 for a focus group schedule). The key case study areas for the qualitative research were two provinces, the Eastern and Western Cape provinces, where isiXhosa is one of the predominant languages. These provinces were chosen for two main reasons. The first reason is that they provide suitable case study sites with the necessary combination of characteristics. These factors pertain to their rural-urban mix, relatively high (Western Cape) versus low (Eastern Cape) employment rates and access to social services. The second reason for choosing the two provinces is that they provide the opportunity to explore the issues of economic migration in significant detail, as there is considerable population movement between the two provinces (LFS 2018).

Stipulations for respondents were as follows:

- Participants had to be recipients of the CSG.
- The number of participants per group had to be between eight and twelve years old.
- Focus groups had to be all-female.
- Respondents who were related could not participate in the same focus group as this could potentially impede interviewee participation.
- Interviewees had to be residents of the areas in which interviews were taking place as questions in the interview schedule were specific to location.

The interviews consisted of an average of ten participants per focus group, resulting in just over 200 CSG respondents. Fifty per cent of the CSG focus groups were females (103 females in total), and 80% of those females were lone mothers – this was determined from the demographic information

provided by participants at the outset of the focus groups. Male and female participants were included in order to get a balanced view (in terms of gender) of the impact of the CSG on the lives of individuals and families. In this monograph, however, I focus on female lone mothers. Although most of the material is drawn from the lone mothers who took part in the CSG focus groups, I additionally drew some material from lone mothers who received the DG. As per the 2011 national census, the demographic makeup of South Africa reveals that 76.4% of the populace identifies as black African, 9.1% as white, 8.9% as Coloured and 2.5% as Indian (Stats SA 2011). As such, the focus is on black Africans as they form the vast majority of the population – all focus group interviewees were black Africans. The lone mothers were unemployed at the time of the interviews, and some were engaged in menial, sporadic work. Results for the first digital South African population count, which were contained in the South African National Census of 2022, will be published at the end of 2023 (Stats SA 2022).

All interviews were recorded with consent from participants so that the analysis of interviewees' responses would be as anonymised. I, first, analysed the focus group transcriptions according to the overarching themes of the interview schedule. The main themes are low-income lone mothers' attitudes to social assistance, the role of the CSG in the recipients' homes, childcare provision, and lone mothers' attitudes to work, work experience and barriers to work. Having used coding in the analysis of the above overarching themes, the following sub-themes emerged: the relationship between work and childcare provision, the relationship between work and social security, the relationship between social security provision and dignity, and the relationship between work and dignity.

The analysis of the relationship between work and childcare provision yielded useful information in terms of the challenges faced by low-income lone mothers and their families in South Africa, as women are expected to work and care for their children simultaneously. Issues of dependency, independence and dignity were well addressed by the analyses of the relationship between social security and dignity and how work for low-skilled women intersects with social security, childcare provision and dignity. The themes and sub-themes were then synthesised in order to reach conclusions on the extent to which social security provision for low-income lone mothers in South Africa encourages dependency and erodes dignity or promotes independence and enhances dignity. Preliminary findings from the focus group interviews informed the design of two modules in the SASAS. South African Social Attitudes Survey is run by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), using a nationally representative sample frame. I use these two modules for the quantitative analysis of lone mothers' attitudes to work and care.

■ Outline

This book's chapters have been structured as follows:

Chapter 2 ('Has the apartheid legacy bequeathed an underclass to South Africa?') sets the theoretical framework and reviews the literature on the dependency culture and underclass debates. It considers the relevance of this literature in the context of South Africa's unique socio-economic challenges resulting from the apartheid legacy and the consequent distinct racial and spatial patterns of poverty which exist in the country. In this chapter, the tension between the constitutional imperatives for a rights-based approach to social security policy is contrasted with the dependency culture discourses prevalent in the country.

Chapter 3 ('Lone motherhood in South Africa') begins with a discussion of 'good' and 'bad' lone motherhood. Routes into lone parenthood for black African women in the country are explored together with challenges to defining lone motherhood in RSA. I also provide a profile of lone mothers according to age, race, employment status and residential location.

Chapter 4 ('Lone motherhood: Employment and unemployment') is an exploration of the extent to which low-income lone mothers are expected to engage with the labour market and the impact of unemployment and lack of income on their families. It also explores the costs of paid work for lone mothers, using domestic workers as a case study. The final section looks at lone mothers in relation to the EPWP.

Chapter 5 ('Who cares?: Childcare challenges for lone mothers') focuses on the challenges experienced by lone mothers in relation to their children and their unpaid care responsibilities. The RSA government's commitments to childcare are reviewed, and the various childcare facilities in RSA are presented. Lone mothers' issues regarding meeting children's physical and emotional needs are also presented, drawing from the focus group material. The views of lone mothers with children of different ages are considered as the choices between work (if work is available) and care may differ according to the age of the child. This leads to an exploration of the relationship between paid work, unpaid care and dignity. The essence of this research study is whether social security provision for lone mothers leads to 'dependency' and, thus, a lack of dignity or independence and dignity. The nexus of these phenomena is explored in Chapter 6 ('The role of the child support grant - promoting independence or creating dependency?') through the analysis of the impact of the CSG on the lives of unemployed lone mothers and lone mothers in low-paid employment. Issues of whether dependence on social grants for lone mothers is empowering or disempowering are discussed. Details about the financial

challenges lone mothers face while caring for their children are explored elucidating whether the CSG is actually a bridge or a barrier to work.

Chapter 7 ('Dignity in the lives of low-income lone mothers') explores whether low-income lone mothers in receipt of the CSG are generally stigmatised or whether they are seen as a group in need of special social security support in RSA. This exploration is made by investigating whether unemployed lone mothers are being blamed for not having a job and whether they are being blamed for having a child and not 'retaining' the father. This informs the study as to whether low-income lone mothers are seen to be less or equally 'deserving' of state support as sick people, old people, children and other unemployed adults. Interfaced with these phenomena is an analysis of social cohesion and the interface with the concept of *ubuntu*. The question of whether the presence of the CSG erodes dignity or, in alleviating poverty and obviating the need for demeaning ways of obtaining resources in a society lacking in job opportunities (e.g. reliance on friends and relatives, indebtedness, or begging), whether it confers dignity is investigated.

Having explored challenges low-income lone mothers face to meet their daily needs and those of their children in Chapters 4–7, Chapter 8 ('Potential social security provision in South Africa: The basic income grant') is a discussion on recommendations about the BIG by an expert panel, building on the SRD grant provided by the government for unemployed people in order to combat the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown measures (DSD 2021). Concluding remarks are then given.

Has the apartheid legacy bequeathed an underclass to South Africa?

■ Introduction

The main questions to be addressed in this study focus on the extent to which social security provision in RSA promotes independence or encourages dependency amongst lone mothers. This is in the context of a constitutional mandate that stipulates certain socio-economic rights, including rights to social security for all citizens and the protection of citizens' dignity. However, sections of the media and some politicians claim that the current social assistance programmes promote dependency on the state, discourage work and indeed set up 'perverse incentives' that encourage teenage pregnancy (Makiwane & Udjo 2007a; Oyenuubi & Kollamparambil 2020). To be clear, this stance ought not to be confused with the South African President's mention of the usefulness of the social relief of distress (SRD) grant provided to citizens with low income in order to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown measures (SoNA 2022). It is worth noting that civil society has sought to expand social assistance provision, claiming that there is a constitutional imperative to do so and that there is no evidence to support claims that the system of social grants fosters a 'dependency culture'.

As indicated in Chapter 1, the contexts for these debates are the very high levels of unemployment, underemployment and poverty, particularly

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amongst black Africans. Most agree (academia, civil society and government) that these levels of unemployment and poverty are the legacy of apartheid caused by low skills as a result of limited access to education and the inferior Bantu education system the apartheid government forced upon black Africans (Terreblanche 2002)¹⁹. However, where there is dispute is the extent to which social security is a solution to these problems.

In this chapter, I will be focussing primarily on the debates about the so-called underclass and the related 'dependency culture' literature. A critical evaluation will be done on the role of social security in discourses and whether social assistance, in the South African context in particular, is a form of *ubuntu*. As such, I employ a theory synthesis of the structural underclass with that of *ubuntu*. In doing so, I seek to achieve a conceptual integration of these two literature streams and offer an enhanced view on social security provision by linking previously unconnected concepts. Inevitably, the treatment given will be partial but I hope to focus on those aspects of these studies that inform the research I have undertaken.

There are two main 'underclass' discourses that are relevant in the South African case. The first discourse, often referred to as a 'cultural' or 'moral' discourse, looks at the household structure and argues that certain groups such as lone mothers (in particular those who have never married) are a family type that promotes long-term unemployment and a culture of state dependency that is transmitted inter-generationally (Auletta 1982; Mead 1997; Murray 1984, 1989, 1996). The second discourse, the structural discourse, views challenges faced by members of the underclass such as long-term unemployment as a failure of the wider economy (Gans 1990; Morris 1995; Wilson 1987, 1991).

The underclass debates emerged in academic circles in the 1970s in the USA and in the 1980s in the UK as a response to expanding unemployment and increased reliance on social assistance. Broadly speaking, two polarised discourses emerged with conservative thinkers favouring individual cultural or moral explanations and left-leaning thinkers promoting structural explanations.

In South Africa, as discussed in Chapter 1's introductory section, fiscal concern about increasing uptake of the child support grant (CSG), mostly by low-income lone mothers, has sparked the underclass debate in communities and amongst policymakers (with a leaning to the right). This, in turn, has promoted a number of research studies that have thus far demonstrated that

19. The *South African Bantu Education Act of 1953* (1953, p. 47) was introduced by the apartheid government as an inferior form of education for black Africans. It led to a significant reduction of government aid to already ailing black African learning institutions. The fundamental aim of this policy was to direct black Africans to the unskilled labour market to ensure white economic dominance and power in the country (Christie & Collins 1982).

there is no empirical evidence of an underclass – at least in the sense of a moral underclass with values distinct from mainstream society exhibiting a ‘dependency culture’ – in the country (Makiwane & Kwizera 2008; Noble et al. 2007). In the following sections of this chapter, the international literature on the underclass will be reviewed to clarify, in particular, whether the moral underclass discourse with its attendant emphasis on a dependency culture has any legitimacy in South Africa. In the last section of the chapter, the moral underclass or dependency culture debates with regard to social assistance will be contrasted with the rights-based approach to social security which emerges from the social citizenship literature. This latter approach will be linked to the government’s mandate in respect of the social rights of citizenship as contained in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996*.

■ Social class and the underclass

The underclass concept has often been described as an elastic notion by academics such as Lister (1996) and Wilson (1987, 1989) mainly because of the fundamentally polarised views that define it, often reflecting either a conservative or a left-leaning stance. Even within each type of analytical grouping (conservative and left leaning), views vary in their detail. Christopher Jencks (1989), for example, suggested that there are three different types of underclass which are discussed in the literature: an economic underclass (those of working age unable to get steady work), a moral underclass (those with ‘deviant’ behavioural norms) and an educational one (those lacking in cultural and social skills). However, in his analysis of the underclass debates, Jencks does not incorporate either a race or geographic isolation dimension. William Julius Wilson, on the contrary, incorporated both race and spatial isolation in his structural exposition. Indeed, although not the first to use the concept, Wilson (1987) was the first academic to present systematic evidence of the existence of a structural underclass and its emergence and growth in his book *The Truly Disadvantaged*.

Not all thinkers accept that the notion of ‘underclass’ has any *theoretical* legitimacy. Interrogating the concept of the underclass, Morris (1995) stated that:

Implicit in the contrasting views about the notion of the underclass is the question of, at what duration of unemployment ‘no stable relationship’ with paid work is deemed to exist? (p. 59)

Morris (1995) challenged the basis for a theoretical foundation of the underclass:

It is not clear that these questions can be resolved by theoretical construction of a new class location rather than by empirical investigation into discontinuity in labour force experience. (p. 61)

She contended that the designation of a distinct unemployed or even underemployed underclass is not helpful if it masks 'diversity or circumstance and experience of its members, and detracts from an understanding of underlying structural processes' (Morris 1995, p. 62). As will be demonstrated in this research study's ensuing empirical chapters, qualitative data are used critically to examine specific 'circumstance and experience' of low-income lone mothers that impact on their ability to be independent and lead dignified lives.

Unemployment is at the core of class analysis; however, Morris (1995) suggested that such a scenario presents challenges:

Is it best addressed by defining the long-term unemployed 'outside' the class structure, or is it better represented by a broader notion such as fragmented employment [... or...] underemployment, and how do each of these strategies relate to social class schema based upon occupational ranking? (p. 62)

By the latter term, 'occupational ranking', Morris referred to the ranking of specific occupations with reference to skill and social standing, a term distinguishable from employment status that encompasses employment, unemployment and retirement. The next chapter will demonstrate that the majority of working South Africans are in menial employment with very limited skills. Lydia Morris concluded that the 'notion of the underclass is an oversimplification, contaminated by its use as a tool of political rhetoric, which has been too readily applied to complex social phenomena' (Morris 1995, p. 74). She further argued that the use of the term underclass is rarely supported by empirical research of the kind necessary to substantiate the varying claims associated with it, suggesting that the term be replaced with detailed studies of labour market dynamics, recruitment, job search, patterning and reproduction of disadvantage (Morris 1995). In the South African context, some social scientists adopt the approach that the (mass) unemployed are really just displaced workers. Workers and the unemployed are all parts of the working class as a whole (Gelb & Webster 1996, p. 74). Exploring the possibility of an underclass in South African society, Seekings made the following inference, '[u]nemployed and employed [... *black* ...] African people share a common position in the social structure, [... *they* ...] are similarly disadvantaged, and share similar interests' (2003, p. 7).

However, this approach, argued Seekings (2003), underestimates the importance of both actual employment and prospective access to employment in conferring advantage or in mitigating disadvantage. He asserted that the unemployed people in South Africa are disadvantaged relative to employed people. However, when it comes to placing the

unemployed in a class location, the unemployed need to be differentiated. Seekings (2003) stated that:

The reasons for delineating an underclass comprising some of the unemployed (and their dependents) are related to the ways in which labour markets work in South Africa. Amidst a scarcity of jobs, access to employment opportunities can itself be a scarce resource. (p. 8)

He suggested that the unemployed are differentiated by uneven access to employment opportunities. This is particularly relevant in South Africa as work impediments such as transport costs play a significant role in rates of unemployment (Noble et al. 2008). Seekings (2003) argued that:

An underclass should be defined not simply as including people who lack employment, but more specifically as including people who are excluded from access to employment opportunities, or at least are very disadvantaged in terms of such access. (p. 10)

Finally, Seekings concluded that, '[t]he apartheid state bequeathed an underclass to post-apartheid South Africa, in that economic and social conditions created an especially disadvantaged class' (2003, p. 15).

Such an assertion suggests that a structural underclass may exist in South Africa. Before concluding whether one does exist in the country, an exploration of the varying views of the underclass concept and suggested corresponding policy approaches will be made.

■ The moral underclass and the origins of the dependency culture thesis

The underclass term originated in the USA and was coined by Ken Auletta who put emphasis on the behaviour and values of people deemed to be members of the underclass (Auletta 1982). Auletta's (1982) book, *The Underclass*, opened with the question:

Who are those folks lurking beyond the bulging crime, welfare, drugs and the all-too visible rise in anti-social behaviour that frightens citizens, leaving them convinced they are being chased? What effect [...] had the Great Society and other government initiatives of the sixties and seventies had on poverty? And why did anti-social behaviour grow as government efforts to relieve poverty also grew? (p. 9)

Auletta (1982) further interrogated whether spatial location, class and/or race were at the core of such a group of people:

Did white or rural poverty differ much from black, Latino, or urban poverty? Was there a distinct hardcore group – an underclass – tucked among the poor? Was race, or class at the core of it? (p. 12)

He concluded that the concept of the underclass was not a racial phenomenon as he found both blacks and whites amongst its members

and that it was the *attitudes* that set 'them' apart; 'the underclass tends to feel excluded from society, rejects many values commonly embraced by society, and is often victimised by its own behaviour' (Auletta 1982, p. 45).

Through a non-profit programme run by academics and professional managers called Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), which was aimed at finding appropriate policies and programmes for poor people, Auletta (1982) studied a group of people with backgrounds such as long-term social welfare receipt, criminal convictions, drug addiction and youths with a history of delinquency. Based in 21 locations across the USA, the MDRC offered counselling, training and a year of employment to poorly educated people. Like Murray, Auletta concluded that the underclass is disproportionately drawn from single-parent homes and welfare-dependent families. However, Auletta asserted that while some members of the underclass were 'beyond redemption' and could not be helped by any new policy or programme, others could and did climb out of poverty once given the opportunity. Thus, even though Auletta found the 'underclass' term useful and was convinced of its existence, he was reluctant to generalise within the same.

In the British context, the notion that reliance on state transfers discourages entry into the labour market can be traced back to the *Elizabethan Poor Law* (1605) and possibly even earlier to laws enacted in the fourteenth century following the black death (Noble et al. 2007). The *Poor Law Act* made provision for 'setting the poor on work' by establishing workhouses in order to ensure that able-bodied people who could not provide for themselves did not receive poor relief but worked for their food and accommodation. According to Beatrice Webb (1928), 'laws relating to the Poor', which included the Statute of Labourers (1350) and the statutes relating to vagrancy, settlement and removal during the Elizabethan era in the sixteenth century, had:

[L]ittle to do with the relief of destitution but of the behaviour of the poor to the rich [...] and [...] were methods of thrusting the free labourer back into the serfdom out of which, from one cause or another, he had escaped. (p. 3)

As noted in the introduction, discourse on the 'dependency culture' and proposed workfare policies have more recently been driven into prominence by proponents of the moral underclass theses such as Murray (1984, 1989, 1996) and Mead (1989, 1998). The moral underclass view is rooted in a cultural thesis of dependency and rests on the notion of socialisation into a subculture or, as Runciman (1990) described, a counter-culture. Murray, for instance, applied his dependency culture thesis to both the USA (1984) and the UK (1989). His theoretical premise is based on the existence of a distinct class, an underclass, with a unique subculture whose state of poverty is caused and reinforced by the members' own attitudes and patterns of behaviour. In particular, Murray asserted that members of the

underclass have little or no attachment to the labour market (1989). With an aversion to waged work, they are content, in the long term, to derive their income from state transfers (Murray 1984, 1989, 1990). A 'culture of dependency' thus emerges as a result of such attitudinal and behavioural failures.

In Murray's view, the characteristic behaviour of the underclass (those with a culture of dependency) falls outside social, economic and political institutions of civilised society and is responsible for the disintegration of wider society (1984). Murray articulated that the underclass is disreputable, immoral and feckless (1996), descriptions which resemble those of the 'undeserving poor' of the Victorian era. Henry Mayhew's (1850) depiction of the 'undeserving poor', for example, was as follows:

[...The undeserving poor is...] distinguished from the civilised man by his repugnance to regular and continuous labour [...], by his want of providence in laying up a store for the future [...], by his inability to perceive consequences ever so slightly removed from immediate apprehensions [...], by his passion for stupefying herbs and roots and, when possible, for intoxicating fermented liquors. (p. 10)

Similarly, Murray's (1996) assessment of a British underclass is that:

[...They...] didn't lack just money. They were defined by their behaviour. Their homes were littered and unkempt. The men in the family were unable to hold a job for more than a few weeks at a time. Drunkenness was common. The children grew up ill-schooled and ill-behaved and contributed a disproportionate share of the local juvenile delinquents. (p. 24)

Murray's observation was that an underclass was growing in population in both England and the USA and that social policy in either country was addressing related issues. He contended that values of the underclass are '[c]ontaminating the life of entire neighbourhoods - which is one of the most insidious aspects of the phenomenon, for neighbours who do not share those values cannot isolate themselves' (Murray 1996, p. 27).

Central to the moral underclass thesis is the perceived ill of lone motherhood (through out-of-wedlock births) or 'illegitimacy' (Field 1989; Murray 1984, 1989, 1996). The claim is that social security provision, which is often referred to as 'welfare generosity' by dependency culture theorists, is the fundamental cause of family disintegration and perverse incentives. As this theme is also the fundamental criticism of social security provision for low-income lone mothers in RSA, the focus is given to it in the next sub-section.

■ Lone motherhood, social security and the moral underclass

Lone motherhood has always been particularly problematic in many historically 'male breadwinner' welfare states (Carabine 2001b;

Kiernan et al. 1998). In this historical context, never-married lone mothers raising children outside marriage have been defined as a 'problem' by the state, society and within conservative dominant academic literature although the construction of the nature of the problem has shifted over time (Carabine 2001a; Head 2005; Lewis et al. 1998). As will be demonstrated in the next section, conservative discourse has tended to depict never-married lone mothers reliant on welfare as a social threat because they are seen to morally threaten the pre-eminence of the nuclear family and the moral fibre of society as a whole, while left-leaning discourse generally portrays them as experiencing structural problems (Duncan & Edwards 1998). According to Lewis and Hobson (1997), welfare-state provision has historically been structured dichotomously around men as paid workers and women as carers with policies serving to protect this gendered contract at the household level. Women's labour (childcare provision and other family responsibilities) has largely gone unrecognised and unpaid (Lewis 1997).

As discussed in the previous section, Murray's chief social policy concern is not poverty itself, but the attitudes and responses of 'a certain type of people', the underclass, to poverty which are shaped by the receipt of social assistance. In his study, Murray (1984) claimed that Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in the USA was the driver for a family breakup – a poor urban two-parent family could improve its financial situation by dissolving the marriage, withdrawing members from the labour market and subsisting on welfare. Even more significantly, unmarried parents would choose to remain unwed in order to access the same social benefits. In Murray's view, '[...] illegitimacy is the best predictor of an underclass' (1990, p. 26).

This conservative view resonates with Foucault's (1989) concept of calibrations of good motherhood. Murray claimed that 'illegitimacy' demonstrates an attitude of one or both parents that marriage is not an essential part of having a child. Murray (1989) claimed that such an attitude in itself distinguishes parents of out-of-wedlock children from the rest of society. He reiterates that 'illegitimate' births are not scattered evenly in a population but are concentrated 'among the lowest class, the underclass' (Murray 1989). In the USA, Murray identified a *ghetto underclass* where most black Americans reside in the outskirts of cities. In 1966, Murray claimed, 30% of black American births were out of wedlock, and by 1976, the percentage had increased to over 50% (Murray 1990). In the UK context, in 1990, 30% of all recorded births were out of wedlock with a projected increase more rapid than that of the USA (Murray 1990). Of professional lone mothers in employment who have a child or children out of wedlock, Murray dismisses the incidents as a comparative rarity and does not criticise their attitudes or behaviour. He rejects the differing view that the structure

of the family is not deteriorating but changing over time but does warn societies with a comprehensive social security system that continued 'welfare generosity' would lead to 'illegitimacy' infiltrating even the upper middle classes, leading to a start of New Victorianism and New Rabble where communities become increasingly indolent and violent (Murray 1990). Murray predicted that a comprehensive social security system would deepen spatial class segregation as two-parent working-class families will increasingly leave council housing (in England), and council housing will be the place where the underclass congregates. He claimed that the delinquency of the underclass will drive businesses out of council housing areas in England, leaving the country with a North American model of the inner-city with '[r]ows of boarded-up shops, an exodus of the chain stores and street-corner drug markets. As shops and offices are vacated, squatting will become more widespread, and so will fires' (Murray 1989).

Murray (1989) stated that the two-parent exodus from such low-income areas will not only seek to be physically distant from the inner city but also seek to be defensible with high security. As such, in Murray's view, family structure is a conscious point of social, economic, geographic and political division. In addressing 'illegitimacy' in England, Charles Murray (1989) suggested a conservative social policy approach for the restoration of 'good society'. Firstly, Murray (1989) strongly suggested that:

A top-to-bottom overhaul of the benefit system is necessary, and it must start with answers to an elemental question: What is it worth to restore the two-parent family as the norm throughout English society? [...] British social policy, unless radically changed, will systematically sustain the disintegration of the family in low-income groups. And if ... [*society*] ... is not socialised, how may we expect the next generation to behave responsibly and hold jobs? (p. 118)

In the above quote, Murray's (1989) assertion is that social security provision for low-income families encourages perverse incentives, as parents will choose not to get married in order to draw maximum social benefits, and social security provision engenders a culture of dependency. Therefore:

[A]t the very least, stop making the benefit system favour single mothers over married mothers. Establish income support and family benefit levels such that any married couple receives a benefit at least as large as any benefit that can be obtained outside marriage, given the same number of children and employment situation, under any visible or concealed living arrangements with boyfriend or girlfriend. (p. 126)

Murray's suggested social policy solution to inner-city socio-economic challenges is over-simplistic and inappropriate for the purposes of meeting both its desired intent of discouraging lone motherhood and encouraging labour market attachment and for purposes of social integration as it would serve to penalise and stigmatise low-income lone mothers. His premise that it is because of 'generous welfare' that a high incidence of lone motherhood exists in poor areas is arguably flawed as

there is no such empirical evidence to demonstrate his claim in the USA or the UK where he conducted his research (Alcock 1996). Murray himself agreed that statistical 'snapshots' of poor communities in England in 1987 or 1992 cannot demonstrate evidence of the influence of social security provision on dynamic social processes, especially those that might only recently have begun to take effect. Refuting Murray's standpoint, Alcock (1996) stated that:

Evidence, for instance, that 'illegitimacy' rates are higher, and growing more rapidly, in poorer local areas in Britain does not provide proof that the former is the cause of the latter – nor indeed that there is a chain of causation running in the other direction. Much more than a growth in 'illegitimacy' is likely to be going on in these areas, and as social scientists we should know that causes are more complex phenomena than are correlations, whatever the latter may seem to reveal. (p. 41)

Thus, Murray's suggestion that decreasing the amount of benefits for low-income lone mothers or, at the least, raising the provision for married couples would curb out-of-wedlock births and the social anarchy it supposedly causes is tenuous.

Fiscal constraint would also be a challenge if Murray's (1996) goal was to be achieved by raising social benefits for married couples instead of lowering them for single parents, as was his primary policy suggestion. On the whole, his social policy approach of solely changing benefit levels is, arguably, minimalist and does not address broader socio-economic structural issues. His stance is that:

I favour eliminating benefits for unmarried women altogether (for potential new entrants, while keeping the Faustian bargain we have made with women already on the system). A strong case can be made that any of these radical changes would produce large reductions in the number of children born to single women. (p. 127)

Contradictory results from a London-based survey by Ermisch (1980) challenging the core of Murray's thesis show that single, never-married mothers end their lone parenthood through marriage faster than other lone parents. In 1980, their median duration as single lone mothers was 35 months, compared with 59 months for women who became lone parents through marriage breakdown (Ermisch 1980). By the time a child in such a family was five years old, 60% of single lone mothers had married, and by the time the child was seven years old, 70% had done so. Another study to refute Murray's single motherhood stance in the British context is Ford et al.'s *Changes in Lone Parenthood* (1995). They contended that the duration of lone parenthood is typically no longer for single mothers than for divorced mothers and that more are in paid work than is commonly supposed. Half of the lone parents are economically active – working or seeking employment opportunities.

Murray's assertion that a hetero-normative, nuclear family is the cornerstone of society and that children born out of wedlock are a symptom of immoral parents who lack ambition, and no attachment to the labour market has continued through the decades. His recommendation of a 'guaranteed income (GI) as a replacement for the welfare state' is designed to bring about a reduction in children born out of wedlock and to increase labour force participation amongst young males (Murray 2008). In his estimation, the money for funding a GI ought to come from existing social security budgets, with eligibility resting on one being a major (21 years old and older). Murray was silent on transition costs from social welfare to GI. Critiques argue that Murray used the basic income tenet without giving recognition to it (Wilson 2008). Coined 'The Plan', the fundamental difference from basic income, of course, is that it is intended to assist 'genetically inferior' people, egging them on to be 'responsible citizens' who work and look after their families, a thinly veiled allusion to black men depicted in his latest book – *Human Diversity: The Biology of Gender, Race, and Class* (Murray 2020).

Indeed, Murray's writings resonate with the new right ideology, which is largely based on neo-conservative social policies and neo-liberal economic policies, where marriage is viewed as a cornerstone of stability in society (Williams 2015). For the new right, day-to-day basic needs such as housing, education and health care ought to be met by the family rather than the state. In addition, basic services can only be run efficiently when located in the private sector, promoting competition in an open market context (Aravacik 2018). Murray (2016), in his book *In Our Hands: A Plan to Replace the Welfare State*, revised and updated his recommendations from GI to universal basic income (UBI). He argued that UBI would provide the social capital necessary to revitalise decaying civic culture (Murray 2016). In this instance, Murray's single mothers, absent fathers behavioural dichotomy is somewhat diluted with a degree of focus on citizen values and attitudes towards a democratic political system.

A more general refutation of Murray's hypothesis of a moral underclass is provided by Dean and Taylor-Gooby. In their book, *Dependency Culture: The Explosion of a Myth*, Dean and Taylor-Gooby (1992) conducted a qualitative study that entailed in-depth interviews with 85 social benefit recipients of working age. The aim of the study was to determine the extent to which a distinctive dependency culture could be said to exist and to ascertain which policies could be altered in order to discourage state dependency if at all it existed (Dean & Taylor-Gooby 1992). Their findings were such that although some respondents unequivocally felt that they were 'trapped' on benefits, they were not necessarily part of an identifiable

subculture, neither did they have an aversion to norms and values of mainstream culture. Dean and Taylor-Gooby (1992) concluded that:

Large scale national surveys detect little evidence of [... a culture of dependency...] among unemployed people or single parents on benefit [and] lone parents are by and large motivated to work. (p. 78)

In addition, Dean and Taylor-Gooby's study 'demonstrated that although lone parents may well be strongly motivated to enter the labour market at some point in the future, they prefer to prioritize their role as parents until their children pass a certain age' (1992). This could be misconstrued as an aversion to work and an inclination to welfare dependency.

Similar to the results from focus group material explored in Chapter 5, the availability of childcare provision was identified as a key factor in determining whether lone mothers are able to undertake and keep paid work. Lister (1996) asserted that overall analysis of the dynamics of benefit receipt suggests that the majority of income-support recipients are only short-term 'tenants' of social assistance, while a minority of long-term recipients tends to accumulate in the system (see also Bane & Ellwood 1986, 1996; Ellwood 1988). Yet, other critics of the moral underclass standpoint contend that if an attempt were made to separate 'deserving' parents and children from the 'undeserving' ones, then the defining points of lone motherhood would be fraught with insurmountable difficulties (Lister 1994; Wilson 1989). For instance, questions such as would divorced women receive benefits and separated women would not receive them, and if so, what about the perverse incentives that would possibly be introduced in such a situation, and is it feasible to base social security policy on the presumed fear of perverse incentives? Such an approach would assume that individuals make decisions about the future of their life courses based only on narrow, calculated economic gains and that they should, therefore, be penalised for making the wrong social choices.

Kaus, a proponent of the moral underclass, suggests that in order to curb the 'irresponsible' behaviour of members of the underclass, a radical policy change is best – that the entire American welfare system be replaced by public service jobs at slightly below the prevailing market wage (Kaus 1996). Efforts to alter the behaviour of individuals through limited or no social security, employment and training programmes are mistakenly seen by proponents of the moral underclass to be the most effective way to fight poverty. Lawrence Mead (1986), for example, stated that:

[...] poverty and disadvantage seem rooted mostly in the limited skills of the poor themselves, yet government could do little to raise skills simply with benefits. Politically, that left unpalatable alternatives. Either equality must be achieved by a levelling of income or status without regard to the capacities of the poor, the prescription of the far left, or the poor themselves must be seen as malingerers or congenitally incompetent. (p. 47)

Mead continued to argue against sociological analysis that suggests a set of less obvious social barriers, ascribing responsibilities for the difficulties experienced by the poor entirely to the social environment. According to Mead, such logic 'blocks government from expecting or obligating the poor to behave differently than they do' (1986, p. 50). Mead (1986, p. 60) asserted that:

Mandatory work programmes do not ask most people to do something alien to them. The programme acts precisely to close the gap between norm and lifestyle. Without enforcement, the recipients are free to avoid work, mandatory programmes take that option away. They place people in a situation where they get needed help to work, but they also have to work [...]. The combination of help and hassle promotes employment as neither voluntary benefits nor a denial of aid can do.

In his book on social obligations of citizenship, Mead (1986) contended that:

The challenge to welfare statesmanship is not so much to change the extent of benefits as to couple them with serious work and other obligations that would encourage functioning and thus promote the integration of recipients [...to good society...]. (p. 17)

He argued that the programmes of the Great Society failed to overcome poverty and, in effect, increased dependency because the 'behavioural problems of the poor' were ignored. His view was that there is a disinclination with the black underclass to either accept or retain many available low-income jobs; '[t]he problem of non-white unemployment is not a lack of jobs, but a high turnover rate' (Mead 1986, p. 50).

Mead contended that because joblessness amongst poor 'non-whites' is not affected by structural change in the overall economy, it would be difficult to blame the environment. While not dismissing the role discrimination might play in the low-income sector, Mead argued that it is more likely that the poor are impatient with their working conditions and menial income and, thus, repeatedly quit in the hope of finding better employment. He asserted that, '[f]or most jobseekers in most areas, jobs of at least a rudimentary kind are generally available' (Mead 1986, p. 51). For Mead (1986), it is not that the poor do not want to work, but rather that they will work only under the condition that others remove the barriers that make the world of work difficult:

Since much of the burden consists precisely in acquiring skills, finding jobs, arranging child care, and so forth, the effect is to drain work obligation of much of its meaning. (p. 73)

In essence, Mead believed that social security provision has exacerbated the situation of the underclass by not enforcing conditionalities upon recipients of social benefits to behave according to 'mainstream norms' such as completing school, being in full-time employment, having children within wedlock and obeying the law. He concluded that, '[s]ince virtually nothing was demanded in return for benefits, the underclass remained socially isolated and could not be accepted as equals' (Mead 1986, p. 74).

This has some resonance in South Africa, as I will illustrate in 'The relevance of the moral and structural underclass debates to South Africa'. The next section is an exploration of broader structural views about the notion of the underclass.

■ The impact of structural disadvantage and low-income families

The counterarguments to Murray's dependency culture thesis are that wider structural economic and spatial dynamics lock members of the underclass into long-term unemployment, poverty and a despondent outlook on life that may adversely affect their behaviour (Alcock 1996; Lister 1996; Seekings 2003; Walker 1996; Wilson 1989). These critics assert that social security provision (in the form of cash transfers) does not engender passivity or a culture of dependency as Murray purports but provides much-needed support.

This notion of a structural underclass has wide support (see, for example, Ellwood 1988; Gans 1990; Jencks 1992; Wilson 1987, 1991). So, Wilson, for example, argued that the *causes* for the increase in unemployment and lone motherhood in black urban communities are *structural*. He acknowledged that there are many factors at play; however, his basic argument has three strands. Firstly, he asserted that unemployment has increased amongst young black men in the USA partly because there are fewer unskilled and semiskilled blue-collar jobs in big cities where black Americans have come to live (Wilson 1987). This is Wilson's 'structural unemployment' thesis. Secondly, Wilson argued that two-parent black families are disappearing because male joblessness has made marriage less attractive. This view is termed Wilson's 'no marriageable men' hypothesis. Thirdly, Wilson contended that both lone motherhood and high rates of male unemployment have increased amongst poor blacks because the black middle class has been moving out of the 'ghetto'²⁰. As such, Wilson (1987) developed the liberal²¹ view on the underclass further by linking labour market disadvantage to a particular residential patterning:

[B]lack inner-city schools have deteriorated, ghetto businesses have closed, the police have fewer allies in their struggle to control crime, jobseekers have fewer employed neighbours to help them find jobs, and the young have fewer good role models. (p. 28)

20. Ghettos are poor residential areas located on the outskirts of cities. They are primarily inhabited by people of the same socio-economic background and race. These areas are called 'townships' or 'informal settlements' in South Africa, and most low-income lone mothers interviewed for this thesis lived in townships.

21. I am using 'liberal' here in the American sense.

In his book, *The Declining Significance of Race*, Wilson (1980) reiterated this viewpoint by stating that:

As a result of the decentralization of American businesses, the movement from goods-producing to service-producing industries, and the clear manifestation of these changes in the expansion of the corporate sector and government sector, a segmented labour market has developed resulting in vastly different mobility opportunities for different groups in the black population [...]. The relatively poorly trained blacks of the inner city, including the growing number of younger blacks emerging from inferior ghetto schools, find themselves locked in the low-wage sector. (p. 20)

Gans (1990), in agreement with Wilson, commented on the debate noting that:

This underclass exists mainly because of large-scale and harmful changes in the labour market, and its resulting spatial concentration, as well as the isolation of such areas from the more affluent parts of the black community. (p. 172)

Gans (1990) also provided his own description of the moral aspects of the underclass and suggested that should an adverse structural 'situation' change, then it is possible for members of the underclass to abandon aberrant behaviour without internalising it and forming destructive life patterns:

Behaviour is [...] a mixture of situational responses and cultural patterns, that is, behavioural norms and aspirations. Some situational responses are strictly ad hoc reactions to a current situation; they exist because of that situation and will disappear if it changes or disappears. Other situational responses are internalised and become behaviour norms that are an intrinsic part of the person and of the groups in which he moves. (p. 97)

Gans, however, argued that the term underclass has become so 'polluted' (because of the moral underclass notion) that it ought to be abandoned (1990). Wilson (1991) took up this argument and substituted 'underclass' with the term 'ghetto poor', albeit calling for a 'more concentrated focus on research and theoretical issues and less fixation on disputed concepts or labels' (p. 5).

He argued that one aim of research on the underclass ought to be the integration of structural and cultural approaches, though in practice, his argument gives primacy to structural socio-economic issues. Wilson, therefore, defined cultural patterns as a response to structural constraint, arguing that stratification in industrial society not only is confined to material differences but also extends to differential cultural experiences. As stated by Wilson (1991, p. 1), this particular experience is accrued through historical and current economic and political structures. Consequently, the diversity in group lifestyles, norms and values is interconnected with disparities in access to organisational

avenues of privilege and influence. Wilson (1991) was therefore of the opinion that:

The central predicament of inner-city ghetto residents is joblessness reinforced by a growing social isolation in impoverished neighbourhoods, as reflected, for example, in the rapidly decreasing access to job information network systems. (p. 9)

Marxists (Marx & Engels 1990) interpreted the cause of such socio-economic conditions as 'the surplus' labour produced by a system that worries more about profits than about people. In his book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson (1987) expressed discontent with 'liberal' proponents (i.e. advocates of the inherent rights of the individual):

The liberal perspective on the ghetto underclass has become less persuasive and convincing in the public discourse principally because many of those who represent traditional liberal views on social issues have been reluctant to discuss openly, or, in some instances, even to acknowledge, the sharp rise in social pathologies in ghetto communities. (p. 6)

The key point here is that while he acknowledged structural causes of social pathologies inherent in 'ghetto' communities, Wilson accepted that such pathologies exist.

In a similar vein, in his analysis of such social pathologies, Ellwood (1988) asserted that culture and values develop as ways of understanding and coping with the world in which people find themselves. Like Gans (1995), he argued that culture is never static unless conditions are static and unless the culture successfully helps people deal with the world around them. Thus, it is clear that academics on both sides of the underclass debate acknowledge that motivation, behaviour and culture play an important role in the adverse conditions of the underclass; however, the understood root causes of the culture and the suggested policy solutions differ fundamentally. In his book, *Poor Support – Poverty in the American Family* (1988), Ellwood acknowledged that few policymakers seriously contemplate eliminating the entire social welfare system or, one might add, social welfare in relation to able-bodied people of working age where it is already available; however, he expresses concern that most welfare states 'continue to talk about cutting it back' (Ellwood 1988, p. 217). Indeed, this remains the case in the UK with the conservative party's persistent austerity programme and fiscal policy (Jenkins et al. 2021). He contended that in the context of the American underclass, the *ghetto world*, '[w]elfare is only one bit player in a drama with many major actors. Reducing welfare benefits will just make these mixed-up lives more difficult' (Ellwood 1988, p. 217).

Ellwood continued to suggest that policymakers need to have a multi-pronged approach in order to address the chronic challenges faced by people in the underclass. Although he refuted that social welfare is a

major *cause* of the problems, he acknowledged that as it stands, it does little to address independence and the empowerment of recipients. His primary message was that more options ought to be available for welfare recipients and a more integrated system incorporating cash transfers, work and/or training and an adequate educational system for children that builds one's self-worth, confidence and self-esteem. Ellwood suggested that lone mothers should be given the option to work on a part-time basis and eventually full-time with the government making jobs available over and above the social assistance they receive in order for them to have the opportunity to 'get out of the ghetto'. The integral difference between the manner in which Ellwood makes such policy suggestions and the approach proponents of the moral underclass use is that his primary concern is for members of the underclass to have a better quality of life without the preoccupation of decreasing or removing their social security. He does not stigmatise the underclass by blaming their poverty on their behaviour.

■ The relevance of the moral and structural underclass debates to South Africa

In his analysis of the relevance of the moral underclass approach to the underclass in the South African context, Seekings (2003) stated that:

South African society certainly exhibits many of the characteristics that underpin conservatives' use of the 'underclass' concept: crime, unemployment, teenage pregnancies and the disintegration of families and communities. The only obviously missing ingredient is welfare-dependency, as South Africa's public welfare system only provides generous benefits to groups (the elderly and disabled especially) who are unable to work. (p. 20)

However, the fact that there is a limited public welfare system has not stopped politicians and senior public figures from claiming that there is welfare dependency in South Africa. As we have seen in Chapter 1, there is a great concern amongst policymakers and within the media that social security promotes a dependency culture, and as such, a strong link is made between this discourse and the international moral underclass discourse. For example, in a resolution from an African National Congress (ANC) national conference, it was asserted that in South Africa, 'we are building a developmental state and not a welfare state given that in a welfare state, dependency is profound' (ANC 2007c). The 2007 SoNA address by the then-president called for 'as many of our people as possible [*to be helped to*] graduate out of dependence on social grants' (Mbeki 2007). In relation to the existence of fallow land, the then-Minister of Finance stated that 'because there are so many social grants, people no longer plant'

(Manuel 2008). The then-Governor of the South African Reserve Bank suggested that the country was 'running the risk of [...] social grants becoming an end in themselves and thus nurturing a dependency syndrome, destroying the fabric of our society' (Mboweni quoted in *Business Day*, 2009); and he elaborated on these concerns at the tenth Steve Biko Annual Lecture held on 10 September 2009 at the University of Cape Town (UCT):

But when millions of our people depend on social grants for sustenance, and urban legend has it that teenagers go to the extent of falling pregnant so as to gain access to grants, we need to ask ourselves, as I think Steve Biko would: are we not running the risk of these social grants becoming an end in themselves and thus nurturing a dependency syndrome, destroying the fabric of our society? (Mboweni 2009:18)

Such statements resonate very strongly with the international literature on the moral underclass, which has been reviewed in 'The moral underclass and the origins of the dependency culture thesis'. It is worth mentioning that the former Reserve Bank Governor, Tito Mboweni, served as Minister of Finance from 2018 to 2021 under President Ramaphosa's administration. A further illustration of the dependency culture discourse in South Africa is the language and terms used in relation to the EPWP. As I will elaborate in Chapter 4, the designated name of different types of EPWPs, such as 'Vuk' Zenzele', translates to 'get up and do it yourself', which arguably suggests that the targeted people are being indolent. Such a policy approach with a behavioural focus reinforced by a particular use of language is stigmatising.

There is another dimension to the dependency culture discourse specific to the South African context that does not draw from international debates. This is the view that social security provision is a Western construct that engenders passivity and undermines indigenous solutions to poverty, such as resource sharing amongst families and within communities. Indeed, the principle of *ubuntu* (as defined in Chapter 1, 'Context of the research question') is at times cited as justification for the expected deliverance of social welfare to those in need by families and communities rather than the state. Such a stance continues to confound attitudes towards extending social security in the country, which may, in turn, impact attitudes to whether social security promotes dignity. Resistance to social security provision is reinforced by the country's historical segregation and apartheid dynamic, which entailed the white population considering themselves as socio-economic trustees for the black population who were treated as passive recipients of white largesse (e.g. Xulu 2005). Currently, with lockdown measures under the COVID-19 pandemic, the BIG in the country has become topical in the country as unemployment levels rose to 34.9% in the third-quarter of 2021 (Labour Force Survey 2021).

In the South African context, there is a further twist to the moral underclass – structural underclass debates, which impacts the discourse

about extending social security provision in South Africa. While many policymakers acknowledge the structural constraints to stable employment and families (for black Africans in particular) as being a direct consequence of the apartheid legacy, which would point to a structural underclass analysis, solutions to poverty reduction tend to focus on the individual's inadequacies and thus speak more to the existence of a moral underclass. An example of this phenomenon of blaming the poor is the debate about introducing conditionalities into the CSG. In spite of high levels of structural unemployment, recipients of the parsimonious CSG in the country continue to be subjects of stigmatising discourse and social policy suggestions not too far removed from wider conservative views of the underclass. In 2009, an amendment to Section 32 of the *Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004* (2004, p. 13) was proposed in order to include a condition of entitlement to the CSG relating to school attendance. However, there is no evidence to demonstrate that introducing a conditionality of school attendance in order to receive the CSG would generate behavioural change where school enrolment is already high and the general population highly values education (Lund et al. 2008). In spite of the supply side challenges of delivery that exist in the country's education system and the obstacles that low-income families already have to overcome, including travelling long distances to school and having to pay school fees, school enrolment remains high. Furthermore, requirements to attend school already exist within South Africa and arguably do not need to be linked to social assistance entitlement, particularly for children within the compulsory school attendance age bracket of seven to fifteen years old (Department of Basic Education [DBE] 2004). Possible cessation of the CSG in the absence of evidence of school attendance is likely to cause extreme harm to low-income families as it is often said to stave off hunger and destitution. Administrative challenges, on their own, of acquiring proof of school attendance in rural areas are likely to serve as an impediment to accessing the CSG. Such a condition of entitlement would imply that poor people do not value education and have to be coerced into attending school.

Despite the prevalence of the moral underclass-dependency culture discourse in RSA, there is a great deal of evidence that neither a dependency culture nor a moral underclass exists in the country. So, for example, it has been demonstrated that the receipt of social grants has not impacted on the prevalence of out-of-wedlock births or teenage pregnancies (Makiwane & Udjo 2007); the receipt of social grants has no impact on recipients' attachment to the labour market (e.g. Noble et al. 2008; Surender et al. 2010). There is no indication that people would prefer a life on social assistance rather than continuing to look for jobs (e.g. Noble et al. 2008; Surender et al. 2010). New and further evidence refuting the existence of a dependency culture is presented in Chapter 6. I shall demonstrate that unemployment in RSA is because of the lack of job opportunities, lack of access to jobs through

lack of social capital, low skills and geographical distance from economic hubs, not because of the existence of a moral underclass which is content to rely on social assistance. This can be seen as a structural underclass and resonates with the arguments of Wilson (1986, 1991) presented in 'The impact of structural disadvantage and low-income families'.

The next section considers the political and social context of social security provision in South Africa.

■ Social rights, social security and the constitution

As we have seen above, proponents of the moral underclass see social assistance as causing dependency and, as a result, producing a moral underclass. This resonates with the neo-liberal approach to social security policy to which some policymakers in RSA subscribe. However, this stance is in conflict with the country's rights-based tradition which encourages the realisation of comprehensive social citizenship rights and which is reflected in the *Africans' Claims* (1943) and the *Freedom Charter* (1955). Indeed, South Africa's rights-based approach to social security is carried through to the country's current Constitution (RSA 1996), the preamble of which suggests a social democratic rather than a neo-liberal approach to social policy. The *Africans' Claims_Policy* containing the *Bill of Rights* was published by the ANC at their conference in Bloemfontein, South Africa, in December 1943 as a result of deliberations of a committee chaired by ZK Matthews (1901-1968) and set up the previous year by the then-president of the ANC, Dr AB Xuma (1893-1962), to study the implications of the *Atlantic Charter*. The *Atlantic Charter* was a joint declaration made by Winston Churchill (1874-1965) and Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) after a meeting held in August 1941 which gave a vision of the post-war world in terms of peace and non-aggression but also pledged advancement of social welfare:

Fifth, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security.

Sixth, after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all the lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want. (Churchill, C & Roosevelt, 1941)

The ANC committee argued that if Africans had participated in World War II (WWII), a conflict described as 'a war for human justice, fair play, and equality of opportunity for all races, colours, and classes' (*Africans' Claims* 1943, p. 1), they should enjoy the advantages outlined in the *Atlantic Charter* (1943, p. 1). This was seen as a means to guarantee that 'the place of the African in postwar reconstruction [is secure]'. The committee expressed this

as their way of asserting to the Allied Nations the Africans' 'undisputed claim to full citizenship'. The committee attached a particular significance to the *Atlantic Charter* as it was endorsed by the then-South African prime minister, Jan Smuts (1939-1948), who had announced that the post-war South African order would be based upon the principles articulated in the *Atlantic Charter* (Asmal et al. 2005). At the time, black Africans residing in South Africa were '[...] subjected to serious educational, political and economic disabilities and discriminations which are the chief causes of their apparent slow progress – under the guise of segregation' (*Africans' Claims* 1943, p. 3). Similarly, at the international level, conventions concerning the welfare of black Africans in relation to health, housing, forced labour (including migrant labour) and social benefits that were drawn up in Geneva under the auspices of the Allied Nations, now known as the United Nations, were either rejected or 'half-heartedly' applied. As such, Article 5 of the *Bill of Rights* in *Africans' Claims* (1943) articulates the need for comprehensive social security in South Africa as the committee expresses:

[...] desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations on the economic field with the object of securing for all improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security. (p. 3)

Although Jan Smuts endorsed the *Atlantic Charter*, he and his United Party (UP) government rejected the *Africans' Claims* document and the *Bill of Rights* contained within it. In fact, apartheid was introduced three years after the end of WWII in 1948, and the social rights of black Africans continued to be disregarded. Just over a decade later, after an extensive period of canvassing the needs of the country's black majority, the ANC convened the Congress of the People at Kliptown and published a further call for political civil and social rights known as the *Freedom Charter* (1955). It stipulates that:

The state shall recognise the right to work and to draw full unemployment benefits. Maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers [...should be implemented...]. Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work. Child labour, compound labour, the tot system [...] shall be abolished. (p. 4)

In relation to living standards, the *Freedom Charter* (1955) further stated that:

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families comfortably and in security. Unused housing space is to be made available to the people. Slums shall be demolished, and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, creches and social centres. (p. 5)

As black Africans suffered oppressive labour conditions, rights to rest, leisure and recreation were specified in the charter together with the repeal of labour laws that broke up families. However, like the *Africans' Claims*

document before it, the *Freedom Charter* was not implemented, and both documents were significant in their influence on the Constitution finalised in 1996 following the advent of democracy in 1994 (RSA 1996, p. 2).

We, the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past; honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that RSA belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity (RSA 1996). Through freely elected representatives, the Constitution was adopted as the supreme law of the Republic so as to:

Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights [...] [i]mprove the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations. (p. 2)

The *Bill of Rights* further stipulates that people's basic rights should be progressively realised according to the state's available resources. The country's constitution specifies health care services (including reproductive health care), sufficient food and water, and appropriate social security for citizens who are unable to support themselves and their dependents (RSA, 1996, Section 27). The Constitution resonates with the principles of redistribution and solidarity inherent in the cultural values of the people and, in particular, with the concept of *ubuntu* discussed in Chapter 1, which is integral in the struggle against apartheid. *Ubuntu* is based on the principle that one's humanity can only be realised when everybody else in one's sphere of contact is respected and upheld. The adage 'I am because you are' is the heart of *ubuntu*. The notion acknowledges both the rights and responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being (RSA Department of Welfare 1997, p. 2). However, the Constitution and the concept of *ubuntu* are, I would argue, at variance with the neo-liberal approach both to social security policy and to the prevalent 'dependency culture' discourses referred to in Chapter 1 and discussed more extensively in Chapter 6. Although the Constitution, with its rights-based approach, resonates with the notions of social rights of citizenship espoused by TH Marshall (1949), the neo-liberal policies to social security with only limited decommodification of labour are very market-orientated. This is in contrast to the form of government intervention advocated by Marshall (1963), which is aimed at ameliorating the effects of the market on individual economic well-being by ensuring a minimum livelihood to all citizens regardless of their social class, position or labour market participation. Marshall (1963) argued that social citizenship is in conflict with the market because it is a system of equality, while capitalism is a system of inequality.

Richard Titmuss advocated social inclusion and was critical of the social security provision of selective services characterised by individual means tests to determine whether and at what level resources are to be made available to poor people (Titmuss 1968). His view was that the means test is exclusionary and stigmatising:

In the past, poor quality selective services for poor people were the product of a society which saw 'welfare' as a residual; as a public burden. The primary purpose of the system and the method of discrimination was, therefore, deterrence (it was also an effective rationing device). To this end the most effective instrument was to induce among recipients [...] a sense of personal fault, of personal failure, even if the benefit was wholly or partially a compensation for disservices inflicted by society. (p. 134)

Similarly, in the South African context, low-income lone mothers' experiences explored in Chapter 6 demonstrate that the means-testing process when applying for a CSG and accessing it can be humiliating. In addition, relying on the CSG for social security is a stigmatising experience as a result of political rhetoric and attitudes from the media and lone mothers' own communities. Titmuss (1950) was a proponent of universalism. This principle emerged as a result of conditions of the post-WWII era where social solidarity fostered in the war against Nazism and fascism led to:

Pressures for a higher standard of welfare and a deeper comprehension of social justice [...] – the reality of military disaster and the threat of invasion in the summer of 1940 urged on these tendencies in social policy. The mood of the people changed [...] and values changed as well. If dangers were to be shared then resources should also be shared. (p. 508)

In this respect, the WWII served as a catalyst to shift societal values away from invasive and stigmatising means-tested social services to services that were:

Available and accessible to the whole population in such ways as would not involve users in any humiliating loss of status, dignity or self-respect [...]. Hence the emphasis on the social rights of all citizens to use or not use as responsible people the services made available by the community [...] which the private market [...was...] unwilling to provide universally. (Titmuss 1968, p. 129)

I would like to draw an analogy between WWII, which catalysed universalism, and the apartheid system in RSA, which arguably fostered solidarity for those opposed to it. The *Africans' Claims* and the *Freedom Charter* are embodiments of such solidarity. The demise of apartheid and the onset of democracy, however, did not bring about the universal values or the rights enshrined in these documents. Instead, and arguably, the social assistance programmes (or lack thereof) have created a commodification of labour and a reduction of:

[S]ocial relationships and social obligations to the cash exchange of the labour contract to the exclusion of the rich networks of social obligations and social relationships within which people are embedded as human beings: [... And as such...] when, for whatever reason a person is unable to sell his or

her labour power the lack of limitations of social rights are likely to shrivel the human qualities of life towards those of mere physical and biological survival. (Twine 1994, p. 20)

Twine (1994) suggested that in essence:

[S]ocial rights are to do with the de-commodification of social relationships and the maintenance of social integration [...which require...] policies of redistribution and reduction of the inequalities that continually arise from the treatment of labour power [...that...] its human carries as a commodity within the labour market. (p. 19)

Dignity and social stigma in the lives of low-income lone mothers will be explored in Chapter 7, and the tension between work and childcare provision will be investigated in Chapter 5. For purposes of this chapter, however, I note South Africa's socio-legal commitments to the protection of dignity as a social citizenship right. These national ratifications are at domestic (the *Bill of Rights*, Chapter 2 in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996*), regional (*African Charter of 1979*) and international (UN 1966) levels. At the national level, dignity is arguably the cornerstone of the South African Constitution (1996). The *Bill of Rights* stipulated that:

The Republic of South Africa is a sovereign, democratic state founded upon the rule of law and principles of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. The rebirth of our society into a constitutional democracy is the result of the national liberation struggle against apartheid. For hundreds of years the majority of the South African people experienced severe hardships, loss of human dignity, oppression and suffering. (RSA 1996, p.1243)

The South African Constitution further stated that '[e]veryone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected' (RSA 1996, p.1247). The right to the protection of dignity is reiterated at the regional level in the protocol of the *African Charter* (1979) on the establishment of an African court for human and people's rights, 'dignity ... [*is an*]... essential objective[s] for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African Peoples'. From an international perspective, the *United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) declared that the acknowledgement of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, as articulated in the *United Nations Charter*, forms the basis for freedom, justice and peace in the world. The realisation of this goal depends on creating conditions where everyone can enjoy their civil and political rights and their economic, social and cultural rights. These rights, grounded in the inherent dignity of the human person, are emphasised in the *United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1966). Such socio-legal commitments, whether on a national, regional or international level, underscore the crucial importance of fulfilling social

citizenship rights (Marshall 1963). This fulfilment is essential for upholding human dignity and establishing a solid foundation for the realisation of civil and political rights (Plant 1992).

■ Conclusion

Even though the concept of the underclass is rigorously contested with views from both the left and right, there are theoretical and empirical grounds for the recognition of such a group of people in the South African context who are members of a structural underclass. Such an underclass not only is unemployed in a society where unemployment means poverty but also lacks the social and monetary resources to provide for themselves and their children a meaningful opportunity to secure stable employment in the future. As such, this type of poverty, lack of education and social disintegration is reinforced from generation to generation. Seekings (2003) contended that class and racial isolation of the South African underclass has stopped being reinforced from generation to generation because apartheid has been abolished, and people of all races and classes can live where they please. I would like to argue against such a view. The poverty enforced by a lack of skills and general unemployment, which is experienced by members of the structural underclass in South Africa, mainly black Africans, translates to their inability to move out of overcrowded and underdeveloped townships that the apartheid regime locked them into. Thus, poverty reinforcement features such as unemployment, poor education, social isolation and dislocation, menial employment and teenage pregnancy are often a probability in South African townships.

The salience and potentially damaging effect of the moral underclass notion and means-tested benefits on social policy warrants response. In South Africa, for example, it is widely understood by society, the media and government that structural constraints play a significant role in locking people into poverty, which may result in multi-generational limitations such as lack of education and a despondent outlook on life. However, there is dissonance between explanations and some of the policies intended to address these issues. An acceptance of structural causes of poverty sits side by side with neo-liberal policies such as the EPWPs explored in Chapter 4, which have a behavioural and consequently stigmatising focus. The next chapter explores the roles of motherhood.

Lone motherhood in South Africa

■ Introduction

This chapter explores the general role of motherhood and the added responsibilities of lone motherhood, particularly low-income lone motherhood in the South African context. Because the impact of attitudes towards routes to lone motherhood is a theme in focus group interviews, different types of lone motherhood are discussed together with social attitudes towards 'good' and 'bad' lone motherhood in different communities. This is followed by a detailed analysis of some specifically South African routes into lone motherhood.

■ 'Good' and 'bad' lone motherhood

For purposes of this study, lone motherhood will be approached from a sociological perspective. Such a perspective centres on the absence of a male partner that would otherwise contribute to the material and emotional sustenance of a child or children in a household (Jenson et al. 2020). Essentially, it is the preclusion of the possibility of a division of labour, in the traditional sense and otherwise, in the realm of child-rearing responsibilities, which defines lone motherhood in sociological terms (Pahl 2007). Other theorists have argued against the validity of assumptions inherent in this definition. The degree to which married or cohabitating

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couples share responsibilities and resources varies, and the day-to-day lives of some partnered mothers may be comparable to those of lone mothers. Similarly, some non-resident fathers may share responsibilities in child-rearing and material needs such that the distinction between a lone-mother family and a couple of families is blurred.

I shall discuss motherhood in general terms before embarking on an exploration of the social constructions of 'good' or 'bad' lone motherhood in the South African context. Motherhood is considered to be one of the most imperative roles any woman can play in a society – it nurtures children, the future of a country, into adulthood so as to lead wholesome, respectful lives as individuals, members of their own families and effective members of society. In nurturing their children, 'good' mothers are expected to follow certain practices common in most societies, such as providing adequate food, clothing, shelter and education. In addition to meeting these physical needs, a mother is expected to raise a child 'responsibly', instilling values and norms that society upholds. A mother is expected to meet all these responsibilities with love and care, which requires time as a resource.

Each society has calibrations of 'good motherhood' in relation to a child's physical, emotional and intellectual development (Lewis 2020). In black South African families, for example, a child born out of wedlock would be informally adopted by the maternal grandmother and raised as a sibling to his or her mother, while in some Western societies, it was historically 'good' practice for a woman with a child born out of wedlock to give up the child for adoption to a wedded couple, expecting the child to have a better future (Amoateng 2017). Such societal practices are undertaken to ensure the 'proper' raising of a child and to make the child, as far as possible, an acceptable citizen. The content of the 'calibrated' rules of motherhood, however, changes over time, depicting the dynamic nature of any society. Boundaries of good motherhood, thus, are fluid (Buzzanell et al. 2005).

Widows have, historically and generally, been seen as 'morally better' and 'more deserving' than divorced and separated lone mothers who, in turn, have tended to be seen as 'more deserving' than single, never-married lone mothers. Even at the bottom end of the moral hierarchy, older never-married lone mothers are seen in a better light than younger teenage mothers. This has been evident in South African discourse, where teenage mothers have been the subject of much controversy regarding perverse incentives in relation to social grants (Makiwane 2016). Whatever the standards and norms of 'good' motherhood, it is the working-class mothers and, within that group, unmarried mothers who are perceived to be a threat in disrupting the carefully calibrated norms of motherhood.

Lone mothers are the group that is deemed most likely to fail the tests of good standards and norms that constitute good motherhood:

It is the boundary between the unwed mother and the married mother that has, for so long, been presumed to coincide with the boundary between the bad and the good mother. (Silva 2013, p. 47)

In addition, households headed by divorced or never-married lone mothers are typically regarded as symptomatic of the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family, a social structure that has long defined society. Even though alternative family structures are tolerated, the heterosexual male-headed household, preferably based on formal marriage, persists as a normative ideal in most societies (Silva 2013). Reiterating a similar conservative perspective are Murray (1994, 2016) and Meade (1997) – they concurred that unemployed, never-married lone mothers perpetuate poverty in society through disarticulation from the labour market as a result of their antisocial behaviour ('illegitimacy', fecklessness, crime) and dependency on social welfare benefits (Murray 1994, 2016). Classifying such a group as the moral underclass (explored in Chapter 2), Murray further stated that a lone mother's unemployment status deprives children of a 'good' role model, leading to a multi-generational cycle of poverty and antisocial behaviour.

In essence, lone mothers are categorised according to their sexual route to lone motherhood (Bernadi & Larenza 2017). Historically, four distinct groups of lone mothers – never married, separated, divorced and widowed – formed the basis for 'good' or 'bad' lone motherhood in South African society. It could be argued that such social perceptions inform social policy in relation to social security provision, or lack thereof, for low-income lone mothers as policymakers themselves are members of society and, in principle, represent the views and values of the majority of society. So, for example, although fiscal constraint was cited as the only reason behind the phasing out of the state maintenance grant (SMG) in South Africa's then-new democracy, it could be argued that social security provision for low-income lone mothers was not seen to be of equal importance as the needs of the disabled or old age people as neither the disabled grant (DG) nor the old-age grant (OAG) was discontinued; rather, they both increased.

Other than the moral values of upholding the nuclear family, the perceptual basis for good and/or bad lone motherhood in South African society has had an added dimension to it over time – whether a lone mother can or cannot financially provide for her child or children. Having failed the moral test of being a wedded mother, for instance, a teenage lone mother who is unemployed and in receipt of the child support grant (CSG) is generally perceived as a bad lone mother for two reasons: her social status as a never-married lone mother and her inability to economically provide for her child or children. Thus, while the moral hierarchy of lone motherhood

still features, the value of paid work has been the yardstick by which good lone motherhood is measured (Lewis 2017).

Since the introduction of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic strategy in 1996, there has been a reconstruction of the notion of 'good lone motherhood' around participation in paid work rather than around sexual immorality. Notions of lone motherhood remain value-laden and gender biased. Non-resident fathers are required to pay child maintenance, and South Africa's high unemployment rates mean that a considerable number of non-resident fathers are unable to financially support their children as stipulated in the *Maintenance Act 99 of 1998*. In addition, follow-up procedures for non-paying fathers are even more costly, both financially and emotionally, according to the Children's Institute.

At a time when the stigma on low-income mothers in receipt of the CSG was topical not only in communities but in the media as well, a former deputy editor of *City Press*, a prominent national newspaper, laments the fact that unmarried teenage mothers who are not in paid employment are in receipt of the CSG in her article 'Learning, not babies':

By way of a child grant, we reward...[idle]... women for having babies. We are giving unmarried teens [...] incentive to have babies they cannot properly bring up. The grants are supposed to alleviate poverty among children. The problem is they are being abused. People think grants are an alternative to getting a job. (*City Press*, 2009)

Mda inferred that the CSG encourages women who, by virtue of being single, young and unemployed, 'cannot properly' raise children, in her view to actually have children. She arguably reflects conservative anecdotal discourse that is common in the media and communities in the country, the influence of which is conservative Western thought. However, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, there is no evidence of a dependency culture in South Africa nor that of perverse incentives as regards teenage pregnancy. Although one may appreciate the challenges faced by unplanned teenage lone motherhood, particularly if compounded by poverty, it is unsafe to assume that teenage, or young, lone motherhood and 'good motherhood' are on opposing ends of the spectrum – such a phenomenon cannot be generalised nor is 'bad motherhood' exclusive to young lone mothers.

A woman in Nxarhun, speaking about her daughter, strongly expressed her views about the social offence of being an unmarried mother and being poor in her village:

'It's a disgrace to our family. I thought because she finished matric [secondary school] she would get married properly and then have children. She hadn't even gotten a job before she was pregnant. Now they all depend on me. It is as if I never sacrificed to put her through school. It's a disgrace, no one will want to marry her, she'll keep having children in my house. The Child Support Grant will be her husband. I was looking to her, I thought she would have a better

life than me. They never had a father. But it seems things will never improve, the poverty will continue.' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, n.d.)

The woman conveys her disappointment in her daughter both at a personal and wider social level for having fallen pregnant and having a child outside wedlock. She considers the family situation a 'disgrace'. Her daughter had completed her secondary schooling, which the mother held in high regard because of the mother's sacrifice in order to give her daughter a better future than herself and to possibly be able to benefit from her daughter's education herself. However, the status quo is such that the mother is bereft of hope as she deals with the social stigma or 'disgrace' of a continued legacy of 'illegitimacy' in her household as her children 'never had a father' either. Psychologists would argue that the depth of her despair is magnified by the 'transference' of her own unresolved issues around being a lone mother to her daughter. Had she resolved her own difficulties around lone motherhood, she would possibly have a more positive outlook on her daughter's life, albeit with a degree of disappointment in her economic inactivity and lack of a partner. She, the respondent, could not see a way out of her family's poverty cycle as her hope, embodied in her daughter, was diminished by her daughter's misconduct and lack of employment. The social policy lacuna of social security and housing for low-income lone mothers in South Africa has led to the interviewee's daughter residing with and depending on the interviewee (her mother) with her child (the respondent's granddaughter). Some would argue that the state's responsibilities have fallen on the shoulders of a grandmother yet again in South Africa.

It is worth noting that in the South African context, there are significant differences in the social perception of good and bad lone motherhood across racial cultures and social class. This may be especially so in a country where 'separate racial development' was legally enforced for 46 years because of apartheid. As a result, socio-demographic differences meant the division of living standards and expectations that remain evident in South African society. A skilled, middle class, never-married lone mother, for example, is seen in a better light than a low-income single mother because she can provide for her child, does not look to the state for the CSG and gives her child or children a good role model as a working professional. A black African lone mother who works as a live-in nanny and whose children are without a mother at home in an effort for her to provide for them related her experience:

'It's a different for us ... [*black African mothers*] ... we have to work whenever we can to provide for our children. My employer ... [*for example*] ... can go to work if she wants to because I look after her children mostly but she chooses to remain at home until her children are old enough to go to school.' (Langa, Female CSG, n.d.)

I now explore the difficulties of defining lone motherhood in South Africa.

■ Challenges to defining lone motherhood in South Africa

Lone motherhood arises for a variety of reasons: a mother could become a lone parent through divorce, adoption, artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood, extramarital pregnancy or as a result of an unforeseeable occurrence such as death, abandonment by a partner, or sexual violence and assault (rape). A working definition of lone motherhood might be someone who is (1) female; and (2) widowed, divorced, separated or never married; (3) living without a partner in the household; and (4) is a parent or caregiver of a dependent child under the age of eighteen years. This definition, however, presents three challenges in the South African context.

Firstly, for many decades within the black African population, lone motherhood was very much hidden from view. In the early 20th century, up to the 1970s, lone motherhood in black African communities in South Africa was perceived and dealt with differently than it is today. Children of young black African lone mothers were mostly assimilated into the grandmother's family, adopting the mother's surname. The concealed young lone mothers were perceived to have had an 'accident', coined a 'fall' and were to be 'helped up' by their parents and/or extended family members so as to continue with their lives as 'normally' as possible. On most occasions, the grandmother would become the primary caregiver, while the young mother continued with her education if she was still undergoing secondary schooling. The moral censure of lone mothers amongst black Africans, especially, increased after the introduction of the CSG in 1998.

Secondly, while 'living without a partner in the household' might suggest lone parenthood in most contexts, in South Africa, this is not necessarily the case as there is still large-scale rural-urban worker migration stemming from employment practices in the apartheid era. High rates of black African labour migration amongst the male population, in particular, have led to an increase in female-headed households, giving rise to some uncertainty about the marital status of women married under customary law. Such marital ambiguity could possibly obscure analyses and may, arguably, depend on whether or not a child's or children's father financially supports his offspring and/or whether or not he offers emotional or care support in bringing up his children, albeit mostly remotely.

The degree of material and financial contribution made by absent fathers is difficult to ascertain from social surveys. The Children's Institute suggests that there are only low rates of financial maintenance and emotional support by 'absent fathers'. In addition, rates of unemployment, which have been increasing over time to 46.6% (LFS 2021) according to the expanded definition of unemployment, can serve as an impediment to adequate child maintenance in South Africa. In the next quote, a lone mother from

Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape province is despondent and states that being unemployed, her children's father is unable to support his children financially:

'... even if I were to ask my children's father for money for the children it wouldn't help, he doesn't have a job [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG)

A male migrant divorcee gives a picture of the suffering that he, his children and their mother undergo as a result of his lack of employment in the following quote:

'[...] my child's mother used to think that I just don't care for the children because I couldn't pay child support... She took me to the maintenance court. There's nothing the magistrate could do. I got retrenched from the factory. I am not earning a salary anymore. It kills me, it just kills me to see my children hungry, suffering like this.' (Langa, Male CSG)

Similar to the distress caused by unemployment in any state without a comprehensive social security system, their ordeal is at two levels – emotional and physical (material) distress. Expressing his emotional anguish, the respondent laments the fact that his children have no food security. His ordeal is further compounded by his children's mother, a lone mother, laying a legal charge against him for their children's financial maintenance only to be told by the presiding magistrate in a child maintenance court that nothing could be done as the respondent had no source of income (the cost of unemployment for lone mothers are discussed in the next chapter). The true extent of the children's 'suffering' is not clear from the respondent's account as there is no information about the mother's employment status. Should his children's mother be unemployed, the possible multiple deprivation his children experience might be even more severe than the respondent's account.

The third challenge presented in the working definition of lone motherhood is that it also captures a more recent category of lone mothers in South Africa – grandmothers who are providers and/or primary caregivers of children whose parents are either unemployed or are part of a missing generation in the country have died from the HIV and AIDS pandemic. According to recent statistics, there are approximately 3.6 million South African orphans whose parents have died of HIV and AIDS-related illnesses. This pandemic has led to a considerable number of children in South Africa being raised by their grandmothers, who then become 'lone mothers'. Such emotionally and (usually) economically challenging circumstances are compounded by the fact that societies within which lone mothers live often stigmatise their lone motherhood status. Coined the 'unsung heroes' of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, elderly women bear a significant part of the burden of raising the future social capital of RSA. However, as my primary interest is lone mothers of working age, because of the way in which they straddle the employment and care policy arenas, in my working definition, I only include lone mothers aged 16–59 years.

■ Routes into lone parenthood for black African women

In 2019, black Africans in South Africa comprised 77% of the total population, Coloured people 9%, Indians 3% and white people 11% (SSA 2015). Amoateng (2017) asserted that there are significant structural causes for the disproportionately high rate of black African lone motherhood in South Africa. These include the impact of HIV and AIDS, labour migration and certain traditional customs (Amoateng 2017). The routes of women into lone motherhood because of migration and customs are considered in more detail in this section.

Urban-bound migration led to an absence of black African men in rural areas as they dominated the migratory labour system in the segregation and apartheid eras, and this migration continues to this day. Such an absence often caused either the postponement or complete avoidance of marriage amongst black men. Historically within family structures, therefore, economic necessity (reinforced by apartheid pass laws, the *Group Areas Act 41 of 1950* and the establishment of 'locations' or Bantustans) meant that the husband or father left his wife and/or children behind to join in the migratory labour system. This situation contributed to family patterns such as female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births and unstable household composition (Amoateng 2017).

In recent years, this migratory pattern has been altered, to a degree, by the emergence of women labour migrants as factory workers, domestic workers and vendors in cities across the Republic of South Africa (RSA), such as East London, Cape Town and Johannesburg, and by the increase in the retrenchment of low-skilled workers, particularly male mine- and factory workers. Eighty percent of female domestic workers are part of a circular migration system in South Africa where women are often separated from their partners and children and live at their place of employment. This has contributed to strained marriages, divorce and maternal deprivation.

The following quote is from a male interviewee originally from a rural Eastern Cape village, Ntsholomnqa, and he was retrenched as a mineworker:

'We are from Ntsholomnqa [*Eastern Cape province*] I used to work in a mine near Witbank, I got retrenched and I subsequently followed my wife here [Langa, Cape Town]. She gets piece jobs as a domestic worker, but we are not together anymore. I think it's the financial strain. Or maybe we grew apart, I took another wife when I was in Witbank, a customary one, you see. But what could I do? We were hardly together and now we are both sick. The children ... [*the respondent's voice tapers off*]' (Langa, Male DG, n.d.)

In search of employment, the interviewee's wife migrated to Cape Town in order to provide for her family (including her husband, the respondent).

The marriage, however, broke down because, according to the respondent, of the strain caused by two possible reasons: a lack of financial resources as a result of his unexpected retrenchment and his having 'taken another wife' while working as a mineworker in Witbank. The respondent claims that he became polygamous because of his forced separation from his family so as to be able to provide for the same (family). 'There's no winning', the respondent stated as a matter of fact upon further probing about the dislocation of his family. Furthermore, the respondent, in receipt of the DG because of illness, mentions that as a result of the complex nature of his relationship with his wife and his multiple sexual partners (because of migratory labour, by his account), he and his wife are 'both sick'. All respondents in the focus group were in receipt of the DG with most disclosing illnesses such as stroke, epilepsy and cardiac disease. As respondents were free not to disclose their illnesses, this particular respondent only divulged the state of his health and that of his wife after the completion of the focus group session, in the absence of other participants from his community and with the voice recorder off – he was suffering from HIV and AIDS-related diseases. The convoluted state of his family was depicted by the emotionally despondent manner in which his voice faded at the mention of his children. Similarly, a lone mother living near Cape Town paints a complex picture of the reasons for migrating and the effects of migratory labour on her family:

'I came here [Makhaza, Cape Town] with my children. At least here there's hope. Back home, only hunger. I can sell things here. Anything, from sweets to clothes. Sometimes I get piece jobs when my friends who are domestic workers are sick or on holiday. It helps them not lose their jobs you see. Services are better here too, things move. You get your ID if you apply, you get your grant and the children don't have to walk long distances to go to school.' (Makhaza, Female CSG)

Like other accounts by migrant women in focus groups conducted in urban areas, the lone mother expresses the hopelessness that exists in rural areas, mostly in the Eastern Cape province, because of a lack of opportunities for economic activity. In Cape Town, there are various ways of 'making ends meet', such as undertaking temporary employment as a domestic worker, having heard of opportunities from her friends and having her own micro businesses. The respondent also alludes to better social service delivery in urban areas than rural areas as 'things move' in Cape Town. Probed about whether she has a partner and supposes she does, if their partner is employed, she responded:

'My husband worked in Johannesburg, when I came here five years ago I had not seen him for years. I don't know what happened. Some say he has been seen there. I don't know, I don't know.' (Makhaza, Female CSG)

For other migrant workers, low wages earned long distances away from home serve as an impediment to a sound social life allowing only a single annual Christmas visit to their rural home:

'I have to send money to my wife and children whenever I can otherwise they suffer. I don't want my family to suffer. They live in Cala. I also have to pay rent here so I can't go home for Easter I can only go once for Christmas' (Langa, Male CSG)

This is a direct legacy of apartheid. According to Eidelberg (2009), 54% of all black Africans lived outside former homelands in 'white areas' as labourers in the early 1970s. There may also be a correlation between high rates of poverty and low rates of marriage.

In addition to the migrant labour system, *lobola* [a black African dowry custom whereby a man pays his fiancée's family a stipulated amount of money or cattle as a prerequisite to marrying her] can serve as an impediment to marriage for unemployed black African couples. Proponents of this practice claim that *lobola* is a good indication that a man is capable of financially supporting his wife and fosters mutual respect between the newly related families (Manobo 2021). Such social complexities in low-income black African people's lives may be a contributory factor in the high incidence of 'never married' black African lone mothers. The following two respondents cite the lack of financial resources, in order to pay lobola, as an impediment to their marital plans:

'My child and her mother live with the child's grandmother. I won't lie to you my sister, I can't afford lobola without a steady job, otherwise they would be living with me.' (Nxarhun, Male CSG)

'They look down on me because I have a child and am not married. We want to get married so much but my partner cannot afford lobola anymore, he was retrenched so we have to wait.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG)

The first respondent, a male living in Nxarhun, a rural location in the Eastern Cape province, prefers to live with his partner and child but is unable to do so, while the latter respondent, a female living in an urban township, Mdantsane, has to contend with the social stigma of being an unmarried lone mother in her community because her partner had been retrenched and could not afford *lobola*.

It also became apparent in the focus group interviews in rural locations that some lone mothers who were widows had husbands who had emigrated to cities such as Cape Town for work purposes and came back home infected with HIV. This was also the case with the lone mothers who went to the Western Cape province from the Eastern Cape province in search of work:

'My husband left a few years ago to work in the mines in Johannesburg, he hardly ever came back, only Christmas time, but he sent us money regularly. Last year I thought he was coming back for Christmas as usual but I could see

something was very wrong. He couldn't go back to work and I had to look after him and the children, he didn't live long, he died in February.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG)

'If my husband had not died from AIDS I would still be home in Cala with all my children. He came here to Cape Town to work. Instead he fetched his death. We buried him in Cala last year.' (Langa, Female CSG, n.d.)

■ Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, lone mothers in South Africa contend with challenges that are both unique to the country and general ones faced by most lone mothers in any country. Poverty and reliance on social assistance for never-married black African lone mothers are compounded by demeaning and stigmatising social attitudes from communities and the media. Accounts given by interviewees reflect apartheid's legacy of labour migration and its role in breaking black African nuclear family units, a situation that has clearly damaged lone mothers' lives and their children in the country. The next chapter 'Lone motherhood: Employment and unemployment' will explore the extent to which low-income lone mothers are expected to engage with the labour market and the impact of unemployment on their families.

Lone motherhood: Employment and unemployment²²

■ Introduction

This chapter is based on Chapter 4 of my PhD thesis entitled ‘Lone mothers’ experiences of employment and unemployment in South Africa – it was previously published on the Department of Social Development (2010) website. As discussed previously, there is no social security provision for unemployed people of working age in South Africa. Unemployed lone mothers need to be both full-time caregivers and prospective breadwinners simultaneously. The country’s high unemployment rate (46.65% according to the expanded definition of unemployment, LFS 2021), however, puts

22. This chapter represents previously published work and has not been revised according to the Department of Education and Training (DHET) Research Output Policy of 2015. Ntshongwana, P 2010, ‘Lone mothers’ experiences of employment and unemployment in South Africa’, Department of Social Development, viewed on 15 May 2024 <https://www.saspri.org/SASPRI/SASPRI/wp-content/uploads/Docs/Lone_Mothers_and_Work.pdf>. The author, Dr Phakama Ntshongwana, conducted this research as part of a team with Professor Michael Noble and Dr Gemma Wright. Ethical clearance for the 2011 phase of the study, which contributed to her PhD from the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee at the University of Oxford (ref. no.: SSD/CUREC2/11-35). The Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee provided the last Ethics certificate for the study in 2011. Dr Ntshongwana declares that the 2008 ethics clearance is no longer available in the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee archives at the University of Oxford because of the passage of time.

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low-skilled lone mothers in a precarious position. Limited work opportunities for low-skilled black African women, in particular, have compelled them to accept menial jobs that often deny them their social citizenship rights:

'I'm from Willowvale, I usually work as a maid in town [East London] then I go home every second month for a long weekend. The money is not much but at least I go home with something. My eldest daughter is sixteen, she looks after the younger ones. My little one is five years and is going to start school. We are used to being apart there's nothing else we can do, the children don't have a father. But it's difficult looking after children at work when mine are on their own.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.)

The issues the lone mother raises in relation to her work and her children are numerous and complex. Similar to millions of low-skilled migrant workers in South Africa, this mother left her rural home and moved to the city of East London in order to be a domestic worker. She highlighted the sacrifice she has made in order to work – living away from her children and the infrequency of her 'visits' to her home. The lone mother's sixteen-year-old daughter has become the head of the household in her mother's absence and the primary caregiver to her own siblings. She, the lone mother, has a young child aged five years, who was probably about to start school in her absence. The maternal deprivation her children experience is further compounded by the fact that her job entails looking after somebody else's children, her employer's, while hers are deprived of her care. The lone mother also raises the inadequacy of her wage which reflects the low earnings of unskilled women in South Africa even in the context of 'live-in' work.

I shall unpick these various issues and explore how low-income lone mothers' relationship to paid work is structured in South Africa, with a view to exploring the attachment to the labour market such women may or may not have and the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives. This analysis will also be an indication of the extent to which low-income mothers are subject to social exclusion. I demonstrate that because of the lack of employment opportunities in South Africa and the impact of the apartheid legacy, black African lone mothers are excluded when out of work and excluded when in work. I then explore lone mothers' motivation to work leading to a discussion about the financial and non-financial benefits of work. The cost of paid work for lone mothers shall be considered by employing domestic workers as a case study. This analysis will elucidate the types and extent of exclusion experienced by low-income lone mothers in South Africa even when at work. The issues relating to the provision of care for children will be explored in Chapter 5.

The analysis in this chapter largely draws on focus group material conducted in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. It is supplemented by quantitative material drawn from analysis of two modules on Work and

Welfare in the SASAS (2008) and the *Statistics South Africa Labour Force Survey* data (2020, 2021). Data from 2006 and 2008 are used to better contextualise and understand trends not only in this epoch but also from 2020 to 2023 in order to draw a narrative of the historical significance and progress into the current era. Yet, the reader ought to be aware that the data are applicable to the Eastern and Western Cape provinces and that while there are similarities between the two eras, there are also significant differences that the reader must keep in mind.

■ Lone mothers and unemployment

According to the *Labour Force Survey*, the demographic group that has remained with the highest rate of unemployment for the last decade is black African women (LFS 2020). Most commentators have argued that the high levels of unemployment are mainly because of a lack of suitable available jobs. Focus group respondents (both men and women, adolescent and elderly, rural- and urban-based) confirmed the scarcity of jobs in the country:

‘There are no jobs here in Khayelitsha.’ (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, n.d.)

‘It’s not that there is a scarcity of jobs in Mncotsho Village, there are no jobs at all, they are simply not available.’ (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, n.d.)

‘Here we all are unemployed, there are no jobs here.’ (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.)

In addition to a lack of employment opportunities, lone mothers are also impeded by their education levels when trying to find work (Table 4.1).

As can be seen in Table 4.1, the majority of black African lone mothers either have no formal education at all or had some secondary schooling – two-thirds of black African lone mothers had not obtained their secondary school certificate (matric). The consequence of unemployment in the absence of an effective social security system is severe poverty, which

TABLE 4.1: The education level of lone mothers of employed age according to racial group.

Racial group	Level of education					
	No schooling (%)	Some secondary schooling (%)	Secondary school certificate (Matric/ NQF7) (%)	Skills certificate (%)	Diploma or degree (%)	Postgraduate (%)
Black African	4.0	62.1	26.6	5.43	1.8	0
Coloured	4.5	72.7	15.6	5.1	0	0.2
Indian or Asian	0	14.8	84.1	1.1	0	0
White	0	23.2	58.2	13.7	4.9	0

Source: *South African Social Attitudes Survey* (2008), administered by the HSRC.

Key: NQF7, National Qualifications Framework 7.

TABLE 4.2: The poverty status of lone mothers of employed age according to racial group.

Racial group	Non-poor (%)	Just get by (%)	Poor (%)
Black African	25.2	36.3	38.5
Coloured	20.1	44.2	35.7
Indian or Asian	85.0	15.0	0
White	48.1	28.7	23.2

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2008), administered by the HSRC.

impacts both the lone mothers and their children. Lone mothers defined their poverty status as follows (Table 4.2).

Almost 39% of black African lone mothers of working age defined themselves as being ‘poor’. The impact of having a lone mother who is unemployed on children has many aspects, including the inability to pay school fees which was a prominent theme in the focus groups:

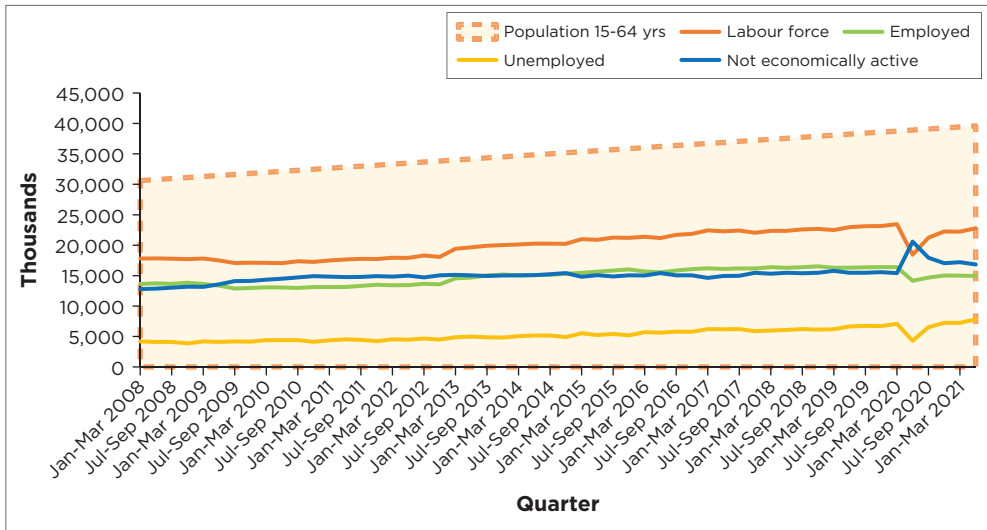
‘My children have been sent home a few times because I couldn’t pay their school fees. Sometimes it’s a choice between buying food and paying school fees from the CSG, where else am I going to get money.’ (Crossroads, Female CSG, n.d.)

‘If you haven’t paid school fees your child cannot sit for her examinations.’ (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.)

‘I receive the CSG, the teachers know that so they say I have no excuse for not paying school fees even though I don’t have a job. They also sent my child home.’ (Mncotsho, Female CSG, n.d.)

The following is a demonstration of unemployment trends from 2008, which are consistent with the first cohort of the research study’s qualitative component, to 2021, which are consistent with the second qualitative cohort. High unemployment rates in the country are long-term, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown measures. In the second-quarter of 2020, there is a sharp incline, 3.3 million higher than the previous quarter, because of discouraged work seekers, coined economically inactive (Barnes et al. 2021; Stats SA 2021). The following graphic representation of employment and unemployment trends over the research period illustrates and informs the existence of a structural underclass in the country rather than a behavioural underclass, as discussed in Chapter 2.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, certain poor areas in South Africa have been exempted from paying school fees for secondary schooling. However, the policy has yet to be appropriately implemented. The lack of financial resources to pay their children’s school fees compromises the youngsters’ education progress as they are constantly being sent home – a destitute environment where, at times, a choice has to be made between buying food and securing a primary education (Crossroads, Female CSG, n.d.). Crying, a lone mother from Gugulethu,



Source: Statistics South Africa (2021) and Department of Social Development 2021, *Basic Income Support Report*, viewed n.d., <<https://www.dsd.gov.za/index.php/documents?task=download.send&id=356&catid=58&m=0>>.
Key: yrs, years.

FIGURE 4.1: Labour force, employment and unemployment trends from 2008 to 2021.

Cape Town, expressed the humiliation she constantly undergoes having to borrow money from neighbours to buy bread:

‘My children have forgotten the taste of meat. Since I lost my job I cannot afford it. Even just to buy bread I often have to borrow money from neighbours. It’s embarrassing, they belittle you [...].’ (Gugulethu, Female CSG, n.d.)

As discussed in Chapter 1, food insecurity, particularly for young children, has been proven to have adverse effects on child development. Black African lone mothers also expressed their vulnerability to crime as a result of their housing deprivation having to live in corrugated iron shacks of a lack of financial resources:

‘I lost my house after I lost my job. I couldn’t pay rent anymore so we live in a shack, my children and I. It’s not secure, I feel like anyone can break the door down and crime rates are so high in Khayelitsha.’ (Makhaza, Female CSG, n.d.)

‘I never thought I’d end up in a shack for so long in Cape Town. The huts at home [rural Eastern Cape village] are much better, stronger. It’s so unsafe here, the crime, it’s really violent. Living in a shack, it’s not safe.’ (Makhaza, Female CSG, n.d.)

Being forced to use an outside toilet shared by a number of households, a woman said:

‘It’s dangerous here, living in shacks, if you happen to need the toilet in the middle of the night, you just can’t go. You can’t [...].’ (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, n.d.)

Families living in shacks are also susceptible to extreme weather conditions:

'I've lost count, the number of times we've had to build a new shack because of the heavy rains here. It's not good for the children the worry, the insecurity during the rainy season.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, n.d.)

Unemployment can also lead to isolation:

'I'm still young, I don't want to just stay at home, I mean I have matric [secondary school certificate]. It's so lonely being at home, just me and the baby and my grandmother. I want to interact with other people, people of my own age group you know.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, n.d.)

In addition, people who are unemployed and/or in poverty are said to be prone to depression and low self-esteem, making it difficult to form lasting partnerships or marriages. Asked about their emotional state in SASAS, the difference in the emotional well-being of lone mothers who were employed full-time and those who were unemployed (both actively looking for work and too discouraged to do so) was considerable (Table 4.3).

None of the lone mothers in full-time employment declared themselves to be 'not at all happy', while 12.36% of unemployed lone mothers did. In addition, a higher percentage of lone mothers in full-time employment were either happy or very happy. It could be argued that employed lone mothers would be even happier if they did not have childcare concerns, which probably exist considering the elementary nature of most lone mothers' employment status and, thus, the lack of affordability of decent childcare facilities. Consistent with Section 27(c) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996* on social security provision, 84% of adults in the SASAS (2017) agreed that the government should provide a decent standard of living for all unemployed people. In the next section, more challenges faced by unemployed lone mothers and their families are explored.

TABLE 4.3: Lone mothers' self-reported happiness: 'Taking all things into [consideration], would you say you are ...?'

State of happiness	Lone mothers in full-time employment (%)	Unemployed lone mothers (%)
Very happy	6.65	3.65
Happy	55.92	44.26
Neither happy nor unhappy	17.4	20.45
Not happy	20.02	19.27
Not at all happy	0	12.36
Total	100	100

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2008), administered by the HSRC.

■ The cost of unemployment for lone mothers

In the absence of any social security support for unemployed lone mothers in their own right, there is enormous pressure for them to seek employment in order to survive. In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that the vast majority of low-income lone mothers have a strong attachment to work for various reasons. Asked whose responsibility it is to financially support a child or children under the age of five years whose mother is single, lone mothers of working age living in both rural and urban locations had similar attitudes with a resounding positive response for lone mothers (even with a child under the age of five years) to 'go out to work to support her child' (Table 4.4).

This, some may argue, could be the result of the internalisation of the 'moral order' in South African society whereby a mother who, having broken the moral code of being a member of a nuclear family and failed to 'retain' her male partner (if she is not widowed), should, at the least, work to provide for her child or children. Such economic independence and 'good working behaviour', at whatever cost, do not only serve to provide for the children of lone mothers but also would provide a 'good enough' role model to children who are perceived to be already morally disadvantaged by being members of lone-parent families. There were, however, variations in response to the same question when analysed according to a racial group. One notes that in Table 4.4, 67% of black African lone mothers thought that 'lone mothers with a child under the age of five years old often are obliged to go out to work to support her child' (SASSA, 2008).

Rather than internalising the 'moral order', this suggests that black African lone mothers appear to be responding to the dire reality of conditions without employment, in the context of no social security support. Indeed, a higher percentage of black African lone mothers stated that they should go out to work to support the child than did the population

TABLE 4.4: Lone mothers of employed age: 'Thinking about a single mother with a child under five years old. Which one of these statements comes closest to your view?'

Answer to question	Black African (%)	Coloured (%)	Indian or Asian (%)	White (%)	All (%)
She should go out to work to support her child	67.0	67.6	78.1	18.6	59.5
She should stay at home to look after her child	75.6	4.5	0.1	0	8.4
She should do as she thinks best	25.5	19.8	20.5	81.4	31.2
Undecided	0.1	0	0	0	0.9

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2008), administered by the HSRC.

at large – almost 60% of black African lone mothers hold the view that a lone mother with a child under the age of five years ought to work in order to support her child or children in the context of all respondents. The widely held assumption that the child support grant (CSG) encourages a culture of dependency underpins the view that low-income lone mothers should work even with children under five years old. The dependency culture thesis and its relevance to RSA will be explored in Chapter 6. Now we have seen that an even higher percentage of lone mothers (who, if on a low income, will be entitled to receive CSG) asserted that they should go out to work than the population as a whole. This strikes at the root of the dependency culture thesis in RSA, as the lone mothers are clearly demonstrating a strong attachment to the labour market. Indeed, if we look at how black African lone mothers of working age respond to the same question by self-defined poverty status (Table 4.5), it is clear that those who define themselves as poor or ‘just getting by’ are much more likely to state that the lone mother should go out to work.

A notably low percentage (14.8%) of ‘non-poor’ (wealthy, very comfortable and reasonably comfortable) black African lone mothers thought that a lone mother with a child under the age of five years ought to go out to work to support her child as opposed to lone mothers who just get by (41.2%) and poor black African lone mothers (44%).

In the focus groups conducted in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces, most lone mothers worked so as to be able to provide for their children:

‘If I didn’t work how would my children go to school? If you don’t pay school fees the children can’t write their exams. They always turn them away. I need full-time work [...] right now I only have part-time work in a hotel. I pay school fees, buy books and uniform. The children need to eat. I need money to take them to the clinic when they are sick.’ (Makhaza, Female CSG, n.d.)

The lone mother raises a myriad of reasons for her need to work not just on a part-time basis but also on a full-time basis. She needs to provide for her children’s educational needs, health care and nutrition. Upon probing about whether she was aware that the *National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996* stipulates that school fees could be formally waived for pupils from poor

TABLE 4.5: The attitudes and perceptions of black African lone mothers of working age to employment by self-defined poverty status: ‘Thinking about a single mother with a child under five years old. Which one of these statements comes closest to your view?’

Answer to question	Non-poor (%)	Just get by (%)	Poor (%)
She should go out to work to support her child	14.8	41.2	44.0
She should stay at home to look after her child	50.5	36.6	12.9
She should do as she thinks best	43.0	25.2	31.8

Source: *South African Social Attitudes Survey* (2008) administered by the HSRC.

families and that no child is meant to be turned away from school for a lack of school fees, the lone mother's response was that she had heard about such a policy but that it 'obviously does not apply to my children's school' (Makhaza, Female CSG, n.d.). The lack of social policy integration at national and local levels has, in this instance, led to considerable distress for the lone mother and probably her children as well such that she, the respondent, is anxious to find full-time work in order to meet her children's needs. Some lone mothers in the focus group interviews indicated that they lived in households with extended family members who were in receipt of other forms of social grants which were pooled together in order to meet, as far as possible, the basic needs of all family members. Such a situation, Gough and Wood would argue, locates unemployed low-income black African mothers in South Africa in informal security regimes.

Without a comprehensive social security system for low-income lone mothers, even existent provisions, for example, school fees, are not fully implemented; it is likely that poor lone mothers who opt to stay at home to look after their young children, forfeit employment in order to do so, would only have the CSG and informal, sporadic, financial assistance to depend on. This does not mean that they would necessarily support the notion of employment at any cost: when asked if 'it is alright for lone mothers to live at their place of work even if it means they are separated from their children' (a situation quite common with black African domestic workers), 46% of poor lone mothers responded negatively (either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing), while only 16% of non-poor black African lone mothers responded in the same way (SASAS). It is likely that having possibly experienced being a 'live-in' domestic worker, or at least knowing someone who has had such an experience, and being separated from their children, poor black African lone mothers are more likely to be aware of the adverse effect of such an arrangement compared to non-poor black African lone mothers.

In focus groups both in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces of South Africa, it was evident that lone mothers made their decisions around paid work not only with economic rationality in mind but with the provision of 'good enough care' for their children as well. Of particular importance to low-skilled black African lone mothers is giving their children a better life and future than they themselves had ever experienced under the apartheid regime through the financial resources gained from their labour. When asked if she would like to work were a job available for her, a lone mother responded:

'It is important for all us here as black parents to ensure that our children have better lives than we did. Education is crucial. We did not have all these opportunities under apartheid but our children can have a chance. That is what I work for when I have work and that is why I continue to look for work.' (Langa, Female CSG, n.d.)

As a lone mother from Mdantsane describes the situation:

'It's better for my children when I have work. I am all they have.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.)

A number of lone mothers responded indignantly when asked whether they would opt to work if a job were available, with a few muttering – 'I would have thought that is obvious' – that they would. One lone mother so desperately needed work that she could not respond to the question as she was emotional and started to cry (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.). The next section demonstrates the cost of paid work for low-income lone mothers.

■ The cost of paid work for lone mothers

The lack of social security provision for low-income lone mothers in South Africa translates to women accepting and staying in arduous jobs in order to support themselves and their children. According to the LFS, 34% of the country's elementary labour force comprises of women in domestic work. In order to illustrate the challenges a low-skilled black African lone mother in employment can face, the archetypal example of the life of a lone mother who is a domestic worker is explored. In the country, most domestic workers are part of an urban working class; however, many of them are from impoverished rural backgrounds with little or no schooling. For a poor, rural and low-skilled migrant from the Eastern Cape province, domestic service in the City of Cape Town (CoCT), for example, can provide an ideal solution to the problems of unemployment and lack of accommodation once in an economic hub. A lone mother originally from the Eastern Cape province who was visiting her sister in Khayelitsha, also an economic migrant, raises several of these issues:

'We often did not have food back home. The neighbours sometimes helped but they too don't have much. All the time it's difficult, it's still difficult but when you work in the kitchens (domestic work) at least I don't have to worry about food, I accept whatever they give me. I have a place to sleep here, I don't have to sell my body at Sea Point and I can send money home to the children.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, n.d.)

Driven by poverty and the lack of employment opportunities in her village, this domestic worker has to earn money to support her children even if it entails being separated from them. She reiterates that even though she has a job, sends money to her children and does not have to 'sell her body', life is still difficult for her. The domestic worker's statement about sex work indicating that it is the worst option to earn money suggests some migrant women may indeed suffer such similar fate to support their families. Indeed, women in focus group interviews in Langa and Gugulethu,

informal settlements near the CoCT, raised the issue of sex work as a means of living:

'It happens, women using their bodies at Sea Point for money. These days I don't judge them, times are hard there are no jobs.' (Langa, Female CSG, n.d.)

'We need jobs in Gugulethu, interesting jobs for our children otherwise they end up in Sea Point, you know, earning money in ways that are not meant to be.' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, n.d.)

Some domestic workers face further challenges at their place of work. For them, to be a live-in domestic worker means that one is dependent on their employer not only for wages but also for basic necessities such as food and accommodation. Such dependence reflects and can reinforce the inferior structural location of black African women in South African society. In this vein, Kubeka and Rama (2020) combined the theories of intersectionality and social exclusion for such nuanced interpretations of power and social relations in South African local contexts. Furthermore, the relationship between the respondents who are domestic workers and their employers has remained generally paternalistic:

'Sometimes it's no better working in black people's kitchens. They think you are less human just because you are not educated. They can forget that you are a person too just like some white employers towards us blacks....' (Makhaza, Female CSG, n.d.)

However, it is the very desperation of domestic workers, as expressed by focus group respondents, that makes them all the more vulnerable and forces them to keep a job no matter how bad the conditions. Domestic workers are still largely exploited in terms of the number of hours they work and wages paid even though the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997* is meant to legally protect them. Low-skilled, black African lone mothers are, therefore, nexus points of four types of discrimination – race, sex, class and marital status. Such discrimination renders women in this position vulnerable to exploitation as evidenced by their lack of employment benefits (maternity leave, pension fund and compensation for injuries) as well as deprivation of a social life. The most common form of recruitment for domestic workers is by word of mouth from friends and relatives. This form of recruitment contributes to the lack of records kept in terms of conditions of employment, which leaves the domestic worker unprotected in the event of a dispute (Female CSG, Langa):

'I left my last job working in the kitchens because they were not paying me properly. Sometimes they would try to cheat and insist on a particular payment they made. Just because I'm not educated doesn't mean I'm a fool.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.)

The experience of having her intelligence undermined ('just because I don't have a degree doesn't mean I'm stupid') indicates her insecurity while working as a domestic employee. This feature of subordination and lack of protection makes domestic workers vulnerable to arbitrary dismissal, deductions from wages for breakages or lost property, evictions from the backyard rooms in which they stay and possible withholding of wages by the employer:

'I have to go back to my village, I can't stay in East London anymore. I was a domestic worker [...] I lost my accommodation when I lost my job. I got fired, it was all so sudden' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.)

A lone mother in Mncotsho Village, an informal settlement in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, who worked as a domestic worker was suddenly dismissed and replaced by her employer's relative who had lost her job:

'I used to work in the city and got fired when my employer decided to get her relative who had lost her job to come look after her children.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, n.d.)

A woman in Langa, an informal settlement just outside the CoCT, expressed how she hopes her children will be better off than her because of the sacrifice she has made in domestic work:

'If my children go to school and get a good education they won't go through the bad experiences we go through. The money they earn won't be withheld because they've broken a bowl at work or something is missing and the madam thinks they've stolen it.' (Langa, Female CSG, n.d.)

In spite of their positions as 'insiders' in the private realm of the domestic world of the South African middle-class society which they serve, domestic workers remain 'outsiders' not only at their place or 'home' of work but arguably with their own children and other forms of social networks too as they are mostly separated from them:

'It's tough, you go home [*Eastern Cape village*] and you don't know your children anymore, you don't get along with the people that are bringing them up. You live at work [*city of East London*] and of course you are a social imposter there....' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, n.d.)

The 'all-encompassing' nature of live-in domestic work may lead the women to suffer from extreme isolation for various reasons. Firstly, entry into their workplace is likely to be restricted by high walls, guard dogs, alarm systems and locked security gates – very different from communal living in rural Eastern Cape villages. Secondly, many domestic workers live alone in backyard rooms with limited access to visitors. For the live-in domestic workers, the place of employment is also a place of sleep (supposed rest) and recreation under the same authority. Domestic service for most low-skilled South African women, therefore, obscures boundaries between

work and private life, possibly depersonalising a woman and compromising her sense of self.

Having depicted the typical life of a low-income lone mother who is a domestic worker, a common occupation for low-skilled black African women, it is evident that the struggle for the realisation of social citizenship rights for low-income women in RSA is ongoing. Furthermore, if 'economic independence' for low-skilled women comes at such a high price, then it is perhaps not so bad for low-skilled lone mothers to be reliant on the state for their social welfare and that of their children.

■ Lone mothers and the expanded public works programme

So far, I have focused on lone mothers' experiences of unemployment on the one hand and the challenges of low-paid employment on the other hand. A third strand needs to be discussed when considering the employment 'choices' available to lone mothers. These are the so-called Extended Public Works Programmes (EPWPs). As I have noted in Chapter 1, the EPWP is considered by the government as an integral part of its social protection programme. It is the justification given for the absence of social assistance provision for healthy adults of working age. However, as this section demonstrates, the EPWP does not provide social protection for all who need it. Indeed, evaluations of EPWP have consistently demonstrated that it does not deliver what was intended.

According to a World Bank Report, the EPWP offers short-term employment and training on the premise that supply side interventions are an appropriate and effective response to transitional unemployment (McCord 2004, p. 9). Such a policy approach is consistent with the use of public works programmes in the context of temporary economic dislocation. However, the structural unemployment and labour market challenges faced by South Africa are not transient. In addition, low-skill supply-side interventions have only limited potential to address the technologically advanced and globalised labour market issues.

The EPWPs have names resonating with the political discourse of 'graduating out of dependence' into economic autonomy, compounding existing pressure for unemployed lone mothers to work. One of the EPWPs' building maintenance programmes is the Zivuseni Reloaded Programme in the Gauteng province of South Africa, and 'zivuseni' (isiZulu) means 'get yourselves up' when literally translated and 'uplift yourselves (by working)' figuratively. The Vuk'uphile Learnership Programme is one of the EPWP development leadership, where 'vuk'uphile' (isiZulu) literally means 'wake up (by working) and live'. Such lexicon blatantly assumes that the EPWPs'

targeted population group is indolent and needs to be 'awakened' from unemployment slumber. In his work on addressing the employment needs of the North American 'ghetto' underclass, Julius Wilson rejected policies that were based crudely on the reshaping of incentives for the structural underclass because of their pejorative and destructive nature. EPWPs have proved not to be the intended panacea for the high rate of structural unemployment in RSA and have not led people to 'graduate out of dependency'.

Public works programmes might be seen as a useful short-term strategy but are not, by themselves, a long-term solution. Their average tenure is ten months, at the end of which most people return to their unemployment statuses or reverse into social exclusion as articulated by the FOSAD social cluster, which is discussed in Chapter 8.

The intention of the South African government is that the EPWPs will address poverty and unemployment in a manner that is generally seen to be empowering and developmental, as opposed to engendering dependency. However, as regards lone parents, this government strategy offers temporary employment and training for low-skilled people with little or no acknowledgement of their parenting or care responsibilities. Expressing their desire to work and local work opportunities within the EPWPs, lone mothers in Langa and Khayelitsha in the Western Cape province of South Africa said:

'I take my son with me when I work. We sweep and clean around the streets. There is no one to look after him, but the dust is so bad for him, he's always coughing. He gets so tired because I can't always carry him on my back and I don't think he likes the constant noise in the streets. But I must work, we can't depend on this CSG, it's not enough.' (Langa, Female CSG, n.d.)

'I really want to work, there were public works jobs going at the main school here, cleaning jobs. At least if you work there people get to know you and you are in a better position to get more work when this public works finishes. I started but had to stop because my cousin couldn't look after my children anymore, she got a piece job. What does one do, I ask?' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, n.d.)

At the core of the EPWP is the concept that economic participation is a fundamental element of contemporary citizenship. The emphasis lies on citizens' responsibilities rather than rights, specifically highlighting the duty for self or family support through employment or self-improvement to enhance employability.

■ Conclusion

This chapter has shown that low-income black African lone mothers are often faced with unemployment on the one hand (and the lack of social

security provision to help them meet their needs) and, if a job can be found, poor quality employment conditions on the other hand. The South African Constitution (1996) stated that:

‘Everyone has the right to have access to health care services, including reproductive health care, sufficient food, water and social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance’ and every child (under the age of 18 years) has a right to: ‘basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services’ (RSA 1996, p. 1255).

Yet, the focus group material used in this chapter has demonstrated the extent of multiple deprivations experienced by low-income, low-skilled lone mothers and their children (whether they are unemployed or employed in menial jobs). A lack of health care, food insecurity, housing deprivation, inadequate childcare and exposure to crime are some of the unmet social rights. Rendered low-skilled with inadequate education by the apartheid legacy, low-income lone mothers shoulder a disproportionate responsibility of reproducing and raising the country’s human or social capital. For such women, employment is often at a high cost, with inadequate wages failing to provide income levels above the poverty lines (causing distress as lone mothers struggle to meet their children’s basic needs, maternal deprivation for their children and inadequate care). Even under such adverse working conditions, there is unequivocal evidence of strong attachment to the labour market amongst low-skilled lone mothers – disproving the perception of a dependency culture for those in receipt of the CSG and, indeed, refuting Mead’s and Murray’s moral underclass theory (discussed in Chapter 2). According to the lone mothers’ accounts from the focus groups, the *diswelfares* of unemployed women appear to be similar to and at times worse than those of women in elementary employment. Bereft of hope, women in isolated rural areas, in particular, seemed to be ‘just surviving’ as entire families shared whatever meagre social grants their households received. Titmuss’ concept of diswelfare is underpinned by the notion that social policy as a practice ought to take structural causes of poverty into consideration (Titmuss 1968). This is depicted by the country’s spatial patterns, which show that low-income women live far away from economic hubs.

Institutionally in RSA, social security remains the terrain of employment-based provisions and labour market interaction and is separated from the sphere of social assistance that is residual and targeted to the special needs of poor people. The social policy framework of the country reinforces and rewards wage labour as the main vehicle for social insertion and inclusion. It does so, however, in a highly problematic context where wage labour is not only scarce but is becoming increasingly embattled (with the influx of immigrants), frail (because of advanced technology) and vulnerable (with current global economic challenges).

Who cares?: Childcare challenges for lone mothers²³

■ Introduction

Chapter 4 demonstrated the difficulties faced by low-income lone mothers in relation to employment in South Africa. This chapter is based on Chapter 5 of my doctoral thesis²⁴ which was published on the DSD (2010) website. It demonstrates the impracticalities and adverse effects of government policy, which stipulate that entry into the labour market

23. This chapter represents previously published work and has not been revised according to the Department of Education and Training (DHET) *Research Output Policy of 2015*. Ntshongwana, P 2010, 'Childcare challenges faced by lone mothers in South Africa', Department of Social Development, viewed on 15 May 2024 <https://www.saspri.org/SASPRI/SASPRI/wp-content/uploads/Docs/Lone_Mothers_and_Care.pdf>.

24. It is an updated study of research conducted for purposes of a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) thesis at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom (UK), which is unpublished. Please refer to: Ntshongwana, P 2010, 'Social security provision for lone mothers in South Africa: dependency, independence and dignity', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Social Policy, Social Sciences Division, University of Oxford, Oxford, with Professor Micheal Michael Noble and Professor Dr Gemma Wright as supervisors. The author, Dr Phakama Ntshongwana, conducted this research as part of a team with Professor Michael Noble and Dr Gemma Wright. Ethical clearance for the 2011 phase of the study, which contributed to her PhD from the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee at the University of Oxford (ref. no.: SSD/CUREC2/11-35). The Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee provided the last Ethics certificate for the study in 2011. Dr Ntshongwana declares that the 2008 ethics clearance is no longer available in the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee archives at the University of Oxford because of the passage of time.

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confers independence and dignity (by virtue of not availing any social security provision for able-bodied low-income lone mothers and because of government rhetoric about the need for low-income lone mothers in receipt of the child support grant (CSG) to work) without consideration for their childcare responsibilities. In the absence of a comprehensive social security system, we saw that low-income lone mothers experienced poverty whether they were unemployed or in low-skilled and poorly paid employment. This poverty was multidimensional and included food insecurity, living environment deprivation and compromised education for children. We saw that lone mothers faced an additional challenge in the absence of adequate resources: the lack of adequate care for their children. This chapter explores in greater detail the challenges faced by low-income lone mothers regarding the provision of care for their children. Depicting the tension between a lone mother's unpaid care responsibilities and paid work, a woman in Nxarhun Village, an informal settlement in East London in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, said:

'I left my job, working in the kitchens [domestic work] in East London, chose to stay at home and look after my children rather than being a live-in domestic worker. Either way it's not an easy choice because I don't have a salary anymore, it wasn't much but it was something. I couldn't bear to leave my children here with someone else like I have done in the past, abandon them, they lost their father only a year ago, he left us, at least if one parent is around there's some comfort for the children. But it's not easy, whatever food I buy I give mostly to the children and I go hungry sometimes. It's not easy, I feel weak at times from the hunger and I can't carry my little one, but I am here, I am here with them [...].'
(Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2006)

The aforementioned lone mother had to choose between 'abandoning' her children by retaining her job or forfeiting her employment and caring for her children, who had lost their father a year earlier. She chose the latter, giving up her job to care for her children. However, as she no longer had a dependable income, she could not afford to take care of and consume the necessary food to nourish herself because she prioritised her children's nutrition, 'whatever food I buy I give mostly to the children'. Risking her health, she ends up compromising the very care that is of such great importance to her that she gave up her income, 'I feel weak at times from the hunger and I can't carry my little one'.

With all the difficulties this mother endured, she found solace in the fact that she was physically caring and looking after her children, 'but I am here, I am here with them'.

Analysing challenges such as these from the perspective of lone mothers will help gather explanations for social policy discrepancies in the country, which put an expectation on low-skilled lone mothers to be *independent* by being in full-time employment and simultaneously to provide care for their children. Firstly, current government policy commitments about

childcare will be explored, including treaties ratified at international and regional levels. This will demonstrate the extent of the lack of fit between government policy and the needs of low-income lone mothers and their children. Secondly, childcare facilities available in South Africa for young children will be reviewed, taking into account the different types of care provision available for all income groups. Then, the physical and emotional needs of children – aged zero to five years and those aged six to seventeen years – will be discussed. This will be followed by an exploration of the effects of inadequate care for children as a consequence of a lack of social security provision for their mothers who are unable to provide adequate care for their children whether employed (earning low wages and at times separated from their children) or unemployed. According to Dawes (2006), child carers are rights bearers themselves, and their rights ought to be protected.

■ The country's 'commitment' to childcare needs

In this section, relevant treaties about childcare provision ratified by the South African government internationally and regionally are explored in order to provide a context for a discussion about the development of childcare policies.

In order to tackle child poverty, the South African government ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) and the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* in 1995 and 1999, respectively. The country is also a signatory to the *International Labour Organisation's Conventions 138 and 182* on child labour. In giving childhood its explicit and appropriate acknowledgement, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) recognises childhood as:

'[M]eaning much more than just the space between birth and the attainment of adulthood' and refers to childhood as 'the state and condition of a child's life: the quality of those years'. (UNICEF 2004, p.3)

In contrast to UNICEF's approach to childhood, the concept of '*ukukhulisa umntwana*' ['raising a child'] in isiXhosa, one of South Africa's twelve official languages, when referring to childcare gives salience to the importance of the 'attainment of adulthood' rather than the quality of a 'cared for' child's life. In the Xhosa tradition, emphasis is often put on childhood's temporary or transient nature rather than on the condition of childhood in its own right. This is especially so with low-income families where financial resources are strained and children are seen to deplete them, with caregivers also bearing the guilt of not being able to provide adequately for their children. The term '*ukukhulisa umntwana*' further implies that reaching adulthood and achieving independence are not only imperative and ultimate goals in

life but also states that confer wholeness. Once one has been raised [*‘ekukhuleni’*] and adulthood (physical, emotional and intellectual) is attained, one is no longer a ‘lesser being’. Although discipline and respect for one’s elders are inferred in both the terms ‘raising a child’ and childcare – ‘raising a child’ *‘ukukhulisa umntwana’* sets emphasis on the unequal aspect of the relationship between carer and child rather than the nurture aspect. *‘Ukukhula’* [‘the state of being “raised,” reaching adulthood’] and acquiring independence can become the focal point of childcare which for children in poverty can be much more urgent. As children grow up, there is also a general expectation that they will be able to contribute to the income of their parents and siblings. When asked about the needs of their children, lone mothers in Mdantsane (Eastern Cape province) and Khayelitsha (Western Cape province) expressed distress:

‘It’s hard raising a child. I love them but it’s a very long process and a big responsibility. I have three and I wish they would grow up quickly and be independent because I can’t even afford to care for them properly. I never have money and their fathers couldn’t be bothered [...]’ (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

‘I am just waiting for this child [her daughter] to grow up so that I can reclaim my life, it can get too much for me and money is scarce. Sometimes I leave her at my sister’s house. She helps me to raise her [...]’ (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2006)

Lamenting the emotional and material dependency of their children both these women convey the message that their children’s anticipated independence and adulthood takes precedence over the quality of their care. The mothers do not have adequate income to give their children proper care, and the young lone mother from Khayelitsha is eager to ‘reclaim my life’ as soon as her child is independent. It can be argued that the financial strain on the aforementioned young lone mother and the pressure she feels to be independent are leading her to pressure her child to do the same, compromising the quality of her daughter’s childhood. Poverty leads to a loss of balance for her between her own identity and her responsibilities as a mother:

‘You raise them with the hope that when they start working they will help you and give you money. I raise them to be independent; there is no time to play because I have to work. The older ones take care of the little ones. My eldest is 12, already she can cook, clean and look after the little ones. Her sister is 10, she likes to do our laundry, she does it well [...]’ (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Again, the notion of raising children for independence and adulthood while compromising the quality of their childhood years is conveyed as this lone mother recounts the different responsibilities her children shoulder in her home. Evidently deprived of a childhood, her eldest daughter is, to some degree, a primary carer to her siblings, a chore that translates to child labour. Such a situation (child labour within families) is not unique to this family in South Africa, as many children, girl children in particular, find

themselves in the same predicament. As a signatory to the ILO (Convention 138 and 182) on child labour, the country has not thus far effectively dealt with the issue of 'sibling child-carers'. Because of the lack of comprehensive social security, women in such circumstances face an inevitable predicament, which is further compounded by the pressure on them to become independent, work and support their children in order to be considered 'good enough' mothers by society and the government:

'I know I need to find work but who is going to take care of my children? Everybody expects you to find work. The government, the village [...] You hear it on the radio all the time, that us young mothers need to find work and not depend on the grant [...].' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2006)

Another lone mother who participated in the focus group in rural Nxarhun in the Eastern Cape province had made the decision to leave her children to be raised in other households. When asked why, she responded as follows:

'It's not that I'm away from home and can't look after my children, I have all the time for that because I'm unemployed. All I do is sit at home. It's just that I went to school for only three years and I've forgotten most of what I learnt anyway. I have two children, one in Grade 7 and the other in 9. I can't help them with their school work and they struggle so I sent one to my cousin to raise and the other lives at a friend's house who is more educated in the next village. They may not have that much food or money but they are better off than me. They have "ubuntu" even though the separation from family is affecting my children [...].' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2006)

This family is faced with numerous social challenges – the lone mother is unemployed, has very limited education (three years of schooling) and, as a result, has sent her two children to live in separate households that 'may not have much' but 'are better off than' her household.

Consequently, her children have been 'affected' by the separation from their family. Sharing the responsibility of raising a child (*'ukukhulisa umntwana'*) in the Xhosa tradition with other adults is not necessarily bad in its origin (see the concept of *ubuntu* discussed in Chapter 1). Indeed, social adages, such as 'it takes a village to raise a child' and 'my child is your child', speak to the nature of solidarity and collective spirit of *ubuntu*. It is about members of society helping one another and altruistically providing within their means for the development of a child. However:

[I]n the context of high unemployment rates and low wages *ubuntu* has, in effect, translated to high reliance on community and relatives to provide social welfare, including child care, for low-income lone mothers (DSD 2010, p. 7).

People in less privileged neighbourhoods tend to provide patronage of welfare, which often results in short-term security being exchanged for the long-term vulnerability of informal security measures. The following lone

mother shares the CSG that she receives on behalf of her four children with her sister, who is also a lone mother:

'I receive money for my four children. They get R180 each but it runs out because I also have to share and help my sister who is a single mother with a young boy. What can I do if in the middle of the month she's crying because her child won't sleep at night because of hunger. I have to take from my children's money and help my sister's child. What can I do?' (Mncotsho, Female CSG, 2006)

Such an informal security regime results in an overwhelming reliance on individuals, leading to a cycle of insecurity and vulnerability, which can arguably compromise a child's development. UNICEF in 2005 declared that:

It is the fundamental responsibility of government to protect the vulnerable and to protect the future. Children are both. Protecting children from the sharpest edges of poverty during their years of growth and formation is both the mark of a civilised society and a means of addressing some of the evident problems that affect... [their] ... quality of life (UNICEF, 2005, p. 1).

However, the South African Constitution and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child have a caveat in their declaration – it is a commitment made within the limits of state resources. Thus, as I have indicated in Chapter 2, while 'everyone has the right to have access to social security including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance', the South African Constitution goes on to say that government:

[M]ust take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of [social security provision for mothers and dependents who are unable to support themselves]. (AU 1999, p. 18)

Article 20.2(a) in the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* also states that:

... governments shall, in accordance with their means and national conditions take all appropriate measures to assist parents and other persons responsible for the child and in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, health, education, clothing and housing [...]. (AU 1999, p. 18)

Such caveats in national socio-legal commitments limit the obligation a middle-income country like South Africa would otherwise have to provide comprehensive social security to low-income citizens. In relation to parental care, Article 19.1 in the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* states that:

Every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of parental care and protection and shall, whenever possible, have the right to reside with his or her parents. No child shall be separated from his parents against his will, except when a judicial authority determines in accordance with appropriate law that such separation is in the best interest of the child. (African Union 1999, p. 18)

As stated priorly, this social right is often not enjoyed by low-income mothers in South Africa. Separated from her child for a lack of resources, a distraught lone mother from Makhaza in the Western Cape province related the anguish of leaving her child in the Eastern Cape province:

'I had to leave my child at home with my relatives, I couldn't imagine living with her in a shack in this Cape Town weather, the rain, the wind is too much. And who's going to look after her when I get piece jobs? That is what I came here for, work. They (the respondent's relatives) tell me that she is changing, my daughter – withdrawn now. I can believe it, I can still hear her harrowing screams as I left home, walking to the bus stop to come to Cape Town. It's only the distance, as I got farther away that silenced her screams [...].' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2010)

The *African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child* has strict stipulations for the right to parental care, while the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996* asserts that:

'Every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment.' (Chapter 2, §28b *Bill of Rights*)

Like all member states, the South African government has the responsibility to ensure that rights accorded to children in the CRC, the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (AU 1999) and the ILO are given effect at the country level. In addition, and in order for such rights to be effectively implemented, it is imperative that the citizenship rights of low-income lone mothers, the duty bearers (referred to earlier), are met. The following quotation illustrates a situation where these rights are not met:

'[...] I do prefer it that my children are with me even though things are hard, we are a support to one another. They eat what I eat and many times, it can be the whole day or for days even, it's dry bread and water with sugar to drink. There are times when we eat the air because there's nothing. But it's fine my children are with me. I look after them even if it's in a shack, I'm their mother [...].' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2006)

This lone mother speaks of her food insecurity (meals of 'dry bread and water with sugar' and, at times, 'the air') and her living environment deprivation, her 'shack'. She takes solace in the fact that she is looking after her children herself (she has been separated from them before). Even with the challenges of food insecurity and inadequate shelter, 'we are a support to one another'.

We must now return to set out the South African government's policies regarding childcare for low-income families. The main provision is the Early Childhood Development Programme (ECDP), which falls within the framework of the government's EPWPs as discussed in Chapters 1 and 4. The departure point of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) for all early childhood development (ECD) policy is that the primary responsibility

for the care and upbringing of young children belongs to their parents and families:

However, because of the inequality in income distribution, and because ECD is a public good whose benefits spill over from individual parents to society as a whole, the Department sees it as the state's responsibility to subsidise and assure the quality of ECD services. (DBE *White Paper on Education* 2001, Section 3.1.4)

To this end, the DBE prioritises the allocation of resources for ECD on children (zero to five years with a particular focus on the under three-year-olds) with low-income mothers (DBE 2007). In trying to meet the varied ECD needs of low-income families, the government subsidises a range of programmes that target the intersecting needs of women and children which include employment opportunities for unemployed women with children younger than five years old (DSD 2006a). In the *White Paper on Education* (DBE 1996), ECD is defined as the process by which children from birth to the age of nine years grow and thrive – physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Such a broad definition encompasses access to a number of services within the health, social development and education government sectors – the purpose of which is to protect a child's rights to develop cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential.

In this vein, the Constitution stipulates that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care and social services (South African Constitution 1996, p. 28). The country's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 has, in addition, prioritised ECD. As such, the interministerial committee on ECD, collectively with the national interdepartmental committee for ECD, advanced the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* in partnership with UNICEF (DPME 2015). The purpose of the policy is to provide an overarching, comprehensive framework of ECD services with a focus on the first 1,000 days of life (DSD 2015) as this is a crucial time for survival, cognitive and psychosocial development. In acknowledging that early childhood care and development begins within the context of a child's home where family members, or caregivers, play an imperative role in the care, development and protection of young children, the DBE has embarked on a programme that aims to provide information to vulnerable families living in poverty and those with young parents on birth registration, access to health care, psychosocial care and support, nutrition and intellectual stimulation. However, there are no readily available figures on the number of homes the DBE has reached or information on the impact of such a programme.

In 2008, there was a total of 12,264 registered ECD sites nationally, spread across all provinces, with 2,568 in the Eastern Cape province and 963 in the Western Cape province, respectively (DSD, 2008). The government's target is to have one million children in registered sites with 19,000 ECD-qualified practitioners (employed or self-employed) by 2010

(DSD, 2008). The DSD manages the registration of the ECD sites (12,264 in 2008) and subsidises children whose caregivers cannot afford to pay the required fees (Department of Social Development, 2008). In 2007, provinces allocated 1.1% (just under ZAR1 billion) of provincial education expenditure to ECD with the exception of the North West province (3%) and the Western Cape province (2%) (Department of Social Development, 2008). DSD's subsidy per child ranges from ZAR5.20 per day to ZAR11 per day according to provincial determinations and level of need. Subsidised children in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces where focus group interviews were conducted were, in 2007, allocated ZAR9.00 per day and ZAR7.50 per day, respectively. The subsidy is used to provide daytime care, nutrition and payment of personnel overhead expenses such as furniture, equipment, educational material and maintenance (DSD, 2008). As mentioned earlier in this section, the DBE's departure point for all ECD policies is that the primary responsibility for the overall care of young children rests with their parents and families (DBE *White Paper on Education* 2006). Such is the case with the DSD as well unless a child is orphaned, with no alternative care, or seen to be at risk of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation. Should a child be orphaned and at risk, they are ordinarily placed in foster care, failing which the child is taken to a children's home by a social worker. Provincial Departments of Social Development register, fund and monitor children's homes. These conditions for children seen to be in need of state care are in harmony with stipulations on childcare in the *Children's Act 35 of 2005*.

■ Childcare facilities and the needs of mothers

This section reviews the different types of childcare facilities available in South Africa, both formal and informal care arrangements.

Childcare provision for high-income families with young children in South Africa is mostly a matter of choice between varying types of programmes such as nurseries, crèches and daycare facilities. The most commonly used form of childcare provision for high-income families is a combination of the live-in domestic work system or au pairs and private ECD institutions. Such private facilities are usually within reasonable proximity of the children's home with children often being driven by their parents to school or walked by their au pairs. In contrast, children from low-income families at times have to forfeit the use of public ECD facilities, even when fully subsidised by the government, because of transport costs. Such was the case for the following lone mother's child:

'It's good what the ANC ... [*government*] ... is doing with these crèches, it's good for people like us because we don't have to pay and the children get something

to eat and will be ready for school, but our problems never end, us black people, my child stopped going to Nkqubela, ... [*an ECD facility*] ... because I can't afford the transport.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2006)

'You can't really say they are free these pre-schools because you still have to pay for transport so your child ends up missing out on this new South Africa [...].'
(Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Respondents using the ECD facilities, however, often complained about the overcrowded nature of such programmes, which was perceived to hinder their children's development and compromise their health:

'There are only two women working there, they need more for that many children if the government really wants our children to develop well. That hall is too small for the children that's why they are always infecting one another with all sorts of illnesses. It's only a good idea because it gives me time to look for work or do a piece job even if it's just a few hours [...].'
(Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

Asked if she would, given a choice and with the provision of adequate social security provision for herself and her child, use the ECD facility, the lone mother responded, 'No, definitely not right now, she's too young, not even a year old. Maybe if she was a bit older I would feel better because one has to work [...]' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

Another lone mother from Khayelitsha expressed similar sentiments in support of the general idea of ECDPs, highlighting, however, the risk a lack of adequate facilities poses and suggesting instead government support for low-income lone mothers to look after their own children:

'This would never happen under apartheid, for our children to have somewhere to go like this while we look for work, so we are grateful. But you know instead of the government spending all the money on these programmes maybe for young children under two they can help us look after our own children, surely that has to be best. With all the diseases going around because of AIDS these days your child can be exposed to too much, and it's overcrowded. It's better if they are older [...].'
(Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2006)

Both lone mothers interviewed have children younger than two years of age. They said they prefer to spend time with their children and not use ECD facilities. The Children's Institute (2014) established that as a result of the apartheid legacy, white children generally have access to ECD services of considerably higher quality than black African, Coloured and Indian children. In addition:

ECD provision for black African children from birth to 5 year olds in poverty-stricken rural and informal areas is far lower than in formal urban areas, both in terms of quality and quantity. (Children's Institute 2014, p. 7)

This observation is supported by material emerging from the focus group interviews. Lone mothers in two rural locations, Mncotsho and Nxarhun Villages, expressed the desire to migrate to an urban area, Mdantsane, not

only to seek employment but to access ECDPs for their young children as well:

'I only went to school up to Standard 3 [*Grade 5*], I'm worried that with the advancement of education these days I can't teach my children anything useful, at least in Mdantsane they have these ECDPs I can take them to and maybe I can do piece jobs. I just don't know where I would stay.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2006)

'The nearer you are to East London the better off you are in all respects. If I move to Mdantsane I can find work, even if its domestic work and my children can enrol in these child development programmes [...].' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2006)

A greater variety of independent and private ECD services exists in South Africa with better quality of care that is more suitable for young children (Children's Institute 2005). But such institutions are mostly funded by parents' fees, community fundraising and/or donations (Children's Institute 2005). A lone mother from Duncan Village, East London, juxtaposed the public ECD facility used by her child and that to which she accompanied her employer's child:

'Without money you are nothing. I take my boss's child to crèche every morning, I tell you it's like a luxury hotel there and the children are kept clean, they are fed properly. It pains me, my child goes to a government crèche, well ... it's the opposite. It's just that you see these things, otherwise maybe one wouldn't notice so much.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2006)

For purposes of this book, this aspect of care provision will be considered from the viewpoint of low-income lone mothers who are themselves nannies or domestic workers. Responsibilities for such employment can range from wet-nursing, holding, feeding to psychological support and affection – in essence, a form of substitute mothering:

'I feel like my real children are the ones I work for because I do for them what I should be doing for mine, I feed them, dry their tears, put them to sleep' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

'Yes, I am a mother, just not to my own children' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

Rothman (1994) referred to this process as the commodification of children and the proletarianisation of mothering. For nannies, who are lone mothers, there is a premise for the degradation of mothering (Silva, 1998). Their mothering has been devalued socially and administratively as they care for their employers' children while being unable to care for their own.

Low-income lone mothers' children who are employed in South Africa are often informally cared for by unemployed relatives or neighbours, as illustrated by the next two quotations:

'I'm lucky, my sister looks after my children and she does it well. Since she finished matric she couldn't find a job so I work for all of us' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

'When I'm at work I leave my little girl with the neighbour, she doesn't have a job, I give her a bit of money sometimes, when I can ...' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2006)

As discussed in Chapter 4, this type of childcare provision can continue for months at a time:

'I left home ... [Cala] ... when my baby was five months old with my cousin to work here in East London because we kept running out of food and the children would go to school hungry having gone to bed on an empty stomach the previous night. When I came back in December she was already walking ...' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Upon probing as to how her child learning to walk in her absence made her feel, the lone mother responded:

'I feel robbed, I don't feel whole. It looked like she didn't recognize me, I know she didn't recognize me it's just hard to admit ... or maybe she did recognize me but didn't show that she cared because she thought I didn't care, having left her for so long. I don't know. At least I know she didn't go hungry after I started working. I don't know .' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2006)

This mother had a difficult choice to make – either she stayed at home to provide day-to-day care to her children at the cost of food insecurity and compromised education as she could not always afford to meet her children's school needs, and emotional strain because of her inability to provide for her children, or she opted to leave her children in the care of her unemployed cousin in rural Cala to seek employment as a live-in domestic worker in East London. She chose to work in East London at the expense of her children suffering maternal deprivation. Consistent with literature on extended maternal deprivation and its possible effects on a mother, missing the milestone of her child learning to walk had adverse effects on the lone mother's emotional well-being – she no longer feels whole as a human being. When this mother is eventually able to go home and see her children, she is faced with the distressing possibility that her youngest child, who had learnt to walk in her absence, could no longer recognise her. The physical, mental and emotional care needs of children of varying ages are further explored in the next section.

■ Physical and emotional childcare needs of children

In order to elucidate the care needs and demands families of low-income lone mothers have, in the context of the obligation to work placed on them, this section explores the varying needs of children of different ages, sexes, and cognitive and physical abilities. UNICEF (2000) defined care as the practice of caregivers that affects nutrient intake, health,

and cognitive and psychosocial development of a child. In a useful analysis, Engle et al. (1999) specified six types of activities caregivers ought to practise:

- It is important for women to take reasonable care of themselves during pregnancy. Rest and nutrition are of particular importance as neglect (of proper nutrition and rest) may compromise the unborn child's health.
- Breastfeeding and nutritious feeding of young children are essential for survival and proper development.
- Food preparation and appropriate storage (like refrigeration) contribute to adequate nutrition.
- Psychosocial stimulation and support for the development and socialisation of children.
- Hygiene practices.
- Care for children during illness.

According to Engle et al. (1999), such care activities require caregivers to have, amongst other factors, limited stress, self-confidence, autonomy, control of resources, reasonable workload, adequate time and social support from family members and the community. Analysing the childcare environment of low-income lone mothers in South Africa according to this framework yields results that vividly demonstrate the inadequacy of care given to mothers and children and the suffering their mothers consequently endure. Relating to Engle et al.'s (1999) first point of analysis, care during pregnancy, two lone mothers said:

'People like us cannot take leave during pregnancy, you lose your job, I was on my feet until the very end.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

'I am always down, I feel low all the time. I try to think of a way out of this kind of life, in a shack. It's no place to bring a child to the world [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2006)

The first lone mother could not afford to have the necessary prenatal care because she had to work 'until the very end', while the second lone mother (who had a son and was pregnant at the time the focus group was conducted) was distressed about her home environment, a shack, into which she was bringing her unborn child. Pregnancy and the early years of life (zero to five years old) are a particularly sensitive period for survival, physical development and mental development. A pregnant lone mother in Khayelitsha was concerned about the success of her then-current pregnancy as she had lost a baby before:

'The strain can be too much, you stand from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night, chasing money, just to survive. I lost my previous baby because of that, this time my mother is going to help me from her pension and I won't work as much [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

As will be discussed in Chapter 8, proposals for social security reform by the Forum of South African Directors-General, social sector, include recommendations for adequate perinatal care for low-income women (FOSAD 2007). A number of lone mothers who had been separated from their infants because of work responsibilities felt aggrieved that, amongst other things, they had to stop breastfeeding abruptly and prematurely even though they believed in its benefits:

'I left my baby with my sister because my boss said if I don't go back to work I'll lose my job. I was still breastfeeding because I believe in it, it's important, my baby wasn't even weaned but what could I do I have to think of providing for the other children as well [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

'You wonder about your worth, who you are, if you can't even breastfeed your child, I know what you are talking about' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

For some, breastfeeding was a way of ensuring that young children were nourished taking into consideration that there was no food security:

'I worry because when I was breastfeeding I was sure my baby was getting some nourishment, but now I can't be sure, being here in Mdantsane, I have to work, food is expensive my cousin doesn't always have enough money, I send money home but it's never enough [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

Children's sense of identity is directly connected to their primary caregivers, a process that begins as early as the zero to two years phase of development. In this age range, the relationship and attachment to primary caregivers are key developmental concepts. Disruptions in care provision at this stage (zero to two years old) of a child's life have been cited as the possible cause of autism, on the one hand, and indiscriminate attachment, on the other hand (for children who have had a series of transient caregivers). Developmentally, children aged zero to three years learn to acquire crucial physical and social skills such as walking, talking, integrating information around them and toilet training. Evidence from some lone mothers demonstrates that inadequate care during this stage of development can have embarrassing, long-lasting consequences:

'My son is incontinent, he's twelve, because, I don't want to say I neglected him because I had to work, but I left him alone too much when he was little, he was only three. I took him with me to work doing washing [laundry] in people's houses, but I couldn't pay too much attention to him otherwise my job would be at risk. So I would just leave him to play outside, I don't think he understood that [...].' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2006)

'It's not good. I'm glad apartheid is over, but where exactly is this democracy. The only benefit I see is that people don't get beaten up and arrested for nothing. People don't get killed by the police anymore like my father - otherwise the poverty is horrible, it's painful, my child is like a fool because I didn't care for him properly, working. He wets his bed, he speaks funny [...].' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2010)

Both these lone mothers are grappling with the guilt that their children have not properly developed (the first mother's child suffers from incontinence, and the second mother's child suffers from both incontinence and a speech impediment) because of inadequate care provision owing to their (the respondents') work commitments. The latter questions the purpose of the country's democracy having experienced no poverty alleviation since the demise of apartheid. Her experience is that poverty continues to be 'horrible' and 'painful'. Such issues – democracy, constitutional rights and policy implementation – were explored in Chapter 2.

Preschoolers from the ages of three to five years require further cognitive and psychosocial stimulation outside the home environment ideally for a limited period of time in a day. Trained caregivers and qualified education agents who interact with children in a consistent, respectful, protective and supportive way are important for this stage of development with a good ratio of children to adults. According to the South African DBE, the minimum requirement for a caregiver employed or volunteering in a government ECD programme is Grade 10, an equivalent of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (DBE 2007). Thus, an unqualified ECD practitioner could hinder a child's development. In addition, childcare facility centres need infrastructure, access to water and sanitation, safe and secure premises, cleanliness and space to care (DBE 2001). As discussed earlier in this chapter, overcrowding was a concern for a number of mothers. According to Myers (2004), children from the ages of three to nine years need play equipment inside and outside an ECD centre. The need to play and the need to participate (interactively with other children) give children the opportunity to practise different types of behaviour without serious consequence in order to explore higher levels of social, cognitive and linguistic skills:

'[...] from a rights point of view, an environment which allows for and encourages these pleasurable activities is also one in which there are opportunities for the child to learn a wide variety of skills safely and effortlessly.' (Pelligrini 2001, p. 178)

Children from low-income families in South Africa, however, often assist in running the household and in caring for younger siblings. Describing the strenuous environment in which their children grow up, these mothers were visibly distressed as children are often required to take on adult responsibilities:

'My daughter is a child only in years, she's eight, but she cleans the huts and can feed her sister after school when I'm working at the shop [...].' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2006)

'Our children cannot be children, there is no time to be a child and play like a child, carefree. They are born into adulthood because they deal with separation from us from the time they are born, they learn to live on hungry stomachs when there are no jobs. They walk long distances to school sometimes with the cold wind and the rain on their backs, this is the life they live here, something has to change.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Biersteker and Kvalsvig (2007) found that South African children who spend their after-school hours working on their household chores do not have time to develop skills and talents more suited to a modern job market when they come of age. Reading skills, in particular, are said to suffer as such children are often tired and depressed:

'The teachers are always complaining that "Nandipa" doesn't do her homework, that she should be reading properly by now. But she's a good girl, the school in Rose [*a rural Eastern Cape village*] never used to complain, I think the schools here in Cape Town are much better, she goes to a Coloured school, the standard is higher. They are demanding, they say she shouldn't be doing housework after school, but I can't stop looking for work so that "Nandipa" can read after school [...].' (Langa, Female CSG, 2006)

Having migrated from an Eastern Cape village to a township near Cape Town, Langa, in order to find work, this lone mother could not see a way of relieving her daughter from household responsibilities in order for her to be able to have time and energy to do her homework. In an environment with adequate care provision, the need for private space, time and independence begins to set in during adolescence. This need, however, becomes a challenge for many adolescents from low-income families, in particular those living in shacks:

'I'm praying for an RDP house, my children fight all the time, you can't blame them. They are what they call teenagers, a boy and a girl in a shack with their mother, they are not happy, I want to do more for my children, before you know it they will be grown and gone [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2006)

A lack of supervision for adolescent children can also have grave consequences:

'I want to go back home [*the Eastern Cape*]. It's not safe here for young children when you have to work, especially girls. Someone I know almost raped my daughter, a neighbour. By grace I came back early from work on that day. Khayelitsha is no place to raise a child, maybe she will go back and live with my mother because there are no jobs in Ngcobo and I'll remain, it's the lesser pain [...].' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2006)

The need for childcare provision during school holidays was a common theme in focus groups around Cape Town. A number of lone mothers were concerned that unsupervised, their teenage sons will turn to crime:

'They want all these things we cannot afford these children. Labels, Nike takkies [*sneakers*] and jeans with [*brand*] names. You worry because you see your child wearing Levis and he won't say where he got them and he always gets these things during holidays when he's in the township with nothing to do. I can't stop working to look after him, he's fourteen' (Langa, Female CSG, 2006)

'My son is sixteen and he already knows what it's like to be arrested. It's a problem, they bring themselves up these children because we are working all the time but they don't really see what it is we are working for, we earn next to nothing.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2006)

Vulnerability to crime in identifying boy children was frequently discussed in the Western Cape province especially:

'I'm sending my son back to Ngcobo, he gets forced into all sorts of things here, bullies want to use him for stealing. Back home [*in Ngcobo*] my mother will look after him, she doesn't work like me and its safe there.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2006)

Risks of sexual abuse for girl children were frequently raised as concerns, again, particularly in the Western Cape province:

'We have to be careful, it can happen to any child because our children look after themselves in Cape Town while we work. Grown men abuse children here, they have no shame, no sense of community like in the village.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2006)

Historically, a UNESCO report on South Africa demonstrated that black African children on farms present the worst symptoms of ECD deprivation, while children from rural areas are generally the most likely to suffer exclusion from ECD with symptoms such as stunted physical growth and lags in emotional and cognitive development (UNESCO 2006). A more recent study on spatial and quality inequality in ECD systems in RSA presents similar results (Venter 2022).

A mother from Mncotsho Village in the Eastern Cape province of RSA spoke of her daughter:

'I receive a disability grant (DG) for my child. She's not quite right. It's not that she's mad or totally stupid, but there's something wrong, she's not like the other children, a bit slow. She's three classes behind in school but she's very loving, compassionate. I used to feel guilty, I still do because one doctor said it's because of the poverty, the lack of food those years when she was a baby. We had nothing, it's better now with the DG [...].' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Crying in response to the foregoing mother's answer, another lone mother said:

'I am just afraid hearing you speak like this. I see your child in the village, sometimes at the shop. I know what you are talking about and I am afraid because I think "Zozo" (her daughter) is the same. She is almost three years old but she can hardly talk properly, I know that girls speak faster than boys but I tell you, a mother knows when there's something wrong with her child [...].' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Upon probing about the doctors' report on her daughter's cognitive development, the lone mother responded:

'Eish, I took her to the clinic and they say she needs a specialist. Where am I going to get that kind of money? Anyway that specialist would tell me what I already know, at the clinic they said nothing can be done. It's this poverty, if I had followed my sister to Cape Town maybe "Zozo" would have had a better chance in life [...].' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Both these women are living with the challenge of having children with learning disabilities apparently caused by food insecurity. The first lone mother blames herself as she could not provide adequate care in the form of sufficient nutrition for her daughter. The mother has not had medical confirmation that her child does indeed have a learning disability, however, as 'a mother' she 'knows'. The second respondent further stated that if she had 'followed' her 'sister to Cape Town, "Zozo" would have a better chance in life'. Although progressive national ECD policies have been advanced in South Africa, Norling (2020) contended that the system remains inadequate and dysfunctional for a significant number of children in the country. In this vein, UNICEF (2020) released a basic education budget brief which highlighted that national ECD policies had not been effectively implemented with facilities across the country varying in quality and operations. This is consistent with Barnes et al.'s historically relevant South African Index of Multiple Deprivation for Children (SAIMDC) – its findings illustrated that South African provinces (such as the Eastern Cape province) mostly composed of areas that were part of former South African homelands under the apartheid system have higher levels of child deprivation than those (such as the Western Cape province) which are mostly an amalgamation of affluent cities of the former-RSA government developed during the apartheid era, notwithstanding peri-urban townships (Barnes et al. 2007).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2005, 2021):

Children and adolescents with good mental health are able to achieve and maintain optimal psychological and social functioning and well-being. They have a sense of identity and self-worth, sound family and peer relationships, an ability to be productive and to learn, and a capacity to tackle developmental challenges and use cultural resources to maximize growth. Moreover, the good mental health of children and adolescents is crucial for their active social and [future] economic participation ... The consequences of failing to address adolescent mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.(WHO, 2021 <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>>)

Low-income lone mothers (both in the Eastern Cape province and the Western Cape province) reported their children suffering from depression, lack of confidence, low self-esteem and an inadequate sense of identity:

'What is the way out for our children? I wish I could see a way for them. My daughter is depressed all the time because of the poverty after her father died. I have to work now, life has changed and she has to be mother to her sister [...].'
(Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

'When "Nosipho" looks at other children with proper families she wonders why she has to be responsible for all the household chores, working all the time. It knocks her confidence, she has no confidence. I can see she walks like she is

not worth anything, I try to encourage her, I tell her I'm working for her, so that she can go to school [...].’ (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2006)

Lone mothers from Langa (in the Western Cape) and Mdantsane (in the Eastern Cape) shared their concerns about their children's uncertain sense of identity:

‘My son thinks he's my sister's because she's looking after him back home, I have been looking for work here in Cape Town for a long time now.’ (Langa, Female CSG, 2006)

‘Every time I go home, the first week is a struggle for my little girl, she doesn't know whether to relate to me as her mother, by the time she gets used to me I have to come back to work again [...].’ (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

■ Conclusion

According to the South African government, the lack of social security provision for low-income lone mothers like all able-bodied citizens of working age in the country is because of two main reasons: fiscal constraint, and the fact that as a developmental state, government implements policies that engender a culture of labour market activity which in turn confers independence and dignity rather than dependence on social grants (African National Congress [ANC] 2006). The previous chapter, ‘Lone motherhood: Unemployment and employment’, explored how low-skilled women's relationship to paid work is structured in the South African context, with a view to ascertaining their degree of attachment to the labour market and challenges they face in their day-to-day lives. This chapter demonstrated how, in the case of employment, low-skilled lone mothers' engagement in the labour market intersects with childcare responsibilities and the struggle for unemployed lone mothers to provide adequate care for their children. Having experienced both employment and unemployment as a lone mother, a woman's account of her childcare challenges demonstrates both the difficulties experienced by low-skilled lone mothers in South Africa and some of the policy discrepancies that impact on their lives:

‘You see when you are poor, you are black and you are a woman life is very difficult even with this ANC. Sometimes it's better if you have a husband, you have somebody to help you [...] They have these public works programmes for people like us to work in, it's a good thing, but does the government expect us not to have children to look after. They say the jobs are for people like us, we are not very educated, we can't pay someone to look after our children, at the same time we need to work so that we can eat. You see, it's impossible, you end up leaving your child with people you don't even trust. I don't know, because even these public works keep finishing and there's nothing after that and you are hungry again.’ (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

At issue is the denial of social citizenship rights enshrined in the South African Constitution (1996, §27 and 28) when, in this case,

'you are poor, you are black and you are a woman' – even under the current democratic dispensation, 'this ANC'. Introduced in 2003 in order to alleviate poverty and for low-skilled people to 'graduate out of dependency on social grants' (President Thabo Mbeki 2007), the EPWP offers intermittent employment whereby one is able to 'eat' (when employed) and go 'hungry' when 'these public works keep finishing'. Such *diswelfare* depicts the manner in which low-skilled women's relationship to employment is structured in the South African context. The words 'eat' and 'hungry' are used symbolically in this context depicting being able to provide for one's self when 'eating' and being unable to do so when 'hungry'. The majority of lone mothers' perception of relevant South African social policy in the focus group interviews was such that they felt penalised for having children while being poor as they were expected to do the 'impossible' – be in full-time employment (in order to be independent, providing for themselves and their children) and provide childcare simultaneously:

'[...] when I think about it I find it impossible to work out, you know, in my head. When I hear government people on the radio saying we should work and not go after the grant. I mean, how are we supposed to work and look after our children at the same time. They have maids to look after their children, you know what I mean? People like us do those jobs, leaving children behind, sometimes with strangers. It's a painful thing. Maybe poor people are not expected to have children [...]' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2006)

'If I didn't feel like a beggar I would ask the official who always says nasty things when I go get the grant, I would ask him, you know, if poor people are not meant to have children, or if he can give me a job where I can look after my child at the same time. But I can't ask these things because I am the beggar, I am begging aren't I?' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

The consequences are that childcare for children of low-income lone mothers is severely undermined for both employed and unemployed women. According to the expanded definition of unemployment (LFS 2021), there was a female unemployment rate of 48.7% (8.1% higher than male counterpart). While some (Castillo 1998; Ratcliffe 1999) would argue that unemployed low-income lone mothers in South Africa who struggle to provide for themselves and their children are socially excluded, the plight of employed low-skilled lone mothers in the country resonates with Du Toit's theory of adverse incorporation, '[...] poverty results not from people's exclusion from the labour market but from the ways they are included' (Du Toit 2007, p. 34)

The manner in which the lone mother from Mdantsane quoted above, for example, is 'integrated' from the 'second economy' (SoNA 2007) into the labour market, in this case EPWP, is adverse in that her job is irregular

without any form of social security, her childcare needs are denied – putting her child at risk, and she continues to live in poverty even though she is working. It can, therefore, be conclusively argued that:

[S]ocial policy in the South African context overlooks the broader social relations within which low-income lone mothers are embedded and the childcare responsibilities that they shoulder for the country's future social capital. (DSD, 2010, p. 20)

The role of the child support grant: Promoting independence or creating dependency?²⁵

■ Introduction

The primary research question of this book is whether social security provision for South African lone mothers leads to ‘dependency’, which is generally perceived (by policymakers, the media and some communities)

25. The following chapter is based on data from the following published papers:

Surrender, R, Ntshongwana, P, Noble, M & Wright, J 2007, ‘Employment and Social Security: A Qualitative Study of Attitudes towards the Labour Market and Social Grants’, Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy, University of Oxford, July, viewed n.d., <https://www.saspri.org/wp-content/uploads/Docs/Employment_and_Social_Security_Report_DSD-CASASP.pdf?> The author, Dr Phakama Ntshongwana, conducted this research as part of a team with Professor Michael Noble and Dr Gemma Wright. Ethical clearance for the 2011 phase of the study, which contributed to her PhD from the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, was obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee at the University of Oxford (ref. no.: SSD/CUREC2/11-35). The Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee provided the last Ethics certificate for the study in 2011. Dr Ntshongwana declares that the 2008 ethics clearance is no longer available in the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Committee archives at the University of Oxford because of the passage of time.

Surrender, R, Nole, M, Ntshongwana, P & Wright, J 2008, ‘Work and Welfare in South Africa: The Relationship between Social Grants and Labour Market Activity’, *Social protection for the poorest in Africa: Compendium of papers presented during the international conference on social protection*, Zambia, 08–10 September, pp. 204–222, viewed n.d. <<http://www.kulima.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Conference-proceedings.pdf?>>

How to cite: Ntshongwana, P 2024, ‘The role of the child support grant: Promoting independence or creating dependency?’, *Who cares? The plight of lone mothers: Social security provision and autonomy*, ITUTA Books, Cape Town, pp 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2024.BK385.06>

as an undesirable phenomenon that erodes dignity or whether it leads to independence and dignity. In this chapter, I explore the evidence in terms of where the provision of the child support grant (CSG) for children of low-income lone mothers in RSA could be located along the spectrum of promoting independence through creating dependency by considering the views of the lone mothers themselves.

In 'Does the child support grant promote independence?', I explore a number of additional issues relating to dependency that the lone mothers highlighted in focus groups in relation to the CSG. I will argue that while some forms of 'dependency' (or reliance on support) are implicitly approved by the government and wider society, other types are viewed negatively. Such attitudes, however, do not necessarily coincide with those of lone mothers themselves. I also include a section that explores the views of lone mothers about the option of introducing a new social grant for unemployed people – this also helps inform the extent to which there is evidence of a 'dependency culture'. 'Does the child support grant create dependency?' concludes by considering whether there is compelling evidence of a dependency culture from the material analysed and (if not) whether on balance, it would be more appropriate to consider South Africa as having a 'structural underclass' rather than a 'moral underclass' which manifests itself in the form of a 'dependency culture'. I explore these phenomena through the analysis of the impact of the CSG on the lives of unemployed lone mothers and lone mothers in low-paid employment. As lone mothers in receipt of the CSG are the main subject of social policy debate and discourse on the 'dependency culture', these issues are considered in the context of theories of the 'underclass', which were presented in Chapter 2.

In many respects, low-income lone mothers find themselves in an invidious position. We have already seen this in Chapters 4 and 5 regarding the challenges they face concerning employment and providing care for their children. They are simultaneously expected to obtain employment and to ensure that their children are well looked after and are additionally 'demonised' should they be seen to fall short. The general public's views on SASSA (2008), however, were not so harsh: when asked whether social grant recipients were 'deserving' of the social assistance or not, Noble et al. (2008) found that surveyed respondents mostly thought they indeed were deserving, in that they acknowledged that they so desperately need the help (Noble et al. 2008). Although this question does not ask specifically about lone mothers in receipt of CSG, they are part of the group that is being asked about.

Table 6.1 shows the percentage of households with per-capita household disposable income (2021) below the CSG means test, food poverty line

TABLE 6.1: The need for assistance amongst most recipients of social grants.

Responses	Respondents' financial status						All (%)
	Non-poor (%)	Just gets by (%)	Poor (%)	Household in receipt of grants (%)	Working for a salary or wage (%)	Unemployed (%)	
Strongly agree or agree	76.1	82.9	88.3	84.9	83.8	84.2	82.3
Neither agree or disagree	10.5	7.6	3.6	10.0	9.3	9.3	10.8
Disagree or strongly disagree	7.0	5.0	4.1	4.1	5.3	5.9	5.5
Undecided	6.4	4.4	4.0	1.1	1.6	0.6	1.5
TOTAL	100	99.9	00	100.1	100.04	100.0	100.1

Source: SASAS (2008). Groups analysed: All respondents by self-assessed poverty; those living in households in receipt of social grants as a sub-group; those working for pay as a sub-group (Noble et al. 2008, p. 14).

(ZAR595), lower bound poverty line (ZAR860), upper bound poverty line (ZAR1,300) and personal income tax thresholds (Stats SA 2021). All households in deciles 1 and 2 fall below the lowest poverty line (food).

The CSG single means test covers all households in deciles 1% to 7% and 43% of households in decile 8 (Department of Social Development 2021a). Such pervasive income deprivation resonates with reports from focus groups and in-depth interviews (2008 and 2020/2021) and makes the case for a BIG. Lone mothers reported the pooling of social grants within households, including the CSG and the OAG. This, arguably, compromises the effects of intended policy targeting.

According to *Statistics on Children in South Africa*, the average undernourishment rate in 2008 (ten years after the onset of the CSG) was 20.8% in the Eastern Cape province with 564,000 children and 13% in the Western Cape province with 220,000 children (Hall & Sambu 2023). In 2020, at the start of the pandemic, undernourishment had decreased to 8.6% in the Eastern Cape province with 221,000 children and 13% in the Western Cape with 271,000 children. The cited children live in households where children are reported to go hungry 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' because there was not enough food (Hall & Sambu 2023). The University of Cape Town's Children's Institute reported that 27% of children in RSA in 2021 were stunted because of chronic malnourishment (Witten 2021). Such statistics resonate with accounts given by low-income lone mothers in both focus groups and in-depth interviews.

The following section considers the extent to which lone mothers in the focus groups felt that the CSG promoted independence.

TABLE 6.2: Households below key poverty lines, child support grant means-test lines and personal income tax threshold lines by decile in 2021 (DSD final report on BIS in partnership with the ILO, 2021).

Decile	Food poverty line (ZAR595 p/m) (%)	Lower bound poverty line (ZAR860 p/m) (%)	Upper-bound poverty line (ZAR1,300 p/m) (%)	CSG single means test (ZAR4,600 p/m) (%)	PIT threshold (ZAR7,275 p/m) (%)
1 (poorest)	100	100	100	100	100
2	100	100	100	100	100
3	12.7	90.9	100	100	100
4	0.0	0.0	100	100	100
5	0.0	0.0	4.8	100	100
6	0.0	0.0	0.0	100	100
7	0.0	0.0	0.0	100	100
8	0.0	0.0	0.0	43.3	100
9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.2
10 (richest)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: DSD Basic Income Support Expert Panel Final Report (2021).

Key: CSG, child support grant; PIT, personal income tax; p/m, per month.

■ Does the child support grant promote independence?

As discussed in Chapter 1, the CSG was introduced upon recommendation from the Lund Committee. This involved phasing out an SMG, which had a parent component, because of fiscal constraints (ANC 1997; Lund Committee Report 1996). Primarily given to alleviate child poverty, CSG payment (ZAR460 per month in 2021) is a means-tested grant and is accessed by primary caregivers for children up to the age of eighteen years. Ninety-nine percent of its recipients are women (DSD 2020). In April 2020, during Level 5 of the COVID-19 lockdown in RSA, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the provision of a temporary CSG top-up for existing beneficiaries. This comprised of an additional ZAR300 in May 2020, which was then increased to R500 from June to October of the same year (SASSA 2020). This measure was intended to reduce extreme poverty during ‘hard lockdown’ when the percentage of employed people decreased from 57% in February 2020 to 48% in April 2020 (Stats SA 2020), including furloughed workers. As most of the interview respondents were low-skilled workers, they reported job loss during the national Level 5 lockdown in the country.

In an attempt to ascertain the impact of the CSG on the lives of lone mothers and their children, the underlying intention and perceived purpose

of the CSG were explored in the focus group interviews. The vivid picture that emerged, drawn by interviewees, is the clear awareness that the CSG is provided specifically for the child on whose behalf it is received. However, circumstances such as unemployment and childcare responsibilities, which impede lone mothers' ability to work, lead to the CSG being shared amongst family members. The following are lone mothers' accounts of how the CSG is spread within families:

'I would say it's for the child, not the entire family. If it were for the entire family they would ask you when you apply for it about the size of your family and pay you according to it.' (Newlands, Female CSG, 2007)

'This grant is for the child, I know that, my child knows that too, her teacher knows that. But what can I do, I spread it out amongst all family members.' (Mncotsho, Female, 2007)

Even though the intended role of the CSG was clearly perceived as that of child poverty alleviation, it was also said to help sustain the 'recipient family' as a whole and imperative in the context of lone-parent families, poverty and high rates of unemployment:

'We depend on this child support grant which we get for "Bulelwa." I am not working, we can get food and paraffin because of her [...] When I run out of money, if I haven't been getting piece jobs, at least we can eat.' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

'I have three children and they all get the child support grant. If it wasn't for them we would starve. Even if the child support grant runs out I can borrow money from neighbours and give it back when the money for the grant comes.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

'The ANC did a good thing with this grant, times are hard, I would not be able to feed my children without it. This [...] grant feeds me too.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

The CSG does provide lone mothers with a degree of financial independence, albeit minimal. Most respondents spent the CSG on similar subsistence items such as meat, sugar, mealie-meal and paraffin. Children's needs like clothes, school uniform, crèche and school fees were also said to be met through the CSG:

'The money from the child support grant is good. We are able to get some paraffin, buy food, and when the children are sick at least we can get medicine sometimes [...] If you are lucky and there's a little extra, you can buy meat, which is very expensive these days.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

'I buy paraffin and can pay the children's school fees from the grant.' (Mncotsho, Woman Female, 2007)

'[...] the money helps a lot in the house. I couldn't do without it, I can go get some sugar and paraffin for the whole family, it helps.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

Even though the CSG plays a significant role in meeting day-to-day household needs, it was clear from interviewees' accounts that it was inadequate. The following are some views from urban locations:

'[...] the government started this ... [*the CSG*] ... to avoid malnutrition for children and to help with the child's clothes, but now one ends up not being able to afford everything the child needs because it is not enough, the money is too little [...].' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

'Money from the child support grant does buy food for the house. But it does not buy sufficient food, like it would buy food for a week [*other focus group members agreed with the respondent in the background*].' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

The combination of high levels of unemployment in the country with the absence of comprehensive social security translates to the CSG being the only source of income for most interviewees. However, because the CSG amount is parsimonious, mothers found it impossible to protect their families from adverse conditions such as food insecurity, compromised education for their children and living environmental deprivation. That the CSG is not enough even to cover the costs of the child on whose behalf it was received was a persistent theme in the focus group interviews. A considerable number of lone mothers expressed concern that they were unable to meet their children's school needs such as school fees, lunches, school uniform and stationary for a lack of income. Such women in both rural and urban settings related similar incidents about the intolerance of school authorities and teachers of children in receipt of the CSG should they not pay their school fees on time or not have appropriate school uniforms. Children being sent home from school when they did not have the correct uniform and, even more of a burden to parents, children being disqualified from writing examinations because their school fees were not paid were constant themes:

'They tell them, the children to go back home and ask us to pay school fees from the child support grant' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'My daughter could not sit for examinations last year because I could not afford to pay her fees. The principal said I should be able to pay from the grant....' (Mdantsane, Female CSG 2007)

Parents were disturbed and seemed offended by teachers who criticised them for their children. Two respondents from Mdantsane agreed with each other that by doing so, school authorities were overstepping their parental boundaries:

'How is it possible that teachers should be allowed to speak badly of us to our children just because we get a grant from the government? That's not right, it's hurtful and undermines us as mothers?' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'No, I agree with you sisi. It's unbelievable that any adult, especially a teacher, would speak badly of a mother to her own child. But it happens, it happens to us.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

A woman from an Eastern Cape focus group who happened to be a school governor appeared to reflect the attitude about which many lone parents complained:

'As a member of the school committee, together with the teachers, we research do on the child's family. If we find that the child is on the CSG, we demand payment. There's no way you can say you don't have money for school fees whilst you are on the CSG. And also the child should always be neat. There is no child that should be without school uniform while on the CSG.' (Mdanstane, Female CSG, 2007)

Asked whether she was aware that national policy from the Department of Education stipulated that children whose parents could not afford to pay school fees were not obliged to do so and, therefore, should not be penalised in any way – the school governor responded that she had vaguely heard of such a policy but that it was not her school's policy. Such social policy disjuncture was evident both in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. As discussed in Chapter 5, national policy in relation to children's education needs was different from that which was implemented in practice at a local level.

Lone mothers, in urban settings in particular, talked explicitly about the manner in which the CSG promoted their independence. The CSG facilitated in augmenting respondent's income through 'microeconomic' business activity. A number of interviewees reported being able to use small amounts of the CSG money to purchase sweets, crisps or fruit in order to sell in their communities:

'[...] it's not like nothing comes at the end of the month because we are not working [...] we are able to buy and sell small things like sweets so that when the CSG runs out before the end of the month, you have something to fall back on, you can buy paraffin and make lunch for the child when going to school.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, n.d.)

'One of the first things I do when I get the grant is to buy sweets to sell in my neighbourhood so that at the end of the day I make a bit of money from the grant. That way I don't have to borrow from people when the grant finishes before the end of the month.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, n.d.)

This practice seemed to be common in the Eastern Cape province as well:

'I copied this buying and selling from my friends. In order to survive, they buy what they need to make fried bread, sell it and make some money. I sell sweets and it helps.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'Yes, it's a good thing to do, you can get that extra R100 sometimes [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007.)

Mothers were then asked whether the CSG facilitated in better positioning themselves to find work in terms of transport costs or work clothes, for example. A small number of lone mothers responded that they had, at times, used part of the CSG to pay for transport costs in order to reach their 'piece jobs':

'I used to be a maid in the city from time to time, just a piece job. The grant really helped me when I had to get to work without much notice. I used it for my taxi fare.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'[...] yes I've taken from the child's money to go to work, at least it's not as expensive as working in the city. I used to work at a crèche, about 20 minutes away by taxi.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

Some lone mothers expressed having feelings of guilt for using part of the CSG on transport to go to work. A lone mother from Langa said:

'Langa is not too far from [Cape] Town, so I have used the grant to pay for the taxi to go to work. It's not right, my child often suffers when I do that. It always means I can't give him money to take to school, maybe for about a week. But he is a good child, he understands [...].' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

Although there were such reports about the CSG assisting in better positioning the women for work, the vast majority of respondents asserted that the small value of the grant made it impossible to use for such a purpose:

'You can't take even a bit of it for your fare. Transport is expensive. Even to go and get the grant you have to borrow the money for transport.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'It's just not possible for me, I only receive the grant for one child, it's too small an amount. My friend receives it for three children, it's a bit better for her. She sometimes uses the money to go to work. It's like, the less money you have, the less chances you have to work or make a bit of money just to live [...].' (Nxarhu Village, Female CSG, 2007)

While the CSG does provide a small amount of economic independence for lone mothers, enabling them to provide food for their children to a limited extent, the amount of independence is minimal as it is such a small grant. The grant is not large enough to provide the things needed by the children, and in practice, it is further diluted by being used to provide for the broader family's needs in many instances. If it is used by lone mothers in other ways that promote their independence, e.g., seeking work or starting up a small-scale self-employment activity, the small size of the grant means that the resources quickly dry up. As such, lone mothers also have to contend with the guilt they feel about using the grant, in the knowledge that the grant was in fact intended for their children.

■ Does the child support grant create dependency?

In order to give some background to notions of whether the CSG creates dependency amongst lone mothers in South Africa, I shall briefly juxtapose *British Poor Law*, in operation from 1531 until 1948, with current South African underclass discourses. In the English context, the notion that reliance on state social assistance discourages entry into the labour market can be traced back to the *Elizabethan Poor Law* or state assistance (1605), whereby such welfare policy was:

‘[...] part of a political philosophy which saw society as an adjunct of the market [...]’ (Titmuss 1976, p. 189)

‘Instead of ... [*the*] ... economy being embedded in social relations, social relations [*were*] embedded in the economic system.’ (Polanyi 1968, p. 70)

The lack of redistribution in poor law was to support industrialism and, later in the 19th century, to establish a competitive, self-regulating market economy founded on the motive of individual gain (Titmuss 1976) – not unlike the GEAR macro-economic policies introduced by the South African government in 1996. To this end (achieving a self-regulating market economy founded on the motive of individual gain), rules of expected behaviour on issues such as working and not working, family relations, cohabitation and ‘men-in-the-house’ were created (Marshall 1963). In terms of family relations, the expected norm was a nuclear family with a paternal breadwinner to support his wife, who was typically dependent on her husband for material support, along with the children she raised. Any family structure outside this norm was, at the least, ostracised. The able-bodied unemployed, at times, labelled the ‘sturdy rogues’ or the ‘idle poor’, were blamed and often punished for their poverty (Titmuss, 1976: p. 185). According to Disraeli (1876), then-prime minister of Britain, poverty was declared a crime by industrialism and ‘laws about poverty became associated with laws about crime’ (Titmuss 1976, p. 189). Such a system was discriminatory, stigmatising poor people with the poor law test and moral judgement on their behaviour – conditions upon which redistribution depended. Approved and disapproved patterns of dependency, such as approved non-working married mothers dependent on spouse versus disapproved non-working lone mothers dependent on state, remarkably resonate with attitudes and debates in the South African context on dependency. Social perceptions about never-married lone mothers, for example, who are able-bodied, unemployed and in receipt of the CSG, are often adverse. The next quotation is an illustration of how such attitudes can affect a lone mother:

'I don't know what it is, how can people blame you for having children, I mean my children are here now. When you don't have a husband or a job and you are a mother it's really hard around here. People say you are after the grant, they say you are using your children, having them just to get this grant. It's almost like only married people have a right to this grant, they don't get condemned for claiming the grant even if their husbands are sitting at home like me. What am I supposed to do? I can't find work even with my matric and anyway I don't know who would look after my children [...].' (Nxarhun Village, Female CSG, 2007)

Adding to the above articulation about the burden of social stigma in her community, another lone mother in the same focus group spoke of discussions about social security that she had heard on the radio:

'It's not just in the village, its everywhere. It's on the radio all the time, sometimes you wonder why they give us this grant if they are going to use it to swear at us and say we don't want to work, that we have children to depend on the grant even if we are not married [...].' (Nxarhun Village, Female CSG, 2007)

Another unmarried woman from Duncan Village spoke of the humiliation experienced when she went to register her second baby to receive the CSG:

'[...] the official said it's nice to be me. In order to get a salary ... [*the CSG*] ... I just lie on my back with whoever [*s/c*] comes along and have a child [...].' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

As discussed in Chapter 2, proponents of the notion of a 'moral underclass' (Mead 1992; Murray 1984, 1996) claim that amongst the population of the poor, there is a significant group whose poverty and position in society are driven and reinforced by their own behavioural failings, in particular, that they are indolent with little or no attachment to the labour market. Such people are said to be content, in the long term, to have state transfers as a source of income and assign no value to paid work. As a result of such a mindset, a 'culture of dependency' is then said to emerge and is transmitted inter-generationally to children who have no role models who are gainfully employed as they observe mostly a contented reliance on social assistance. At the heart of the 'moral underclass', thesis is the notion that social security provision facilitates passivity and engenders a culture of dependency amongst the poor. Rather than alleviating poverty, social welfare helps to perpetuate not only poverty but also attitudinal and behavioural traits such as crime, delinquency and 'illegitimacy' (having children out of wedlock) (Murray 1989).

Evidence of a dependency culture is typically explored in relation to whether a subgroup of the population has views that differ from those of the rest of the population. In this part of the chapter, I review the evidence for such differing views, drawing from the focus groups and the SASAS data, to see whether lone mothers' attitudes towards work or attachment to the labour market are different from other groups, i.e., whether there is

evidence of lone mothers being content with being out of work and depending on the CSG. More broadly, I also present other issues relating to dependency that were raised by the lone mothers in the focus groups.

In exploring the dependency culture thesis amongst low-income lone mothers, the extent to which they valued paid work was investigated. Asked if they would opt to work where jobs available, a considerable number of women responded indignantly:

'[...] we are here in this building now and we are going to enjoy lunch with you, but some of us will be going home to shacks and are not sure what our children will eat next week when the grant is finished. I don't understand how we can be asked such a question and all of us here have similar lives. The answer is yes, we want to work. My children are at school now, they can look after each other if I get a job [...].' (Khayelitsha, Woman CSG, 2007)

'[...] we also want to give our children a future. I want to be able to put money away for my children's future, but when you are thinking about what you are going to eat tomorrow, or how you are going to pay school fees for your children so that they can get their school reports, you have to forget the future. I want to work for my children, that is all I think about [...].' (Crossroads, Woman CSG, 2007)

Such strong attachment to the labour market amongst the lone mothers resonates with views that the general South African unemployed population demonstrated in the *South African Social Attitudes Survey 2007* (Noble et al. 2008). In response to the statement 'I feel alright about being out of work because so many other people are out of work too', they found that 86% of unemployed South Africans either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Noble also found that a high percentage of the total population (78.4%) felt it was important to 'hang on to a job' even if they did not enjoy it, with 82.4% of people who defined themselves as 'poor' sharing the sentiment (Noble et al. 2008). Such behaviour was demonstrated in Chapter 4 when I drew attention to the poor working conditions of many lone mothers who are domestic workers. Lone mothers in focus group interviews who periodically had temporary work, informally called 'piece jobs', also demonstrated strong labour market attachment:

'When there are public work's jobs around here they last a month at a time. We will do anything. I have matric but you'll see me sweeping the streets. How do I survive otherwise? Sometimes I work in kitchens ... [*domestic work*] ... You can't discriminate when you have nothing. It's not possible to just depend on the CSG, both you and your child.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

'I can't imagine anyone here refusing work, nothing is beneath us. It's hard enough not being able to find jobs. Most of us have piece jobs from time to time, people fight over whatever jobs are available here because everybody wants to survive, nobody likes to see their children going hungry.' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

'We will do anything to earn something, a bit of money for our children.'
(Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

'[...] people fight over whatever jobs are available here.' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, almost all interviewees in the Western Cape province focus groups had moved from the Eastern Cape province in order to find work. Similarly, many interviewees in urban focus group locations in the Eastern Cape had migrated from rural Eastern Cape villages to find work. Such willingness to relocate in order to find employment was also found in SASAS (Noble et al. 2008). Posed with the question 'How willing would you be to move to a different area to find a job?', 81.4% of the unemployed black African population indicated that they would be very or quite willing to move to find work (Noble et al. 2008).

Concerns raised by some parts of government and the media about potential unintended effects of the South African social grant system, in particular the CSG, are not supported by either the qualitative evidence (focus group interviews) or the quantitative results drawn from SASAS (Noble et al. 2008). There was no compelling evidence that the CSG undermined work motivation and created a dependency culture.

In order to explore the widespread view about misuse of the CSG, focus group participants were asked:

'Do you think people in receipt of the CSG use it for their children or do you think they use it for their own needs, like buying clothes and other personal items?'

Most respondents raised the lack of empathy, again, for unemployed women in receipt of the grant:

'We always hear these stories, that we drink the CSG away, especially us young people. But guess what, we also love our children, the reality is that the grant helps us a lot, we couldn't do without it even though it's not much [...].'
(Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

Others unequivocally said that the amount was not big enough to accommodate such personal gain:

'Ha! what adult clothing could I buy with this grant? And why would I do that when my daughter does not have a school blazer and my own son does not have a coat to protect him from this harsh weather?' (Gugulethu, Female, 2007)

'When you have a child who totally depends on you and you have no husband, there's no room to think of treating yourself with clothing. I can't remember the last time I bought clothes.' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

In the Noble et al. (2008) study, people who were not working for pay were asked whether they considered themselves better off claiming grants than working – the group overwhelmingly rejected such an assertion that it is not worth them working – with 75.3% of the unemployed disagreeing with

the proposition. We also found that the responses of those where the CSG was received in the household were not significantly different from households where no CSG was accessed (Noble et al. 2008). Similarly, in response to the statement that 'the CSG is too high and discourages people from finding jobs', there was little support with over 70% of the population either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the proposition (Noble et al. 2008).

In relation to lone mothers specifically, when posed with the question 'Is the CSG too high and does it discourage people from finding jobs?', focus group respondents often turned the question back to me (the interviewer), asking if applied to my life (being classified by respondents as non-poor) I would opt not to work only to depend on the CSG:

'[...] only people who cannot relate to our plight would utter such statements. It's almost like just because you are poor and receive this grant, your needs for yourself and your children differ from the people writing newspapers and those on the radio. I want to ask them this question, would they refuse work because of the grant?' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

A woman in the same focus group simply said:

'The answer is "no, *sisi*," the grant is not too high and no, it does not discourage us from working.' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

The overwhelming majority of respondents thought that it was impossible for the CSG to engender a culture of dependency or serve as a deterrent to work simply because of its small value in relation to their family needs:

'There's no way you won't want to work in order to live on the grant. When you work, you earn more than that. Yes we are hungry, we are used to poverty, but there's no way you won't work only to depend on the grant.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

Notwithstanding these points, the CSG is a vital income stream into lone-mother households, and as such, they do depend (i.e. rely) on it. For example:

'I use the money to feed my child. If it hasn't run out it also helps when I take my daughter to the clinic. Bulelwa is not very well, she's often sick and the money is very helpful. When it's run out you just have to pray and hope for the best.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

When the CSG runs out, this lone mother describes how she has to 'pray and hope for the best' that her child does not become sick as she would not be able to pay for her to go to the clinic. However, it is important to distinguish between a situation where lone mothers, if they were to demonstrate a 'dependency culture', are content to receive the grant instead of working and a situation where a lone mother depends (i.e. relies) on this much-needed help in order to try to avoid destitution.

■ Dependence on families and money lenders

The dependency culture debate in RSA is driven by anxieties about the rapid increase in uptake of social grants, the CSG in particular, during the past number of years. While some see the increase in take-up of grants as evidence of the government's commitment to poverty alleviation and a reflection of an improved and successful social security administration and redistribution (Meth 2004b; Whitworth & Noble 2008), others, as noted above, have expressed concern about the fiscal sustainability of the social grant system and the risk of perverse incentives that undermine independence, local assistance and remittances. It is apparent from such views that dependence by the poor and unemployed on relatives for financial assistance, as opposed to state social grants, is not seen as a sign of a culture of dependency but is implicitly treated as a positive form of poverty alleviation. This suggests inconsistencies on the part of dependency culture proponents in South Africa. On the one hand, reliance on social assistance such as the CSG is said to generate dependency even in the context of high unemployment rates and limited social security, while similar reliance on relatives is seen to be 'normal'. I would like to argue that this portrays a lack of commitment to social citizenship rights and the Constitution as it stands.

The state has, arguably, abdicated a considerable portion of its social welfare responsibilities for low-income people to less poor relatives. Many a lone mother in the Eastern Cape province focus groups relied on relatives for survival:

'My sister works in Cape Town, she sends money when she can, she's also struggling. I don't know what we would do without her because there are no jobs and you can't live on this CSG.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'Bonga is a watchman in Cape Town ... [*the respondent's brother*] ... He helps us out with money, but his wife is not happy about it because they also have their own children to feed.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'If it wasn't for my brother in Cape Town, things would be even more difficult. You can't eat the CSG the whole month, you'll starve. I'm even better off because there are people without jobs or brothers in Cape Town to send them money.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

Asked what her brother does for a living in Cape Town, the lone mother said her brother is a factory worker. It was evident from most lone mothers reliant on remittances that it is a matter of the less poor helping those in danger of destitution. This at times caused tension within families that were augmenting the CSG for their relatives as they were mostly employed in menial jobs. The second respondent's brother was a security guard:

'[H]is wife is not happy about it ... [*providing remittance for the respondent*] ... because they also have their children to feed.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

As the CSG was inadequate to cover the basic needs of families, a significant number of lone mothers reported having to resort to borrowing money from informal credit agents (or 'loan sharks' as some respondents informally referred to them) in order to provide for themselves and their children. Such a system of credit relations was common amongst many communities and came with high interest rates that lone mothers could ill afford. Thus, in addition to relying on family members, the prevalent use of loans from food stores and local, informal credit agencies translated to the CSG being used for debt repayments before anything else:

'I am always paying debts with the grant, and then I borrow again, immediately, in order to buy food.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'The child support grant is not much, it is very little and when it gets finished we are forced by the situation to go and borrow money elsewhere. When the grant comes we then go to repay those debts. You find that though you have received the grant, you don't ... *[really]* ... have it.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Making reference to the humiliation of constantly borrowing money, a number of lone mothers expressed themselves with sadness:

'That's how we live. Borrowing money all the time in the name of this child support grant. All the time, begging for money. Sometimes I feel like I'm selling my soul. It's for my children, I tell myself. I hate knowing that they haven't eaten, that they are hungry' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

'The thing is, people that should not know how vulnerable your family is end up knowing and saying all sorts of things, hurtful things I tell you' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

The lone mothers expressed discomfort in their use of 'loan sharks' saying that it made them unnecessarily susceptible to danger and exploitation:

'The people that you owe will come on the month end to collect their money, which has interest. You end up using all the money for paying that person. Your child will have to use cold water to bath because there is no electricity. It is very painful.' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

'It's not easy. You can expose yourself to a lot of nasty things when people know you are poor, always borrowing money to survive. Some men, loan sharks, they try to see if they can take advantage of you [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

'One knows that loan sharks are terrible with their interest, we all know that, yet what can we do? Friends don't always have money to lend you. They are in the same position, just surviving.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'These loan sharks should be closed down by government. What people did before loan sharks, I don't know. They are bad for us, all our money ends up there yet I am always in debt. When I started getting the grant for my children, that gave me the licence to borrow from them, biggest mistake of my life! *Yho!* Now I am trapped.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Thus, lone mothers spoke extensively about the way in which they have to depend on borrowing money or using 'loan sharks' in order to make

ends meet. Such indebtedness, particularly if it involves loan sharks, increases their levels of poverty in practice. Far from depending 'contentedly' on the CSG, lone mothers have to resort to indebtedness in order to survive, in the absence of any other alternatives.

■ Lone mothers' attitudes about an unemployment grant

Another way in which to explore the notion of a 'dependency culture' is to examine how lone mothers respond to the idea of a social grant for unemployed people in RSA. Focus group respondents were asked to consider whether an unemployment social grant ought to be made available for all who were unemployed, including those who were able-bodied and without children. Most individuals supported the introduction of an unemployment grant, arguing that it would be a lifeline to communities who are otherwise destitute because of a lack of jobs:

'I think that government should introduce a grant for people who don't have jobs so hunger amongst people would cease.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007).

'We are desperate...we need it.' (Mncotsho, Female CSG, 2007).

The vast majority of respondents with older children in school, however, insisted that they prefer jobs to an unemployment grant:

'When my children were younger I would welcome the grant. But now they are at school. What's the point of staying at home the whole day waiting for a grant instead of working and earning money for your children?' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

'If the government is able to give a grant for people without jobs then it means they can create jobs for us. A grant will never be enough, maybe it will be R200 a month whereas if you are working you could earn R1,500 a month.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'We prefer jobs, if they give a grant they are going to turn around and say we don't want to work, we just want the grants.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

Some lone mothers argued that an unemployment grant would facilitate their job-seeking activities by covering transport costs or would provide capital to start small business initiatives:

'My cousin sometimes finds work for me in town, maybe for a week or two, the problem is that I don't always have money for the taxi to go. Maybe this unemployment grant would help me get to work.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'I'm good with my hands, I sew well, the grant could help me get material to make dresses to sell in the township, that would be better than just depending on the grant.' (Duncan Village, Female CSG, 2007)

In addition, interviewees argued that work had a number of advantages over and above just income such as healthy investment in social capital,

health and well-being, empowerment and self-confidence and would therefore always be preferable to unemployment. Most interviewees expressly said that they would always prefer work for reasons other than purely financial gain:

‘When you think of it though, what are you going to do when you are a pensioner if you start behaving like one now? I am only 30, I have dreams, I have energy to work, I want to learn new things, meet different people [...].’ (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

‘The danger with introducing an unemployment grant instead of jobs is that it can kill you. There’s no hope of developing and learning new skills, you just sit at home, that is not good, one needs to exercise the mind to show that they are alive.’ (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

The strongest argument, however, for supporting the notion of an unemployment grant was that it would reduce crime. Almost all focus group raised this point:

‘Sometimes people do bad things because they are hungry, they commit crime because they have not eaten for days, not because they are bad people. Maybe an unemployment grant would prevent this.’ (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

‘This grant would help, you see young boys snatching bags to buy food, it’s not nice.’ (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

It is worth noting, however, that similar to some SASAS questionnaire respondents, a small number of interviewees voiced concerns about the provision of social grants for the unemployed – even amongst this group were unemployed and highly impoverished grant recipients. Opposition to the idea centred on fiscal affordability and the possibility of the suggested unemployment grant turning into a disincentive to work. Some argued that the burden placed on taxpayers would be unsustainable and unfair. They expressed doubt about the economic feasibility of an unemployment grant in the context of mass unemployment:

‘An unemployment grant for all of us would be impossible...the government can’t afford such a thing. I’d love to have such a grant but there are too many unemployed people.’ (Mdantsane, Male CSG, 2007)

‘You are joking! That just would not be possible, who exactly is going to pay for us all in this country to get an unemployment grant?’ (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Those who were sceptical about the provision of an unemployed grant agreed with other respondents that in the final analysis, it was jobs that people wanted and therein lay the solution, in the creation of more jobs. It was evident that although most respondents’ experience of the CSG was that it is an imperative form of financial support in the absence of employment, employment still remained everyone’s preference:

'All we need is to work, then we wouldn't be discussing all this, people wouldn't be giving us bad names just because we have the CSG.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'I think it would be better even for our democracy, our country, if we had jobs rather than grants.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

This section has shown that while there is agreement that an unemployment grant would do much to relieve poverty, there is no indication that it would in any way create dependency. In fact, the women outlined ways in which it would help them to seek work and stressed that if given a choice between a grant and a job, they would much prefer a job.

■ A moral underclass or a structural underclass?

Having identified the strong attachment to the labour market of lone mothers in RSA and the fact that people are not 'content' to rely on the grant system (even if it is extended to include unemployed people), this section explores the extent to which it would be more appropriate to consider unemployed lone mothers as part of a structural underclass.

Some may argue that South African society exhibits many of the characteristics that underpin conservatives' use of the underclass concept such as crime, long-term unemployment, teenage pregnancies and disintegration of families and communities. However, many socio-economic challenges and structural constraints can be seen to underpin these traits rather than an individual's characteristics. A woman from Langa, just outside of the CoCT in the Western Cape province of South Africa, gave an account that demonstrates such challenges:

'It was difficult to find a job in Cala ... [*Eastern Cape province*] ..., I hadn't worked for years, so I left and came here ... [*Western Cape province*] ... to find work. You don't know what's better, what to do, I've been here for two years now, I still haven't found a stable job. Would you believe it? Having left my children at home ... [*Cala*] ... with my mother, they don't have a father. I mean, they do in the village, but we are not married, he never sees the children, anyway he too doesn't have a job, I think he's ashamed of not providing for the children. And now my mother tells me my daughter is pregnant, she's still at school, a child herself, how are we going to feed another mouth? The grant for the two children helps a lot, but it will never be enough [...].' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

Having been unemployed for a number of years, the respondent migrates from her rural village in the Eastern Cape province to a township near the CoCT (Langa) to find employment. In order to do this, she had to leave her children behind with her mother. However, after two years in Cape Town, the lone mother still had not found 'stable' employment at the time of the interview. Her children, born out of wedlock ('illegitimate') had a father

who was also unemployed at the time and could not financially contribute to the upbringing of his children. The father also made no contribution to the care of his children as he 'never sees the children'. At the time the focus group was conducted, the respondent had recently received disturbing news that her teenage daughter was pregnant, arguably with no prospect of marrying her child's father and similar to her own mother is likely to require the CSG. The social challenges this lone mother faces resonate with Julius Wilson's theory on the existence of an underclass. He argues that an underclass may exist in certain societies but that it is most likely to be a *structural* underclass rather than a *behavioural* one (Wilson 1991).

In this instance, a multi-generational pattern of family and community disintegration is evident together with long-term unemployment and welfare (CSG) reliance. As discussed in Chapter 2, Wilson's view of a structural underclass is that it is reinforced by the cumulative disadvantage of geographical and social isolation (Wilson 1991). This view arguably resonates with the lives of most black Africans RSA who, because of the legacy of apartheid, are confined to the outskirts of the country in townships like Langa and previously called 'homelands' (where the respondent's home of origin, Cala, is located). Exposed only to an inferior and limited type of education, Bantu Education, many black Africans continue to be 'trapped' in social networks consisting primarily of others without employment and reliant on social assistance, albeit parsimonious. This inhibited exposure and lack of adequate social capital have a tendency to lock people into a position of labour market disadvantage as most people are said to acquire employment through social networks (Gallie & Marsh 1994). As such, location within a structural underclass is consequential – individuals are not simply temporarily displaced workers and social beings but are locked into a class trajectory that leads away from rather than into other classes with (for example) steady employment and sound education (Devine 1997; Marshall et al. 1996).

In line with the concept of a structural underclass, the focus groups revealed that work-seeking strategies for low-income lone mothers were often arduous and mostly ineffective. As was found with unemployed people more generally, many went from door to door (Noble et al. 2008). It is worth noting that most focus group interviewees spoke only of menial, elementary work when discussing employment, a possible indication that respondents were either low-skilled or had no confidence in getting better jobs. Evidence from respondents' accounts shows that the largest perceived obstacle to employment was that there were no jobs or too few jobs available. This is consistent with the findings of Noble et al. (2008) where it was found that the main obstacle to finding employment identified by those who were seeking work was the lack of available jobs ('no' or 'few

jobs available'), followed by lack of skills ('not enough qualifications') (Noble et al. 2008, p. 7). The following responses were a dominant theme in the rural and urban focus groups:

'There are no jobs in Khayelitsha.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

'There are not enough jobs here otherwise we wouldn't be here, we would be at work [...].' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'Jobs are scarce it's the only thing that did not come with democracy in our country, unfortunately it's the very thing that affects every area of your life and your children's [...].' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

'[...] my sister is in Cape Town, people in Cape Town can't find work, how are we expected to find work here in Mncotsho?' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2007)

Respondents also identified a number of additional barriers that compounded their situation. A lack of skills and experience were issues raised mostly by younger lone mothers:

'Even working at Pick 'n Pay requires experience these days. Experience and qualifications. They say everything is computerised so you have to have some knowledge of working with computers.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'If only I had matric, maybe my Afrikaans would be better, it's important here in Cape Town if you want to get a job. Coming from the Eastern Cape it's difficult to speak Afrikaans.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

In SASAS, we identified a great willingness to train to get necessary skills in order to obtain employment (Noble et al. 2008, p. 7). However, some focus group participants were ambivalent about whether a lack of skills was impeding their job search. While most agreed that more training would always be helpful and welcome, for many, it was not seen as a panacea:

'I have a certificate, computers, but I have been sitting at home for a year.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'What about our children who have matric... [school leaving certificate]... but can't get jobs?' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Some lamented the high cost of training agencies:

'Please tell me, when you are not working, you have a child to feed, where are you supposed to get money to pay an agency to train you, or to go to tertiary?' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

'Maybe we should just forget about the training and get jobs that we can actually do with our hands because we can't afford training, there's no money, unless the government finds a way to train us [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'I can never have the money to pay an agency even though I am still young, I can still learn something to help me get a job to support my children, but right now the most important thing is to bring up these children with the little money I have.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

In both the SASAS survey and focus group interviews, the cost of transport was cited as a significant barrier both to seeking work and actual employment. Respondents appeared cut off and isolated from local job markets. Living in townships or settlements outside the main centres of work, like Cape Town and East London, respondents argued that the cost of minibus taxis or buses made it extremely hard to go in search of work. In instances where a job was secured, a large percentage of one's salary would be spent on transport:

'We have to use public transport which costs money and leaving children behind, it is difficult for us to hear if there is a factory offering jobs in Parow.' (Crossroads, Female CSG, 2007)

'The taxi fare is R20 every day [...] you would end up working only for the taxi fare.' (Mncotsho Village, Woman CSG, 2007)

Depicting Julius Wilson's view on structural long-term unemployment, a woman from Khayelitsha said:

'This is the thing with apartheid, it didn't just end in 1994, it's going to go on and on, because here we are locked in these townships ... and we can't even afford to go look for a job in Cape Town' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

However, even in the context of such structural constraints to paid work and in spite of the absence of dedicated unemployment social assistance, opponents of social assistance in South Africa argue that social grants do foster dependency and that people should be given a 'hand-up' not a 'handout'. As noted above, there are discourses within the South African media and politics that the existing social grant system might act as a disincentive to the unemployed in seeking and retaining work, creating a culture of 'dependency and entitlement' (Daniels 2006). Their view is that a social safety net in the form of social grants is anti-developmental and is opposed to home-grown anti-poverty solutions (SoNA 2008).

However, this was not a view shared by the lone mothers: Most focus group respondents were surprised, and many were indignant when asked whether the CSG might cause laziness or discourage people from working:

'If people are saying these things they must have everything that they need ... Those that are complaining, I'm sure those people do not depend entirely on it as we do, if they did, they would realise how little it is.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

The last interviewee's response suggests that proponents of the dependency culture opinion in RSA, where social grants are parsimonious, arguably have little empathy for the unemployed and are seemingly blaming them for their state of poverty. Such views were perceived to be derogatory by the women, where all their dreams and aspirations were seen to be fulfilled within the confines of the CSG.

■ Conclusion

Findings from the focus groups suggest that there is no dependency culture amongst low-income lone mothers in RSA who are in receipt of the CSG. There was no support for the proposition that receipt of the CSG amongst lone mothers is a discouragement from finding work or that they felt better off claiming grants rather than working. This chapter has demonstrated that in South Africa, the primary reason lone mothers are not working is not because of wantonly choosing to rely on social security, a particularly tenuous position given the absence of an unemployment grant and the small amount of the CSG, but is rather because of structural constraints.

Overall, findings show that the most important factors reducing unemployed lone mothers' chances of finding work were the structural conditions of the labour market and the wider economy, together with their childcare responsibilities, rather than their behavioural characteristics and the arrangements of the social grant system.

To avoid destitution, lone mothers often cited reliance on less poor relatives and, at times, neighbours, leaving them with a strong sense of indebtedness. Although the CSG was seen to confer a degree of financial independence, findings show that it was impossible for it to create independence in any meaningful way because of its parsimonious amount.

It could be argued that the government's stance on citizens' reliance on social grants does not address apartheid's legacy of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. Even though there is a CSG for children in low-income households, dignity is perceived as independence from the state through labour market activity for those mothers not wealthy enough to stay at home and look after their children. A more comprehensive social security system would, arguably, lead to greater financial independence for low-income lone mothers. The next chapter considers issues relating to dignity in the lives of lone mothers.

Dignity in the lives of low-income lone mothers

■ Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore whether low-income lone mothers are able to lead *dignified* lives as citizens in their own right and as mothers who need to provide for their children adequately. I will explore the extent to which poverty and deprivation undermine respondents' sense of dignity, if at all. I will then consider the role of employment in conferring dignity for low-income lone mothers in the country, followed by an exploration of the relationship between dignity and childcare provision concerns mothers had for their children. Finally, I will examine the extent to which social security receipt confers or erodes dignity in the absence of paid work, both in terms of the current social security arrangements and in the context of a hypothetical social security system that expressly provides support for mothers who need it. Before embarking on these analyses and by way of background, I shall unpick the notion of dignity in the various spheres of a person's life (individual, family, community and state) within which it operates.

According to Taylor (1992), dignity is innate. It pertains to respect and the sense of human worth (Frowein 2002). Dignity can arguably be viewed as the foundation upon which most social justice efforts are based, as it is central to upholding social citizenship rights (Craven, 1998).

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Although dignity and social citizenship rights, in general, are separate concepts, it is worth noting their interdependence. In the different spheres of the respondents' lives, dignity or indignity is experienced at four levels:

1. Dignity and self-perception

'What do you have when you don't have self-respect? When you lose your dignity because of the kind of lives we lead, it takes away your self-respect [...].'
(Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

Interviewees often expressed how the extent of multiple deprivations they experienced on a daily basis ultimately resulted in the loss of self-respect because of an eroded sense of dignity:

'I don't feel like I'm nothing because of the poverty, it's what the poverty does to you that makes you feel like you're nothing, it takes away your dignity, when dignity is gone, respect for yourself goes with it.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

This mother articulates that when living in poverty, one loses dignity and, as a result, self-respect.

The self-perception of both women has been adversely altered by their loss of dignity and self-respect.

2. Dignity and family orientation

'All dreams of being a dignified family are gone. I feel ashamed, shame when I see the look on the children's eyes when things are bad, when I can't afford to take one of them to the doctor. Sometimes they understand, but they are children, you can see it in their eyes that they expect more from their mother [...].'
(Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

'My family has little dignity, sometimes it doesn't matter what other people think, as long as there's a sense of dignity amongst us, within the family. But now, even when we are on our own, at least as a mother, that dignity is gone since I lost my job....'
(Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

The above two quotations demonstrate the mothers' concerns about their families' loss of dignity through poverty. The nature of the intersection between dignity and childcare provision will be explored in 'Dignity and care' of this chapter.

3. Dignity and community

'How can my neighbours respect me if I keep borrowing money from them just to put food on the table, sometimes I can't even give it back because by the time the child's grant comes, there's no food anyway. You just lose all dignity, with everyone....'
(Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

This lone mother spoke of the embarrassment she experienced as a result of constantly having to borrow money from her neighbours in order to sustain herself and her children. Her inability to repay her neighbours compounded her feelings of embarrassment to loss of dignity in her community:

'You sell your body to feed your children, even your neighbours know. There's no dignity in poverty. You lower yourself, your dignity, and people think that's who

you are, a loose woman. They have no idea of the problems you have behind closed doors. Your neighbours end up looking at you funny, you know what I mean? And how can you blame them? At the end of the day, people are not meant to live like this, it's not right.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

This lone mother expressed the extent to which she had to lower her dignity by 'selling her body' in order to provide for her children. Such 'loose' behaviour had become her social identity as her community perceived it as synonymous with her identity – 'people think that's who you are'. She continued, almost inaudibly:

'The shame, the shame for me in our community is too much.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

4. Dignity and the state

'... even when you go and register for the children's grant, the officials, because you are young and there's no ring on your finger, they say you sleep around just to get the grant. Because we depend on government to feed our children, we are not treated with dignity, something you don't expect from freedom....' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

This woman refers to freedom from apartheid, the mention of which alludes to an expectation of a dignified reception from a democratic state official (where social rights are meant to be upheld). In agreement, another respondent in the same focus group interview said:

'Yes, that's what they say when you register. They say we should work and not depend on the grant. If we were educated and could support our children ourselves, I'm sure these government people would treat us with dignity.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

The South African government has ratified a number of social justice endeavours for the protection of dignity as a social citizenship right. These national commitments are at domestic (Chapter 2, the Bill of Rights in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 63 of 1996*), regional (*African Charter*, 1979) and international (UN, 1966) levels. At the national level, dignity is arguably the cornerstone of the South African Constitution (1996). The *Bill of Rights* stipulates that:

'The Republic of South Africa is a sovereign, democratic state founded upon the rule of law and principles of human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. The rebirth of our society into a constitutional democracy is the result of the national liberation struggle against apartheid. For hundreds of years the majority of the South African people experienced severe hardships, loss of human dignity, oppression and suffering.' (RSA 2007)

However, as will be seen in 'Dignity and poverty', many lone mothers likened their living circumstances to the indignities experienced under apartheid. The South African Constitution further states that:

'Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.' (RSA 1996)

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (OAU, 1979) stipulates the 'Right to Dignity' for every individual, including women. According to the charter, dignity is innate and ought to be recognized and protected. As such, exploitation, degradation, and violence against people are prohibited and punishable by law (OAU 1979 Articles 3, 4 & 5).

Article 5 of the the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* (OAU 1979) resonates with Statman's theory (2002) on the link between dignity, humiliation and degradation. Women in both the Eastern and Western Cape provinces' focus groups, young lone mothers in particular, often spoke about the manner in which government officials treated them with degradation as a result of their reliance on the child support grant (CSG). Stigma and its humiliating effects on social security provision will be teased out in this chapter ('Dignity and social security'). The right to dignity is also specified in the preamble to the protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, informing the African Court for Human and People's Rights (OAU). The preamble makes salient that dignity is imperative 'for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African peoples' (OAU 1979, p. 1). Internationally, the *United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) (UN 1966, p. 1) states that:

"Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, 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' ... [a goal that] ... 'can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic, social and cultural rights [...]" (UN 1966, p. 173)

Such socio-legal commitments (nationally, regionally and internationally) elucidate the vital importance of meeting social citizenship rights (Marshall 1963) in order to uphold people's dignity and to create a sound foundation for the realisation of civil and political rights (Plant 1992). While Chapter 2 demonstrated the significance of social rights of citizenship, this chapter will demonstrate, through low-income lone mothers' accounts, that political rights have taken precedence over social rights in South Africa due, in part, to the country's colonial and apartheid history.

As the legacy of apartheid is still efficacious in the country, the chapter will comprise of apartheid legacy interrelated factors such as unemployment, lack of skills, cyclical economic migration, economic isolation and the cost of political activity against the apartheid regime that inhibited respondents' personal growth and development. 'Dignity and employment' explores the intersection between dignity and employment and 'Dignity and care' explores the interface between dignity and childcare provision. Both 'Dignity and employment' and 'Dignity and care' are aimed at clarifying the extent to which social insecurity can adversely permeate the emotional and material fabric of the lives of mothers and those of their children. 'Dignity and social security'

investigates the extent to which the CSG promotes and/or erodes dignity through social stigma. This chapter will demonstrate the many interactions that exist between the four overarching themes of the argument: social security provision, dependence, independence and dignity.

■ Dignity and poverty

The aim of this section is to explore the relationship between dignity and poverty in the lives of low-income lone mothers. Socio-economic conditions in which basic needs are met can, arguably, set a framework in which dignity has a possibility to exist for lone mothers and be nurtured for their children. Conversely, it could be argued that poverty and multiple deprivation set up conditions in which dignity is eroded. As discussed in Chapter 4, the country's parsimonious CSG failed to protect the women and their children from day-to-day deprivation that defined their daily existence. Respondents were unequivocal about the manner in which poverty impacted their sense of dignity:

'There is no dignity in poverty.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'The kind of poverty we experience, it just steals your dignity away, it kills you inside. I no longer know what dignity is [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

The following lone mother was certain that poverty pulverised dignity:

'Poverty strips you of your dignity as a woman and as a mother, you become someone you don't recognise. Life only becomes a matter of survival, you can't dream bigger than that, that's all you are preoccupied with, survival, and in trying to survive you lose your dignity because you are poor.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2007)

The erosive effect of poverty on the women's sense of dignity was a recurring theme in both rural and urban settings, for young and older lone mothers alike. The woman from Mncotsho Village not only felt that she had been 'stripped' of her dignity as a result of poverty but also strongly felt that she had lost her sense of identity as she had become someone she, herself, could not recognise because of the indignity she experienced through her state of poverty. In articulating the loss of her dignity, she used the word 'strip(s)' in order to depict the mortifying manner in which poverty had ground down her dignity 'as a woman and a mother'. Attempting to illustrate the indignity of her poverty, the following lone mother juxtaposed the 'struggle against apartheid' with the 'struggle' against poverty:

'At least our parents could fight and struggle against apartheid, how do you struggle and fight poverty, how do you fight for your dignity when there's no hope of getting a job in this democracy [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

Another lone mother said:

'They said there would be dignity in democracy, it's possible but poverty steals it away from you [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

Lone mothers' despondency to lead a dignified life burdened the atmosphere in focus group interviews. Bowing down one's head in the middle of a sentence, fluctuating intonation when talking about loss of dignity and suddenly stopping one's response when overwhelmed by tears were common occurrences in both provinces. As the above quotations demonstrated, the black African women expected social policies from the country's democracy that would ameliorate their day-to-day existence in a country where an apartheid legacy still has a stronghold. In SASAS (2007), 38% of lone mothers defined their poverty status as 'poor', while 36% of lone mothers defined their poverty status as 'just getting by'.

The tension between political and social rights in the country played itself out in the women's responses about unmet basic needs in a democratic country where the liberty to vote came at a cost of life for many a South African (black Africans in particular):

'So many of us lost family members in the struggle, our brothers lost their lives, literally. I don't think it was a struggle just to vote, just to vote for the ANC. It was a deeper struggle than that, it was a struggle for dignified lives, not this poverty, not these shacks we live in [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

This single mother tragically lost her brother, who was involved in the struggle for democracy, to the actions of the apartheid police force:

'Even though we were hurting and still hurt to this day because of the way they shot him like a dog, we were proud of what he stood for, what he gave his life up for. He died for our liberation, for the dignity of black South Africans. He didn't die so that we can go cast our vote and then starve, or for us to live anxiously because we are worried children will be returned from school because I can't pay fees. Our people died for the dignity of black people.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

A significant part of the women's accounts of how poverty erodes dignity consisted of the adverse effects living environment deprivation has on dignity. According to the *General Household Survey* (Stats SA, 2018), 13.1% of South Africans live in informal dwellings, 5% in traditional dwellings and 81.1% in formal dwellings. A considerable number of lone mothers in the Western Cape province lived in 'shacks' and gave reports of the indignity of their susceptibility to adverse weather conditions and crime in such informal dwellings. A mother from Khayelitsha said:

'You can try your best to accept your circumstances, but its humiliating living in a shack, there's no dignity living there. You can't take pride in your own home. That was the only advantage living back home in the Eastern Cape, huts are much better than shacks. Here in Cape Town you don't know when you are going to find yourself without a home because of the winds and the rain here [...] it's humiliating, it's not how you want to live your life.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

In agreement, the following mother responded:

'It's true, a shack is not a home. You can't call it a home because it doesn't protect you from anything, even rain. It's true the huts back home were better [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

Economic migrants in the Western Cape province, both women strongly agreed that they were (at least) more secure living in traditional dwellings ('huts') 'back home in the Eastern Cape'. They could not take pride in their 'shacks' as one would in a home, neither could they rely on the informal dwellings as they rendered them susceptible to adverse weather conditions. The lone mothers spoke of the erosion of their dignity as they had to unexpectedly ask neighbours with more secure homes for shelter:

'Ja, it's like that, there's no stability in these shacks we live in. You always worry that something is going to go wrong and you always feel like you owe people something, people who've helped you out with shelter before. Ja, no, no dignity [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

As an individual who migrated from a rural village in the Eastern Cape, she further articulates:

'I understand what you're saying about the huts at home [...] they are better.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

In the following quote, the lone mother expressed how 'all' they (as a family) had when living in the Eastern Cape province 'was the dignity of ... [*their*] ... home'. However, a lack of infrastructure in their village, Ngqushwa, compelled them to move to the Western Cape province:

'When we lived in Ngqushwa all we had was the dignity of our home, it's just that the school is too far from us and the clinics are even further, so we had to come here but there's a sacrifice, we live in a shack now, no dignity [...].' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

Lone mothers who lived in informal dwellings further spoke of the indignity they experienced when 'harassed' and/or 'threatened' by some men in their neighbourhood who were aware that they lived in 'shacks'. Their perception was that 'people don't treat you with the same dignity as someone with a man in the house':

'It's humiliating, these men know that there's no man in my home, it's just me and my children. They harass me, saying they'll get what they want from me, that they can just kick the door of my shack down. They've never done it, but those words, those words trample on your dignity. You can't say you have a home when you live in a shack, there's no protection, you live in fear when people threaten you like that.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

'I'm sure women who live in proper cement homes escape all these insults from men. They know that you are vulnerable, you become their victim even if it's just words, it takes something away from your dignity. You know, self-respect, it takes something away, you start asking yourself questions [...].' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Similarly, a lone mother from Khayelitsha in the Western Cape province said:

'People look at your shack and look at you and decide how they are going to treat you as a person, a woman. They don't treat you well, with dignity. It's not right, a woman with children needs a proper home, you know what I mean, to live like a human being....' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

Mothers often expressed a strong desire to work (as demonstrated in Chapter 4) in order to provide proper homes, amongst other basic necessities, for themselves and their children. The next section is an exploration of the relationship between dignity and employment.

■ Dignity and employment

Black African women are the most vulnerable population group with an unemployment rate of 31.1% (LFS 2019). The unemployment rate for the general South African population is 27.6% (LFS 2019). As demonstrated in the previous chapter ('The role of the child support grant - promoting independence or creating dependency?'), the women often expressed a strong desire to work in order to adequately provide for themselves and their children - and to lead dignified lives. Frequent accounts of lack of income resulting in multiple deprivation which, in turn, eroded dignity were given in focus group interviews. The lack of de-commodification from the market (Esping-Andersen 1990) for such women (who are also mothers) has compromised their quality of life and that of their children. Twine (1994) contended that the problem with relying on the market to meet social needs is that:

[C]ommodification of labour power tends to reduce social relationships and social obligations to the cash exchange of the labour contract to the exclusion of the rich networks of social obligations and social relationships within which people are embedded as human beings. (p. 20)

Thus, the commodification of labour as the economic and social norm 'tends' to undermine cohesion in communities 'within which people are embedded as human beings' and, as such, erode their dignity with compromised social relations. Reflecting Twine's (1994) view on the adverse effects of commodification in society, a woman from Makhaza said:

'[...] there's no way you can live well, you know, a proper life without worrying about shelter and food if you don't have a job. There's just no way. You don't only have yourself to think about but your children as well, that's the sad thing. You live a hard life because you don't have enough money to live on, you live a hard life because most of your relationships are strained, I'm always borrowing money from people, even with my children my relationship is strained because I'm their mother and father, but I can't do the things a parent is supposed to do for her children.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

In urban settings, respondents additionally highlighted the *indignity* resulting from social class inequality exacerbated by unemployment in the country:

'I'm not sure how this new democracy works, it's a democracy without memory. It looks like some of our people have so much money they don't know what to do with it, when I have piece jobs in the kitchens ...[as a domestic worker] ... I watch people throwing away food all the time. People can have one child but they live in huge houses and are driving different fancy cars. What kind of dignity are they enjoying? It's now about individuals, when we were all in the struggle together, we all lost family members. That is why we are where we are today, poor. But we live in shacks and if you are lucky enough to have a piece job and can afford to go to work, you wake up at four in the morning to be at work on time, earning close to nothing.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Schwabe's (2004) assertion that South Africa's high Gini coefficient (0.7 in 2004 and 0.63 in 2020) suggests that low-income households have not shared in the benefits of economic growth in the country remains true almost two decades later:

In the past inequality in South Africa was largely defined along race lines. It has become increasingly defined by inequality within population groups as the gap between rich and poor within each group has increased substantially. This level of inequality is comparable with the most unequal societies in the world. (Schwabe 2004; *World Population Review* 2019)

The highest levels of poverty in South Africa are amongst the black African population. According to Bhorat et al. (2007), 56% of black Africans lived in poverty, compared to 36% of the Coloured population, 15% of the Indian population and 7% of the white population. In 2021, 64% of black Africans, 1% of white people and 6% of Indians lived in poverty (South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC] 2018). The aforementioned mother from Makhaza in the CoCT in the Western Cape province perceived 'huge houses, education and fancy jobs' as an honour ascribed only to a skilled class of people in her black African community. She questions the depth and quality of their sense of dignity ('What kind of dignity are they enjoying?') in a country where an 'individualistic' approach has led to people being 'without... [a] ... memory' of the collective struggle against apartheid:

'[...] it's a democracy without memory [...]. It's now about individuals, when we were all in the struggle together, we all lost family members. That is why we are where we are today, poor.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

The issue of dignity as a privilege and an honour bestowed upon a skilled, employed class of citizens arose again when respondents encouraged one another as despondency set in:

'It doesn't matter what people say, they say these things to us all, they have their education and fancy jobs but I doubt they have true dignity otherwise they wouldn't be belittling people like us. They have forgotten where this country

comes from, a long, long way with apartheid. We are trying our best for our children, I know you are too, I know your child and I know you always handle yourself with dignity, don't worry about anything else, you may not have an education but you are giving your child one, it's the only thing you can do [...].'
(Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Some lone mothers suggested that because most black African children, who constitute the majority of the country's young population, are living in poverty with little dignity ('because parents have no jobs'), the future of South Africa as a country is compromised:

'Most of us black South Africans are poor and struggling even to give homes to our children and we are the majority in this country, the masses. What good is it going to do our country in the long run if our children grow up in homes where there's little dignity because of poverty, I mean I don't see an end to this, there is no work.'
(Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

'I don't see what future this country has because I can't see my children's future. There are no jobs. It's very hard, the poverty, it's bad, it's humiliating. Even the children are hopeless sometimes. Maybe things will, I don't know, revert back to the old ways somehow, you know, it's a different kind of apartheid, only a few people live well in proper houses, with toilets and running water, with rooms for their children. I don't know, I know we have our rights on paper, the constitution, but here in the township we still live in fear, we are still hungry, I don't know, I don't like to think about these things.'
(Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

This lone mother's reflections resonate with Marshall's (1963) view that without social rights, political rights on their own are limited in their impact on reducing poverty for citizens. She articulated such a state of general deprivation as 'a different kind of apartheid' where 'only a few people live well in proper houses, with toilets and running water, with rooms for their children'. Supporting this perspective was a mother from the village of Mncotsho in the Eastern Cape province. After experiencing retrenchment, she relocated back to her rural residence from the urban city of East London:

'You cannot have dignity without self-respect, how can I respect myself if my children are looking at me, hungry, and there's nothing I can do about it. What this country does not realise is that there's no point in being able to vote if you still can't feed your children, or take them to the doctor when they are sick. What is the point? It was much better when I had a job, I could look after my children. We have to protect these children with decent lives, dignified homes. It's not that we want to be rich, we just want, somehow, to be able to lead normal lives, not to worry about school fees.'
(Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2007)

The following section is an investigation of the relationship between dignity and care for lone mothers.

■ Dignity and care

The intersection between dignity and care in the lives of low-income lone mothers is such that they have difficulty providing adequate care for their

children, a condition which impinges on their dignity as mothers and that of their children (as they go without basic necessities). The following lone mother spoke of how she ‘...[lost] ... all dignity’ when she could not ‘do something important like giving them [*her children*] the school fees they need’:

‘... not having income, I’ve lost respect for myself. It touches on many areas of my life, you know, many areas. But the most important is the children, I see it in their eyes, the look in their eyes when I can’t do something important, like giving them the school fees they need, I lose all dignity....’ (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

Concern about the ‘look in children’s eyes’ that depicts the loss of dignity for both lone mothers and their children because of inadequate care provision was a recurring theme in focus group interviews. Another mother from Mdantsane said:

‘The worst is when you see the look in your child’s eyes when you can’t even put food on the table. How does a child go to bed hungry? I tell you sisi, you lose all dignity, you don’t sleep at night because of that look in your child’s eyes....’ (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

In 2008, 13.4% of the South African population lived in informal dwellings, while the percentage in 2017 was 13.6% (Stats SA 2008, 2017). As such, the indignity of housing deprivation for unemployed lone mothers was a persistent concern for respondents residing in urban, informal dwellings. The next respondent strongly desires for her children ‘to grow with dignity’:

‘It’s not right, sharing one room with your children, all your children. You wash, sleep and cook in the same room [...] it’s not right. The children are growing, it’s not good for growing children, they need a proper home so that they can grow up with dignity. Maybe I’ll get one of the RDP houses someday and start to live my life with some dignity.’ (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

The next lone mother’s anxiety was that all her children may know is a ‘life without dignity’:

‘The children are growing it’s not right for them to live like they are squatting, but I’m really worried that this is all they will know, this kind of life, without dignity. I wish I had a job to give them a proper home, but I’m not educated, the kinds of jobs I get don’t pay well anyway. The only way out is for them to study and have an education, maybe then they can live their lives with some dignity.’ (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

In expressing the indignity of housing deprivation, it became apparent that the lack of adequate housing for low-income mothers was a risk to their children’s health:

‘... you get stripped to nothing when you have no income. You can’t even have a reliable, solid home for your child. This shack that I live in, when the Cape Town rains are pouring down, week after week, there’s nothing you can do. You first get wet yourself, your body and then all of a sudden everything you own is drenched in rain water. Your child gets sick and you face the humiliation of going around asking people for shelter. What kind of life is that, where you don’t even have the basic dignity of your own home?’ (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2007)

Once emigrated from the Eastern Cape province, the next respondent was unable to continue living with her daughter as a result of the lived indignity in their shack:

'My child had pneumonia because of the shack we live in, she couldn't survive here, I ended up sending her home, she lives in Cala with my mother. In a way it's better that way, at least I know she's in a proper home now, there's no dignity here, little decency unless you have a proper home, a job....' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Asked about her view regarding the introduction of an unemployment benefit in South Africa, a lone mother thought that 'people who get such help are at least able to live dignified lives with their children':

'It's not that we don't want to work, there are no jobs and I have no one to look after my children, they are young. So if the CSG can be a bit more, [...] if we can have decent homes and not live in shacks, then it would be much better. I think people who get such help are at least able to live dignified lives with their children. It's important, especially when there's no man around the home.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Some women spoke of the manner in which the indignity of poverty robbed their children of their childhood years, imposing 'unnatural' adulthood upon them:

'It takes away the children's innocence, I think, having to struggle like this, the way we are with no jobs. Children having to learn how difficult and rough life is, it happens at such an early age. When children watch their mother begging for money to buy bread, when you lose your dignity in front of their eyes it takes away their innocence, it changes them to adults, they learn to be hardened in order to survive. I can see it you know, I feel it and it kills me that there's nothing I can do about it because I'm on my own, I can't rely on anyone else. It's unnatural, this adulthood they acquire as children.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

Such accelerated childhood into 'adulthood' was reported to compromise the quality of the children's emotional well-being:

'...you can't separate the need for dignity from being human, all human beings need to live their lives with dignity, especially children. If they don't have it they may never recover, as people, you know. They are only children, they need to be protected all the time. My children have seen too much, my daughter is always down, she's so young yet she knows what depression is, she knows what humiliation is, you know, loss of dignity. It's not right but what can I do?' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

Similar to the above mother, the next respondent's view resonates with Taylor's assertion (1992) that dignity is an inherent need in all human beings including children:

'It's the most basic thing, no child should be deprived of their dignity. My children are known for our poverty in our neighbourhood because we are always begging,

asking for help. It's humiliating, embarrassing for them, their friendships are compromised, they get teased and bullied about it. I just tell them to be strong and stand up for themselves because they are not the only poor children in the neighbourhood.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

The apprehension regarding the vulnerability of participants' children to bullying, leading to a subsequent loss of dignity to because of their parents' insufficient provision, repeatedly emerged during focus group interviews. Although it has been a national education policy since the inception of South Africa's democracy (1994) for children not to be turned away from school for lack of school fees, there is still a discrepancy between such policy and its implementation (see the discussion in Chapters 4 and 6). Unemployed women who were unable to pay for their children's school fees also spoke of the link between their inability to provide for their children adequately, the compromise to express the love they had for their children and the encroachment to their dignity and that of their children:

'You lose respect for yourself when your child is sitting at home because you can't pay school fees. Where is my dignity when I can't feed or educate my children? Nowhere. That's all I want to give them because they have no father. Education, health, you understand – well-being. It's your love for your children isn't it? It's how you love your children, giving them that dignity for the future.' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2007)

'I feel empty, I can't even respect myself ... [pause] ... I have no dignity within me because I can't be the parent I know I should be to my children because I have no money, no income only the CSG. You wonder sometimes if your children are convinced of your love, not being able to provide for them as I should, even school fees are hard to pay and I know this disturbs them because the school sometimes tells them to go back home to get the money.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

It was evident from accounts such as these that the mothers were concerned that compromise to their children's dignity, through deprivation, would continue into adulthood as poverty undermined their intended investment as parents in their children's future, especially in relation to education and health. The women felt strongly that poverty limited their ability to give their children 'that dignity for the future'. Such perceptions are consistent with literature (Hertzman 2000; Sen 1999) which asserts that it is probable that children's socio-economic positions determine their future and can define their (children's) lifetime socio-economic potential. According to Sen (1999, p. 4), '...capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experiences as children'. The next section is an exploration of the relationship between dignity and social security (the CSG).

■ Dignity and social security

The link between social rights, dignity and honour (in social citizenship rights enjoyed by skilled South Africans), from the viewpoint of respondents, was briefly discussed in 'Dignity and poverty' of this chapter and will be further explored now, in relation to the CSG. I shall start by teasing out differences between the two notions, dignity and honour, in order to elucidate their connectedness to social citizenship rights and inequality in the country. Berger (1983) contrasted the two concepts (dignity and honour):

Dignity always relates to the intrinsic humanity divested of all socially imposed roles or norms [...] it pertains to the[...] individual regardless of his position in society. If only some have honour, all have dignity; if birth is central to honour – being a person, regardless of ascriptive location, is critical to dignity; if honour is hierarchical, dignity is egalitarian; and if in the world of honour the individual discovers his true identity in his roles, he does so in a world of dignity... by emancipating himself from socially imposed roles. (p. 176)

Berger (1983) then reiterated that honour is associated with a hierarchical order of society that is a direct expression of status, a source of solidarity amongst social equals and a demarcation line against social inferiors. In his analysis of Berger's assertion, Taylor (1992, p. 27) stated, 'For some to have honour in this sense, it is essential that not everyone have it ...' (Taylor 1992, p. 27).

Similarly, respondents in the Western Cape province differentiated between racialised honour bestowed upon white and Coloured low-income lone mothers during the apartheid era (with access to the SMG) and dignity (as an egalitarian concept inherent in all human beings). Asked what their perception was of the government's intended use of the CSG, lone mothers in Gugulethu responded:

'Under apartheid only white and Coloured families got the grant, it was even much better ... [*than the CSG*] ..., because of the colour of their skin. I know from my coloured friends. Now the ANC tries for all of us to live in dignity, equally, everybody deserves a life of dignity, we are human beings. It's just that the child grant is not enough.' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2007)

'... this grant is to protect the dignity of all South African children. It's fair, for all children, the government doesn't just honour Coloured children because of their race. It wants all children to have dignity, to lead lives of dignity in their homes.' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2007)

In line with the distinction between honour and dignity that has been made by Berger (1983), two women from Langa in the Western Cape province also contrasted the 'honour' assigned to certain racial groups under apartheid in relation to social assistance with the concept of dignity. One woman went so far as to question whether recipients of the grants under

apartheid could have dignity in the context of the oppression that prevailed around them:

'I know the CSG is not enough, but at least we all get it. At least this government tries, it realises that we are all human and we all need to protect our dignity. Here in Cape Town, apartheid honoured you with your skin colour, if you were Coloured or white they gave you a grant like the child grant, only it was much more. There's no dignity in that because while you gain others ... [*black African*] ... are starving and dying.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'We are grateful for these grants, the child grant. We would have never have gotten these grants under apartheid, that was an honour for other racial groups. But I don't think they fully enjoyed all these racial benefits with dignity, how could they when we were being oppressed, in the same country' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

The respondents' contention was that the apartheid regime may have attributed racial honour to Coloured and white citizens in the country by giving them access to the SMG; however, such honour did not presuppose dignity as they (the honoured Coloured and white citizens) were enjoying social benefits while their fellow citizens, black Africans, 'were being oppressed'. Indeed, one of the respondents made the following utterance in reference to the need for equal access to basic amenities:

'It's so important, making sure that everyone, as much as possible, can have the dignity of a proper home, without the embarrassment of not having even a toilet, especially for us women, it's important. It shouldn't just be high class people who have these things, it's not right, we all need them, they are so basic.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

As discussed in Chapter 6, much of the debate in South Africa about social security provision, the CSG in particular, is centred around the risk of engendering a dependency culture for the unemployed even in the context of high unemployment rates and parsimonious social security provision. Speaking about the desire for a comprehensive social security system, a woman from Makhaza raised the importance of the relationship between independence as an adult woman and dignity:

'I think it would be good for South Africa to have a grant like that ...[...]. We would all have the dignity of independence, as adults, you understand. Right now this country has a whole lot of adults living like children, begging for this and that just to survive and provide for their own children.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

In the same vein, another woman from Mdantsane said:

'It is not possible to live with dignity as a woman, you know, as a mother, if you can't stand on your own two feet and do, at least the small things, the basic things for yourself and your children. You just can't live properly like that, be a person' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

Data from this study suggest that the CSG does indeed confer a measure of independence and a modicum of dignity to low-income lone mothers, especially in relation to their children and the communities in which they live:

'At least when the grant for my three children comes, it comes into my own hands, something I've hardly ever experienced before. I feel like a person, a person with dignity. I can make my own decisions and look after my children, it does run out but I don't know what I would do without it.' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2006)

'The grant gives you some independence, I don't borrow money all the time with people looking down on me....' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2006)

Expressing her perspective on the sporadic dignity associated with receiving an insufficient CSG, the following women appeared to imply that this form of dignity and independence held little value:

'The CSG helps a little, but it is not much, you still cannot stand on your own two feet with dignity. I can respect myself when I can take my child to the clinic or doctor when she's not well, or when I can put food on the table for my children. But this self-respect, this feeling of dignity, it doesn't last, it never lasts when you only have the CSG to look forward to.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Some women felt that they were stigmatised for receiving it, an experience that eroded their sense of dignity:

'If you depend on this grant and you have nothing else, no husband, no job, you become a victim in Langa. I have three children and all I hear is that I open my legs to get the grant. It's like people go out of their way to humiliate you, you become a victim' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'The grant helps, it really does. You can do a bit with it for the children, at least it's not all the time that they are hungry. But people feel they have a right to trample on your dignity when you live on the grant, they think you are lazy or stupid, I don't know' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2007)

Certain women believed that communities perceived single mothers as less deserving of government support compared to individuals with disabilities:

'They insult us, taking away our dignity, saying we can work and should not get the grant. But they don't say these things to people who are disabled and living on a grant' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2007)

'If they give me a job and look after my baby I will work. Why do they say these things to us, even the officers, why do they insult us for getting the grant when they don't do the same with disabled people?' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2007)

'When we go to register for the grant, you notice that they ...[*government officials*] ... don't discourage people on wheel chairs like they do, with us, you know, to get the grant. I don't know what it is, why they think mothers deserve to be treated badly, without respect. They always say we don't want to work, we are just after this grant. I mean, is this the law in this country, that we are not actually meant to get this grant?' (Mdansante, Female CSG, 2007)

Seeing work to be the only escape from such stigmatisation, respondents were generally highly motivated to find work both in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces even with responsibilities of childcare:

'If only I could have a regular job at Pick 'n Pay or something, maybe become a cashier, I could live my life with dignity and look after my children so that we are not labelled as lazy. I mean, how can I be lazy just to depend on the grant, it's not enough, I have dreams for my children too.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'I felt I had dignity when I worked but the factory shut down. Now I don't even recognize myself. My poor children, I feel for them, with people saying all the things they are saying about mothers like me on the grant. I just wish I could get a job so that we don't have to take all these insults [...].' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

'I really wish I could get a job to support my family so that I don't have to be feeling bad all the time because of people who say I don't want to work I just want to live on the grant. We all need a life of respect, you can't live your life being everybody's victim [...].' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2006)

Some women, originally from rural areas in the Eastern Cape province, who had migrated to the Western Cape province in part for better access to the CSG felt saddened by the stigma attached to them. They said:

'You know getting the grant was one of the main reasons we moved to Langa, we are from Cala. It was taking too long for us to get the grant at home, for many people, so I moved here because the schools are close as well. Now we finally get the grant but we pay for it, we still pay for it with the insults that come with it, the price is our dignity [...].' (Langa, Female CSG, 2007)

The women's accounts demonstrated the extent to which the CSG reduced poverty and served to confer dignity. However, the manner in which the CSG was administered eroded dignity, and many felt stigmatised for receiving it rather than that it was their entitlement to receive it.

■ Conclusion

Evidence from both focus group interviews and SASAS demonstrates that poverty erodes dignity. Respondents saw employment and economic autonomy as conferring a sense of dignity. In the absence of employment, however, social security conferred dignity. Although the CSG promoted dignity, its inadequacy (partly because it is such a small amount and only intended for the child) limits the extent to which low-income lone mothers can be *decommodified* in order to lead lives of dignity as women and mothers.

Women's responses on issues pertaining to social security provision demonstrated that they made linkages between the indignity of the former apartheid regime and the lack of dignity caused by poverty:

'It's a different kind of indignity ... [*from apartheid*] ..., we have freedom in South Africa now but most of us are still humiliated by poverty [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'We are not second class citizens anymore, we have recognition and we can vote. But that's about all, the poverty continues, there's no dignity in poverty [...].' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

Such key findings imply that the country requires a more comprehensive social security system (in particular that which is directed to low-income lone mothers) in order to protect and uphold the dignity of its citizens.

Stigmatisation was an issue that compounded unemployment and limited social security provision for lone mothers in receipt of the CSG. In expressing the erosive effect on the dignity of the manner in which the CSG was administered, lone mothers spoke of 'humiliation', 'loss of self-respect' and 'shame'. These degrading terms resonate with Statman's view (2001 and 2002) that there are strong conceptual and linguistic linkages between human dignity, self-respect and, if one is violated, humiliation. Deacon and Bradshaw (1983) stated that stigmatisation is a common problem with means-tested benefits.

It is worth noting that interviewees saw poverty as an indignity (in society) not only for those unfortunate enough to be stricken by it (such as themselves and their children) but also for South African society as a whole:

'The poverty is painful, it's humiliating, you lose respect for yourself. There's no dignity in poverty, for sure. But I often wonder about the people who have more than enough, surely our poverty humiliates them as well? When people look at South Africa, we are part of it too. People driving from the airport can see that there are women living in shacks with their children, isn't it? It's the dignity of the whole country that is compromised. I'm sure visitors ask themselves how can this country let children live in shacks [...].' (Gugulethu, Female CSG, 2007)

The limitations of political citizenship with inadequate social rights was a consistent theme raised by respondents in relation to the erosive effect of poverty on their sense of dignity. This view resonates with King and Waldron (1998, p. 420) in the British context:

If we accept [...] arguments for universal suffrage, then, taking seriously the arguments we have been outlining about fraternity, economic independence and security, we will have powerful reasons for associating political citizenship with at least some of the welfare rights that Marshall spoke about when he referred to citizenship in the social sense.

The next chapter ('The impact of potential social security provision in South Africa') explores how social security provision could be increased and, where possible, de-stigmatised, in such a way that reduces poverty experienced by low-income lone mothers and helps to confer dignity.

Potential social security provision in South Africa: The basic income grant

■ Introduction

Having explored the challenges low-income lone mothers face to meet their daily needs and those of their children in Chapters 4–7, this chapter is an exploration of the potential impact on poverty of possible social security options for citizens with low income, including lone mothers. We have seen in Chapters 4 and 5 that the government effectively expects low-income lone mothers to simultaneously be full-time care providers and full-time employees. However, there is currently no social security support for those who are unable to find full-time employment, nor is there any social security support for those mothers who choose to or have no option but to care for their children. A clear message that emerges from the empirical chapters, ‘Lone mothers: Unemployment and employment’ in particular, is that basic income support for mothers in their own right, over and above the child support grant (CSG), is necessary. Interviewees from the Eastern Cape province talked about the inadequacy of the CSG in the context of their unemployment and lack of income, even to meet the needs of the targeted children:

‘It’s very difficult, there is no work, even with my young child I’ve been looking for work for over a year now. The grant helps but by the end of the first week of the month I’m already worried that it’s getting finished. The stress is never ending,

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its worse when you have children like us. Not knowing what your children are going to eat because you don't have a salary, or just some kind of wage, because I have matric you know sisi.' (Nxarhun Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'I have three children and I receive the children's grant for all of them. We all end up living on this grant, eating from this grant. Really, both my mother and I eat because of the children's grant, my mother is not old enough to get a pension, she has five years to go. One ends up feeling so guilty, eating from the children's money, because they don't have enough themselves. But what can we do, we're not earning anything.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

In the Western Cape province, interviewees at times referred to the state maintenance grant (SMG) as a form of comprehensive social security provision that would, if administered by the current government to citizens in need, help reduce poverty for low-income lone mothers. The SMG was social security provided for low-income lone mothers in South African non-homeland areas under the apartheid regime. Paid in respect of the caregiver and the dependent child(ren), it was racially stratified with mostly white and Coloured recipients (see the history of 'Social security provision for lone mothers in South Africa' in Chapter 1). A respondent from Makhaza said:

'Considering everything black people went through in this country, I mean living in townships the way we do with little education, having lost all that we did under apartheid, you'd think that women with children like me, mothers who can't find work would get a grant like the state maintenance grant [...].' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

In agreement, another interviewee in the same group said:

'This is the thing, it's very sad that, well, as far as I can see, the people in power making all these policies, I don't know, it's like now that they are sorted out they have forgotten about us. Why couldn't they give us the State Maintenance Grant? I mean even the apartheid government gave it to coloured people, why can't our government look after us? It's not that we don't want to work, there is no work, there are no jobs and anyway we have to look after the children as well.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

Both interviewees felt that the post-apartheid government could afford to provide a more comprehensive social security system for citizens who need it, in particular those with children:

'[Y]ou'd think that women with children like me, mothers who can't find work would get a grant like the state maintenance grant.' (Makhaza Female CSG, 2007)

This sentiment resonates with criticism about the inferior standard of Redistributive Social Democratic Policy (RDP) houses government has built in order to provide for low-income families (Moolla et al. 2011). In this regard, occupants compare the low quality of the housing units with that of the four-roomed houses built under the apartheid housing legislation (Mabin 2020). To be clear, this housing conundrum is not at all apartheid

nostalgia which was declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations General Assembly (1973). Rather, it is a declaration by occupants that, albeit low quality, the four-roomed houses black Africans were displaced into by the apartheid regime are not as inferior as current RDP houses (Mabin 2020). The studies' empirical evidence and wider international literature on social security provision strongly suggest that if child poverty is to be tackled, in any country, then low-income parents must be provided for (Lister 2003). Policies that 'view women merely as conduits to reach children in order to promote child well-being' lack insight into how interlinked mother and child well-being are (Molyneux 2006; Patel & Ross 2022). The possible implementation of a BIG would address such maternal challenges (DSD 2021).

As discussed in the introductory chapter, a ZAR350 social relief of distress (SRD) was introduced for an initial period of six months in May 2020 in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and its lockdown measures (DSD 2020). It is means-tested and was, in the first instance, targeted at people between the ages of 18 and 60 years who are not direct beneficiaries of any social grants, eligible for UIF payment or receiving financial support from any other source (SASSA 2020). It was later reinstated until March 2022, when the eligibility criteria were expanded to include unemployed caregivers who receive the CSG on behalf of children (SASSA 2021). The Minister of Finance Enoch Godongwana further announced the extension of the SRD in October 2022 until March 2024 in his medium-term budget policy statement to parliament (National Treasury 2022). In interviews, mothers in receipt of the grant reported that the staggered SRD provision had been an arduous experience. In March 2022, grant beneficiaries stopped receiving the grant for up to five months during a digital systems migration process (SASSA 2022). All eligible persons had to re-apply as the grant was no longer under the *Disaster Management Act 57 of 2022* with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic. The eligibility threshold of the SRD means test is ZAR624 a month – all income is monitored, including e-Wallet. It could be argued that the cost of the means test, together with monthly monitoring, could go a long way in financing a BIG.

■ Former proposals for social security reform

Following on from the Taylor Committee discussed in Chapter 1, the government Forum of South African Directors-General (FOSAD), a social sector cluster, was requested by the government to identify gaps in the country's social security system with the view of making recommendations for possible policy reform (DSD 2007a). The rationale behind this process was that reform is necessary in order to effect a reduction of high rates of

poverty and to protect basic social rights stipulated in the Constitution (The Presidency 2007).

In the ground-breaking case of *Grootboom et al. versus the Republic of South Africa*, the constitutional court sought to give effect to housing rights as provided for in Chapter 2, Section 26 of the Constitution. The court ruled that:

A society must seek to ensure that the basic necessities of life are provided to all if it is to be a society based on human dignity, freedom and equality. To be reasonable, measures cannot leave out of account the degree and extent of the denial of the right they endeavour to realize. Those whose needs are most urgent and whose ability to enjoy all rights is most in peril, must not be ignored by the measures aimed at realization of the right. (Constitutional Court, *Grootboom et al. v the Republic of South Africa* 2000, p. 1)

This constitutional court ruling aptly depicts what it is that the FOSAD social cluster endeavoured to do – the South African social security ‘safety net’ has many ‘holes’ (Samson 2002; Whitworth & Noble 2008) through which millions of citizens fall. It is such people whose needs the FOSAD Gaps Document begins to acknowledge and intends to address. The ‘FOSAD Gaps Document’ was unequivocal in its recognition of the importance of income maintenance as a forerunner to long-term poverty alleviation. It acknowledged that the ability of any family that exists and persists in a state of poverty to mould their lives, direct their affairs and protect themselves from harm is severely limited (Gough & Wood 2004). It recognises that such families’ income poverty often leads to what Sen (2005) calls capabilities poverty:

While it is important to distinguish conceptually the notion of poverty as a capability inadequacy from that of poverty as lowness of income, the two concepts cannot but be related, as income is such an important means to capabilities. And because enhanced capabilities in leading a life would tend, typically, to expand a person’s ability to be more productive and earn a higher income, we would also expect a connection going from capability improvement to greater earning power and not only the other way around. (Sen 1999, p. 90, cited in the FOSAD Document)

In its recommendations, the FOSAD social cluster emphasised the significance of adequate social cash transfers to eradicate both income and capability poverty. From the onset, the social sector cluster based its work on a *social security gaps typology* that focused on three fundamental issues: Firstly, it addresses social security coverage in relation to adequacy, quality and quantity. Secondly, it addresses the allocation of resources – existing entitlements, non-existing entitlements and extension of coverage on existing entitlements (e.g. the CSG was in the process of being extended from the age limit of fifteen to eighteen years). Thirdly, it addressed the institutional and legislative frameworks pertaining to the adequacy of

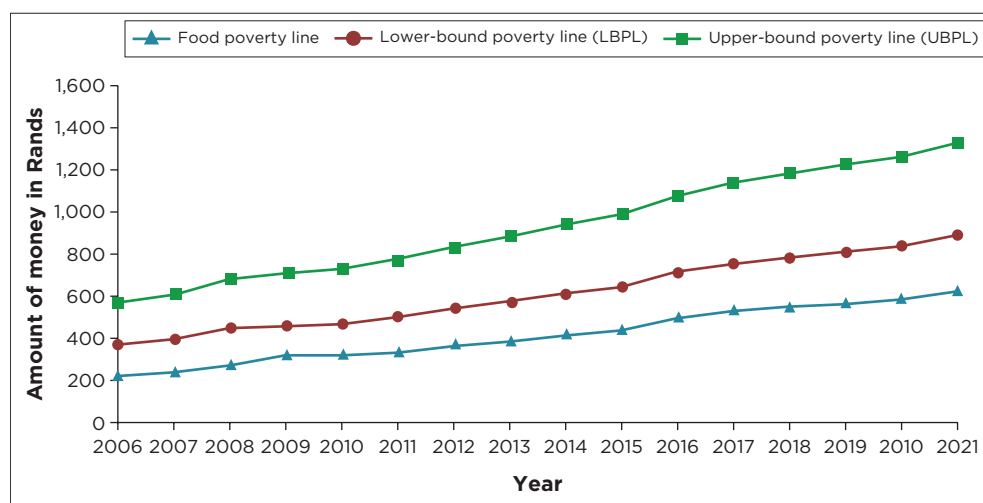
social assistance, oversight and compliance in respect of social security delivery (FOSAD Document 2007). The relevance of the design of the social security system on the whole is also at issue in this typology. The requirement for certain entitlements to go from one social security institution to another, each with differing standards of access and regional presence, is a case in point. The social cluster recommended that consideration be given to an integrating institution that could facilitate and access referrals (FOSAD Document 2007), hence the formation of SASSA.

From the above *social security gaps typology*, the FOSAD social sector cluster recommended the provision of two social benefits termed *pillars* (FOSAD Document 2007). The first pillar would have been ‘the establishment of a universal minimum grant in order to create an enabling environment for all to effectively participate in society’ (FOSAD Document 2007, p. 7). The second pillar pertained to ‘the implementation of key social insurance measures to protect families from facing catastrophic reversals in their social participation once enabled’ (FOSAD Document 2007). Of all these FOSAD recommendations, two were implemented – the extension of coverage of the CSG for eligible children up to the age of eighteen years and the establishment of SASSA. The next section is a discussion of the government’s consideration for the implementation of a BIG precipitated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdown measures.

■ Current proposals for social security reform

The ILO, together with the South African DSD, established a panel of experts to examine the feasibility of BIG options and conduct economic appraisals through quantitative and qualitative analyses (DSD 2021). In addition, the experts identified and advised on complementary policy actions such as labour, relevant linkages and policy reforms towards a comprehensive social security framework.

The work of the panel was based on the evident premise that income poverty in South Africa is pervasive. Although the depth of poverty varies, inequality remains high in the country reporting a per-capita expenditure Gini coefficient of 0.6 (SSA 2021). As such, four million households fall below the food poverty line (FPL) equivalent to a monthly value of R624 (SSA 2021). This translates to these households falling below the lower-bound poverty line (LBPL), equivalent to a monthly value of R890, while eight million households fall below the upper-bound poverty line (UBPL), equivalent to a monthly value of R1335 in 2021 (SSA 2021). Such income disparity is because of high levels of unemployment, officially 34.9% in the third-quarter of 2021 (LFS). In the same quarter, with COVID-19 restrictions



Source: Statistics South Africa 2021, *National poverty lines*, Republic of South Africa, Pretoria, viewed n.d. <<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P03101/P031012021.pdf>>
 Key: LBPL, Lower-bound poverty line; UBPL, Upper-bound poverty line.

FIGURE 8.1: Inflation-adjusted national poverty lines per person per month in South African Rands from 2006 to 2021.

limiting the movement of the general population, the rate of unemployment according to the expanded definition was 46.6% (LFS 2021). However:

[...] although the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated certain of these conditions, [...] evidence indicates that these features are endemic and long-term in nature and have not responded to government interventions implemented to date. (DSD 2021, p. 6)

The above graph demonstrates how the inflation-adjusted poverty lines have changed from 2006 to 2021 (Statistics South Africa 2021).

As discussed in prior chapters, specifically Chapter 4, there is no social security provision for adults of working age unless disabled. Having ascertained that income support in the form of a grant is necessary and that no alternative measures could reasonably address the widespread and urgent income-support needs of relevant adults, the expert panel considered risks associated with the introduction of such support and the form it ought to take (DSD 2021). It proposed a phased approach contingent on fiscal capacity and sustainability. As such, a recommendation was made that the existing COVID-19 SRD grant be institutionalised and form the platform for an expanded system of basic income support which can then be improved incrementally over time (DSD 2021). The intended aim is the progressive elimination of income poverty, as measured using the UBPL mentioned above.

In respect of fiscal considerations, the panel suggested that a basic version of the BIS can be implemented safely by utilising a combination of financing methods, including modest debt financing, enhancements in tax revenue resulting from potential demand stimulus and judiciously adjusted tax increases when necessary (DSD 2021). Furthermore, if the anticipated grant expenditure is primarily funded through tax increases, the panel asserted that the redistributive effects would be fully maintained, with significant social and economic advantages likely for the households and communities affected (DSD 2021).

As discussed in Chapter 4, caregivers receiving the CSG use part of the grant to pay for transport to find work or for entrepreneurial ventures. This formed part of the research study's evidence that the CSG and, indeed, social grants in general in South Africa do not cultivate a dependency culture. With basic income support for working-age unemployed adults, injection back into the economy would be possible and would have localised positive economic effects from the redistributive measures. This may aid in the diversification and development of local economies while at the same time contributing to systemic improvements in socio-economic conditions (DSD 2021; SoNA 2022):

These positive effects of social assistance transfers to households therefore reflect enabling features of income support, such as promoting economic and social participation and agency on the part of recipients. (DSD 2021, p. 9)

Based on the expert panel's estimates, introducing a BIG at the level of R1,300 per month, income support would almost totally eliminate poverty measured at both the FPL and LBPL. In these scenarios, income inequality (as measured by the Gini coefficient) also improves dramatically from 0.65 to 0.55 (DSD 2021). The panel asserts that 'the objective that is to be realised must be made explicit and underpinned by legislation, the chosen pathway should clarify the obligations placed on the state to ensure realisation over time, justifications for variations from the pathway should involve transparent deliberative processes consistent with an open and democratic society.' Finally, the panel recommended that should an increase in taxes be required, consideration should be given to the balance between the revenue raising and redistributive potentials of various taxes (DSD 2021). In addition and for a more comprehensive approach, the panel recommends that:

A labour activation strategy should be developed in conjunction with industry with funded job-skilling and occupational learning initiatives for emergent industries; accessible job placement; and internship. The labour activation opportunities should be automatically available to grant recipients at no cost to them and employment in the labour activation system should draw from, but not be limited to BIS grant recipients and include on-the-job training for key skills. (DSD 2021, p. 20)

In this respect, challenges such as the temporary nature of Extended Public Works Programmes (EPWPs) jobs and nepotism faced by intended beneficiaries (discussed in Chapter 4) would be avoided.

■ Concluding remarks

As a group, lone parents in general and lone mothers in particular have received little policy attention in South Africa. There are very few accounts even of their demographic characteristics, let alone their unique position in the policy arena in terms of employment, social security and care. The study makes a number of unique contributions to literature. It provides an unprecedented insight into the construction of lone motherhood in South Africa, taking into account the various routes into lone motherhood in the South African context. It also demonstrates unique insight into the policy nexus of social security provision, work and childcare in respect of low-income lone mothers in South Africa. On the one hand, lone mothers are expected to work, and on the other hand, they are expected to provide for the care of their children. This is in the context of very high unemployment, very few opportunities to work, inadequate affordable, safe childcare provision and a low skills base amongst black African lone mothers. Ironically, many black African lone mothers who are able to find work are employed as domestic workers caring for other people's children to the detriment of their own children. In the absence of work, lone-parent families are desperately poor, even when in work it is often badly paid and insecure. As such, the study highlights the disjuncture between policy on social security provision, the constitution and South Africa's rights-based approach. Drawing from the underclass literature (both moral and structural), I undertake a detailed exploration of dignity and dependency in relation to lone mothers' experiences of and attitudes about social security provision, poverty, employment status and childcare obligations. In addition, the concept of *ubuntu*, from an epistemological and ontological perspective, provides a uniquely cultural lens through which to view social security provision.

The study draws from detailed accounts provided by low-income lone mothers themselves in semi-structured focus group interviews. Such in-depth personal access to issues related to social security provision helps one gauge the extent of the success and/or failure of current social assistance policy in the country in terms of whether it meets the needs of intended recipients. This analysis is supplemented by some small-scale analysis of SASAS and discussions on former and current social security policy and government official recommendations.

In this section, I revisit the research questions raised in Chapter 1, taking into account the theoretical issues introduced in Chapter 2, and examine the extent to which the analysis presented in Chapters 3–7 sheds light on these questions. The interface between dignity and poverty is considered in particular, in order to inform the overarching research question of the thesis: to what extent does social security provision for lone mothers encourage dependency and erode dignity or promote independence and enhance dignity?

■ Lone mothers and employment

In focus group interviews, the dominant theme was the perceived pressure on low-income single mothers to work, driven by three primary reasons: a desire to adequately provide for themselves and their children, the perceived inadequacy of the CSG to meet basic needs, and concerns about the discourse on perverse incentives and the potential development of a dependency culture, impacting respondents and motivating them to seek employment even at the expense of compromised childcare.

This section addresses the first subordinate research question of the study noted in Chapter 1: What challenges do lone mothers face when in low-paid work or when unemployed? For contextual purposes, it is important to reiterate that the government has made it clear through actual social security policy, ANC policy documents and in press statements through the media that it expects low-income lone mothers to fully engage in the labour market. As such, because most black African women in the country have limited skills because of the apartheid legacy and lack of education, interviewees often found themselves in emotionally gruelling job situations. For example, in Chapter 4, an ironic picture was drawn of how mothers in domestic work felt torn when they had to provide care to their employers' children while their own were without adequate care provision. As will be discussed in further detail in the next section on childcare provision, some lone mothers found such domestic employment situations to be too emotionally costly – they ended up forfeiting their jobs in order to care for their children. The following quote illustrates that even though these mothers found some relief in choosing to care for their children, they still had poverty to deal with:

'It feels really good to be home with my children, to be able to look after them myself. Just to know how their days are going, but this too comes at a price. We have less food, most days we survive on one meal a day, me and the older children. When I was a domestic worker they gave me food at work and I could send money home for groceries.' (Nxarhun Village, Female CSG, n.d.)

Another striking theme to emerge in the Western Cape province in relation to difficult working conditions is that, in the context of mass unemployment in the country, low-income lone mothers gave reports of engaging in transactional sex and/or prostitution in order to survive:

‘Sometimes, sisi, you find yourself in a situation where you have to choose between selling your body at Sea Point or continue watching the hunger on your children’s faces.’ (Langa, Female CSG, n.d.)

In sympathy with the above respondent, other interviewees articulated an important issue, which is the limited access the mothers have to social citizenship rights in the country and the high rates of inequality. Jobs acquired through the EPWP were reported to be helpful when they were available in both the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. However, because they are temporary, spanning an average of eight months at a time, interviewees and their families often found themselves living under the same conditions of poverty they were in prior to engagement in the programme. Thus, in this context, the EPWP is yet to deliver on its mandate to position people for stable employment better.

■ Care challenges

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, some lone mothers are faced with the difficulty of providing care for their children under arduous conditions where there is either minimal income or no income at all other than the CSG, which is, itself, intended to meet the needs of the child. The multi-faceted nature of childcare provision is such that lone mothers have to provide homes for their children; meet their financial education needs; and provide adequate clothing, food security, emotional nurture and support. In this sub-section, concluding remarks are made about the issues that confront lone mothers who are either in low-paid employment or unemployed in terms of providing adequate care for their children in the context of limited social security provision for their children (the CSG) and none for themselves. The discussion is framed around the subsidiary research question that was raised in Chapter 1: What are the main issues that arise for low-income lone mothers in relation to the provision of care for their children?

While the government has provided subsidies for ECD centres catering to children up to the age of five across all provinces, their limited number fails to meet the demands of all eligible children. Furthermore, not all of these centres provide the requisite level or quality of care necessary to enable mothers to pursue paid employment, as detailed in Chapter 5. Thus, similar to the discrepancy between the government’s constitutional mandate to provide social assistance for those who are unable to support themselves or their children and the actual social security provision policy,

there is a disjuncture between the country's legislative commitment which stipulates that children are not to be separated from their family unless through necessity proven by a legal process and the reality faced by lone mothers occasioned by the need to try to find work or engage in work, with inadequate childcare provision. The need to raise an income through labour market activity in the absence of adequate childcare provision in the case of low-skilled lone mothers often translates to such mothers taking up menial employment away from their children, thereby 'abandoning' childcare responsibilities in order to try as best they could to provide for their children.

Although the government encourages all adults of working age to be engaged in the labour market in order to be independent and lead lives of dignity, evidence shows that there is little difference in the quality of life for low-skilled lone mothers in menial employment and those who are not in work. In focus group interviews, for example, both lone mothers who were in full-time employment (such as domestic workers) and those who were unemployed suffered living environment deprivation with similar accounts of sharing a single shack as families. Within the same informal dwelling, one cooked, bathed, slept and raised her children. Of particular concern to lone mothers was the discomfort of adolescent children of different sexes being forced to share the same small space. As black Africans mostly live long distances from economic hubs like Cape Town in townships and underdeveloped rural locations, working lone mothers who lived with their children often reported that high transport costs to and from work undermined their already parsimonious earnings. As such, they also experienced food insecurity, and meeting the educational needs of children was said to be compromised. Because of the inadequacy of their childcare provision because of lack of income, focus group interviewees saw little hope that their children would have a better future. Blaming themselves, respondents were often despondent with reported low self-esteem. The following quotes were a strong emerging theme in focus group interviews both in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces:

'It was never my wish to abandon my children in order to work, it is depressing.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

'You feel like you've failed your own children, there is just no way for me to give them a better life because I have nothing.' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, n.d.)

Lone mothers also lamented the fact that their children missed out on being children as they were faced with poverty from a young age, some having to assume adult roles as they parented younger siblings:

'My children had to grow up very quickly so that they can cope with our poverty.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'[...] they were not children for long, my 13 year old girl became a mother at ten when I had to work.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2007)

A strong theme to emerge for lone mothers with children younger than the age of three years who found labour market activity too costly was the issue of missing their children's important developmental stages, such as when a child takes their first step or utters their first few words:

'It broke my heart that when I got home after a few months, I was working in Port Elizabeth, you see, my child was walking without my help or encouragement.' (Mncotsho Village, Female CSG, 2007)

'When my little girl started to speak, when she said her first words, I was not there. She didn't even know what to call me. I decided to abandon work rather than live with that, I wanted to witness my child's growth, we were becoming strangers.' (Nxarhun, Female CSG, 2007)

Some lone mothers with young children reported that they stopped working away from home as domestic workers as their children no longer recognised them. Children's susceptibility to abuse was also a grave concern some interviewees expressed when their children were without adult supervision. Overall, there was a preference amongst lone mothers to be able to care for their children themselves, particularly during the first two years of their children's lives. Lone mothers appealed that poverty reduction is imperative as most black African children, who are the majority of children in the country, are living in poverty compromising the country's future social capital.

■ Lone mothers, independence and dependency

This discussion is based on the research question, which is aimed at interrogating what independence and dependency mean to women with low income in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces. It will inform a component of the study's overarching research question: to what extent does social security provision for lone mothers promote *independence* or encourage *dependency*? In an attempt to consolidate findings on these issues, I will first focus on independence in the country's context from two perspectives: first from the government's standpoint, followed by interviewees' understanding of the concept. I then focus on the issue of dependency.

Chapter 6 demonstrated that in order to gain independence and autonomy in South Africa, able-bodied people of working age are expected, by the government, to be in full-time employment. The EPWP illustrates this conclusive remark. As discussed in Chapter 1, South Africa's former President, Thabo Mbeki, asserted that one of the main reasons the government embarked on the EPWP is to ensure that social grant recipients have systematic linkage to work opportunities so that they gain independence by 'graduating out of dependence on social grants'. In addition, Chapter 5 demonstrated that names given to projects under the

auspices of the EPWP strongly suggested that in order to be independent, one has to abandon indolence, which is evidenced by joblessness and reliance on social assistance and work for themselves in order to earn a living. As it has already been established in Chapter 1 because there is no social assistance for able-bodied people of working age in South Africa, it is recipients of the CSG that are at issue. This arguably means that all discourse on *independence* from social grants in the country is mainly directed at women with children as they form the bulk of CSG recipients.

Interviewees' perspectives on *independence* were similar in some respects, in that for lone mothers, independence meant financial autonomy which, in their daily lives, translates to the ability to adequately provide for themselves and their children. Indeed, most respondents expressed a desperate need for jobs that were understood to confer a degree of independence. However, this is not simple or straightforward. Firstly, in the absence of jobs, they were clear that some kind of social security assistance would confer independence. Although the CSG was seen to confer a degree of independence, findings show that it is impossible for it to create total financial independence as it is too small an amount. As will be discussed more below, some form of social security for unemployed caregivers would confer more independence than the current situation. Secondly, even in the context of available jobs, lone mothers struggled with an internal conflict that their children would be deprived of much-needed care. Thus, when asked if, there were jobs available, she would prefer to work (and be independent) or live on social assistance, a lone mother from Mdantsane demonstrated a typical struggle amongst lone mothers:

'Yes I would take the job and feed my children. But what is the point of working [...] of being independent ...] if I cannot fulfil the most important role in my life, motherhood?' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2007)

It can arguably be generalised that independence for low-income lone mothers means being free from the daily concerns of the different aspects of their poverty both as women, individually, and as mothers expected to provide for their children. In practice, however, low-income lone mothers are far from independent and have to depend, for their survival, on a number of sources of support. These include the CSG, remittances, borrowing from friends and family, and money lenders. As such, analysis in Chapter 6 demonstrated that in South Africa, there are acceptable and unacceptable forms of *dependency*. The important roles of borrowing from friends and neighbours as well as gifts from extended family, were recurring themes in focus group interviews. Respondents' view was that such loans and gifts were not seen to be a function of *dependency* by either government or society, but were seen as a sign of *ubuntu*. However, respondents pointed out that such forms of support can be complex; they were often demeaning, and they were uncomfortable with having to

depend on what amounted to patronage. Government and society, by condoning such dependence but eschewing reliance on social grants, are effectively applying double standards.

As demonstrated in Chapter 6, findings from both focus group interviews and the nationally representative SASAS show that there is little evidence of a dependency culture amongst low-income South Africans who live in households that are in receipt of social grants. In focus group interviews, there was overwhelming evidence showing that mothers' chances for finding and retaining work were impeded by the structural conditions of the labour market and the wider economy together with their childcare responsibilities, rather than their behavioural characteristics or a dependency culture. This is not to say that lone mothers do not *depend* on the CSG – it is clear that they rely on it as a regular income stream into the family; however, there was no indication that lone mothers were content to rely on the grant rather than aspire to appropriate work which takes into account their unpaid childcare responsibilities. Indeed, lone mothers reported that they went to great lengths in trying to secure employment, having to withstand difficult working conditions, such as 'live-in' domestic work and low wages. Such findings resonate with suggestions made in Chapter 2 that an underclass may indeed exist in South Africa; however, it is a structural underclass, not a moral one. Unemployment, limited education, social isolation, social disintegration, crime and poverty were all characteristics of the interviewees' lives. Compounding such adversity for low-income lone mothers was the concern that their predicament would be a blight on their children in the future and that their poverty would be transmitted inter-generationally, as they could not see a way out of it.

■ Lone mothers, dignity and social security

As indicated, this research study draws from focus groups that were carried out to explore the issue of attitudes to work and social security. Although *dignity* was not the focus of that study, it became evident in each focus group interview that the phenomena of poverty, social security and dependency could not be adequately investigated without giving the issue of dignity the importance that respondents felt it deserved. Triggered by most questions in the original focus group interview schedule, the subject of dignity permeated most lone mothers' accounts about the CSG, work, childcare provision and the issue of dependency. Thus, as the interviews were semi-structured, I was able to pursue this significant theme.

That poverty erodes dignity was an overwhelming theme in focus group interviews. As discussed in Chapter 1, the CSG is means-tested, and most respondents in the focus group interviews declared themselves

as being poor. Three prominent aspects of their experience of the indignity of poverty were housing deprivation, food insecurity and insufficient funds for their children's educational needs. Housing deprivation and over-crowdedness were a concern in the Western Cape province and one location in the Eastern Cape (Duncan Village) as respondents who lived in shacks struggled with not knowing when they would lose their homes and the danger such insecurity posed to their families:

'If it is not the rain and the Cape Town wind blowing you off your own home then it is a fire burning your shack down. This is our fourth shack. I'm telling you, there's no dignity when your shelter is being blown off while you're still in it with your own children. You feel like a fool, it's like somebody is playing sick joke with your life, it's humiliating and just too dangerous for the children.' (Khayelitsha, Female CSG, 2007)

Although family safety was a primary concern for respondents living in shacks, lone mothers also expressed the humiliation that the sudden loss of their homes induced. The indignity of hunger was also a recurring theme in focus group interviews. The mothers often felt that not being able to adequately nourish one's child erodes dignity not only in one's eyes but is a degrading experience in relation to their children's perception of them as mothers too. Interviewees reported that they found it extremely difficult and shameful when their children would ask for food and they could not provide it. It was the same case when dealing with the inability to meet children's school needs, such as school uniforms and fees. As reported in Chapter 7, children were often turned away from school, at times not being allowed to take examinations, because of a lack of school fees. This was especially difficult for lone mothers as they felt that their children's education was the key route out of poverty and degradation. However, as one lone mother from Makhaza said:

'A school is as good as the home. If you cannot pay school fees and your child keeps being humiliated and thrown out of school, then not much is going to come out of such a situation. It is one thing for me to be humiliated because I have nothing, but it kills me when it affects my child like this.' (Makhaza, Female CSG, 2006)

Interviewees expressed experiencing an erosion of dignity when they had to borrow money from their neighbours in order to survive and reported having felt even deeper humiliation when unable to honour their debts. Often, in cases where a family member became unexpectedly ill, interviewees reported that not having provision for such instances compounded the circumstance as one had to also deal with the embarrassment of borrowing money for transport costs to health care facilities and for treatment. In relation to the CSG, a considerable number of interviewees reported that they received degrading treatment from government officials administering the social grant. Such reports were mostly given by young, unmarried lone

mothers who said they were being accused of falling pregnant in order to access the CSG. On the whole, respondents expressed appreciation for the CSG; however, they felt strongly that because *reliance* on the CSG was misconstrued as *dependency*, they were stigmatised. Therefore, for low-income lone mothers, similar to the humiliation of poverty, such stigma attachment was reported to erode their sense of dignity.

Interviewees with work experience saw work as conferring a degree of dignity. However, work does not automatically confer dignity. It is worth noting that a number of interviewees from both rural and urban locations reported their work experiences as being erosive to their sense of dignity. Indeed, those who had been involved in prostitution said they found it humiliating and stigmatising:

'When you degrade your body for money, you stigmatise yourself.' (Langa, Female CSG, 2006)

Some found the experience of domestic work erosive to their sense of dignity:

'There can't be two mothers in a home, one of us has to become a child and if you're an employee you don't have a choice but to regress. It's embarrassing.' (Mdantsane, Female CSG, 2006)

In conclusion, the majority of interviewees were either unemployed or underemployed, emphasising the crucial role of social security in providing a semblance of dignity in the absence of adequate employment opportunities. The significance attributed to the CSG underscored its importance. However, the limited amount of the CSG implies that it can only partially contribute to promoting dignity for recipient families.

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This scholarly book aims to enhance a socio-scientific examination of social policy in South Africa, utilising interdisciplinary analytical tools that employ historical, political and socio-economic dimensions. This book presents research conducted within temporal and spatial spheres that are crucial to defining the social landscape of South Africa.

Empirical data is derived from two pivotal timeframes: a decade following the introduction of the child support grant in South Africa (in 2008) and the year 2021, influenced by the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This book presents research that is a blend of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This approach integrates diverse epistemologies to bolster the study and offer additional insights. The qualitative component aims to deconstruct social policy-related phenomena, such as family values, work attitudes, and social assistance to uncover possible causes of success or failure.

In addition, the study focuses on the perceptions of lone mothers in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces of South Africa, allowing for a detailed exploration of challenges in economic migration, given the significant population movement between the two provinces. The quantitative component is nationally representative and spans the qualitative primary research focus periods (2008, 2020 and 2021), demonstrating employment and unemployment trends from 2008 to 2021. Additional themes explored in this book include spatial inequalities, unpaid childcare, dignity and poverty.



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