

The Extended Family Support to Older Persons in The Context of Government Social Grant Provisioning in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The study's point of departure is based on the assumption that the parent-child tie is the primary source of support within families. Therefore, by using a qualitative research design, this study is performed to explore the financial support being received by elderly parents in receipt of Old Age Grant (OAG) from their adult children. The study has been conducted in Amathole District in South Africa and thirty participants have been selected for the study. The participants have been selected using purposive sampling and data is collected by semi-structured interviews. Evidence from the study reveal that a significant proportion of the elderly who are receiving the OAG have not been getting support from their children precisely because of their receipt of the grant. Nevertheless, other reasons emerged are ranged from unemployment of the adult children, poverty, and urban migration. However, there is an insignificant proportion of those who have been receiving support from their adult children. On the other hand, the frequency of support received has not been regular. It is found that a large proportion of the support received is occasional and rare in some instances. The study reveals that extended family support networks are no longer as strong as they use to be in the past in rural South Africa. It is therefore recommended that more formal services will have to counteract the informal care provided by family members, in particular those provided by adult children.

Keywords: Elderly parent; filial obligation; financial support; old age grant; adult children; reciprocity.

Introduction

Ageing reduces one's capacity to work and to earn. However, internationally, there has been a general increase in the number of older persons in all countries. According to the United Nations (UN) (2013), in the portrayal of the magnitude and speed of population of ageing in Africa from 1950 to 2013, the older population (60 years or over) has grown faster than the total population in all regions of Africa. It is estimated that the proportion of elder persons relative to the rest of the population has increased considerably (from 5.3% to a projected 10.0%) and expected to reach 19% by 2050. Furthermore the UN's (2013) report states that in 2025, the median age of the African population (21.8 years) will still be below the median age of the world population in 1950 (23.9 years). As a result the elders need to be taken care of financially, materialistic and health wise. In most societies of the world, including in Africa, responsibility for the material support of older people unable to take care of themselves through work or investments originally resided with their younger generational family members specifically their adult children. The societal attitude towards the duty of adult children to meet the needs of their aging parents has been conceptualized by Walker et al (1990) as filial responsibility. As a result, in the past, the family played an important role in determining the status and security of older people.

Nevertheless, in many countries, the state has either taken over some of the traditional family roles or shared these responsibilities when the family has difficulties bearing the burden of care. In South Africa, where the study was conducted, the government caters for the welfare of the elderly in the form of an Old Age Grant (OAG). South Africa was the first country to introduce a state pension in Africa and as argued by Pelham (2007), it boasts the longest history as a welfare state, although it has the shortest history of universal democratic elections. The state pension was instituted in 1928, carried forward by the Coalition Pact Government and reformed under the National Party's apartheid rule from 1948. The government of South African from 1994 onwards committed itself to redirecting resources towards social

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sectors and social spending in areas previously discriminated against on racial grounds.

The OAG is a social grant paid to an aged person in terms of Section 10 of the Social Assistance Act (No13 of 2004). At a value of R1260 per month it has, by developing country standards, generous eligibility thresholds and benefit levels (approximately double the per capita median income for Africans) (SASSA, 2015). Most of the beneficiaries are found in rural regions whilst a relatively high number are also either married or widowed (SASSA, 2015). The grant has been found to have many positive impacts in terms of nutrition and education of children staying in households where there is receipt of the grant (Tanga and Gutura, 2013). Despite the efforts by the South African government, it is recognized in this study that the parent-child tie is the primary source of support within families. Therefore, the aim of this study is finding out whether the adult children are still providing financial support to their elderly parents especially in the presence of the OAG in South Africa.

On the other hand, a growing body of research in the past years has focused on the importance of intergenerational transfers for the well-being of the ageing population in Africa (Kazianga, 2006; Ferrara, 2007; Onyebueke, 2008). As put forward by Defo (2010), intergenerational contract is basically a natural way of living in Africa where intergenerational transfers and family relationships are of vital importance for the health and well-being of individuals. Perceived reciprocity between ageing parents and their children has been associated with the exchange of intergenerational support, however, where there are imbalances; this has shown to have a negative effect on relationship quality (Schwarz, Trommsdorff, Albert & Mayer 2005). However, whereas the majority of older Africans continue to rely on material help from younger kin, indications are that the adequacy of such help has declined (Help Age International, 2014).

In summation, the previous studies had dealt extensively with issues regarding intergenerational relationships and patterns of family support; however, insufficient attention has been given to attitudes and expectations of elderly persons towards receiving financial support from adult children whenever their own resources, in this case OAG, are insufficient to meet their increasing needs in old age. The gap discovered will be covered by this article as it uncovers the nature and extent of support received by the OAG recipients and the attitudes and expectations, guided by the theory of reciprocity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the reciprocity theory developed by Falk and Fischbacher (2000). According to the theory, people reward kind and punish unkind actions. Kindness comprises both the consequences as well as the intention of an action. The theory captures the empirical finding that the same consequences of an action are perceived and reciprocated differently, depending on the underlying intention. However, reciprocity is thus strong that a person will feel obligated to return a favour in spite of whether they like the person who originally offered the favour and even if they did not want the favour. On the other hand, one problem of reciprocity is that it focuses on the unequal profit obtained from the concept of reciprocal concessions. The emotional burden to repay bothers some more than others, causing some to overcompensate with more than what was given originally. Nevertheless, this study therefore uses this theory to explain the obligation of the adult children to provide financial assistance to their aging parents as a reciprocal action of being taken care of when they were young and sent to school to get a good future. The theory also helped the study to explain the expectations of the elderly parents from their adult children which emanates from wanting to be rewarded for their role they played as parents.

STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

Area of Study

This study was carried out in Amathole District. The district is comprised of eight local municipalities. These municipalities intertwine with the other tourism routes located within the district, namely the Sunshine Coast Route, the Wild Coast Route, the Amathole Mountain Escape Route and the Friendly N6 Route. The economy of the district is dominated by Buffalo City, which comprises the coastal city of East London, King William's Town, Mdantsane and the

provincial administrative capital of Bhisho. The municipalities and their cities are as follows:

- Amahlathi Municipality (Cathcart, Stutterheim and Kei Road)
- Buffalo City Municipality (East London, King William's Town, Mdantsane and Bhisho)
- Great Kei (Kongga, Kei Mouth, Hagga-Hagga, Morgan's Bay and Chintsa)
- Mbhashe (Dutywa, Willowvale, Elliotdale)
- Mnquma (Butterworth, Nqamakwe, Centane)
- Ngqushwa (Peddie, Hamburg)
- Nkonkobe (Seymour, Fort Beaufort, Alice, Middledrift)
- Nxuba (Bedford, Adelaide)

According to the Amathole District Integration and Development Plan (ADIDP) (2012), social grants dependence is higher in Amathole (66%) than the average for the Eastern Cape (64%) as a whole. Only Nxuba (59%) falls below the district and provincial averages with the remaining local municipalities recording two thirds and more of households which depend on at least one social grant. This therefore means that the number of people who receive social grants is a clear indication of the number of people who earn a household income below a certain level which makes them to qualify to be beneficiaries of social grants.

South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) (2014) has indicated that the most common type of social grant being received by Amathole District residents is the Child Support Grant (18.8%), followed by Old Age Pension at 7.9%. With 32% of the Amathole District's population being children under the age of 14 and currently on Child Support Grant, this again alludes to a high dependency ratio in the region with a negative financial impact on the economically active population. In addition, in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) in Amathole, it has increased from 0.48 in 1995 to 0.53 in 2005, and remained constant at 0.53 until 2012 which is a medium HDI by international standards. The HDI is used as an indicator of development. The HDI is calculated by measuring the overall achievement in respect of the three basic dimensions of human development namely longevity (life expectancy), knowledge (literacy) and standard of living (income).

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research method to obtain the desired results. This use of the qualitative method in the study was to try to describe and interpret the participants' feelings and experiences in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

The target population for the study was the OAG recipients. The study sample was thirty recipients who were purposively selected. De Vos (2011) argue that during purposive sampling, a sample is chosen according to what the researcher considers to be typical units. The participants were purposefully selected to obtain rich data. The strategy was to select units that were considered to be the most common in the population under investigation in this case the OAG recipients.

Data Collection and Analysis

A semi structured interview guide was used to collect data from the participants and it was composed of open-ended questions in order to allow detailed opinions and perceptions of the participants. Furthermore, data collected were analysed using thematic analysis that is according to the themes that emerged.

Ethical Considerations

Regarding ethical considerations, firstly an ethical clearance certificate was obtained from the university to conduct the study. There was emphasis on the principle of voluntary participation in conducting the research. Informed consent was sought from the participants. The participants were protected from any harm in terms of stressful, embarrassing,

anxiety-producing or unpleasant situation. This was done by maintaining confidentiality among participants and assuring the participants that there were not in danger by participating. Also, the study maintained anonymity.

RESULTS

Biographical information of participants

Thirty recipients of the old age grant participated in this study and these consisted of twenty females and ten males. In terms of the age of the participants, the majority were between 60 and 65 years, nine were between 71-75 years old with eight between the ages of 66-70. Nevertheless, the least number of participants were found at the age of 76 or more. Regarding the racial distribution of the participants, twenty-seven were black and the remaining three were coloureds. Fifteen participants mentioned that they were married, eight were widows and seven never married. Furthermore, the majority of the recipients who made up nineteen participants mentioned that their households were headed by females whilst the remaining eleven were coming from male headed households.

The study further showed the educational qualifications of the participants. Most participants (15) had at least primary education with others distributed on either having secondary education (three) or high school (two). The results of the study indicated that housing types that the recipients were staying in. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants' types of houses.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by housing type

Type of house	Number of Participants
RDP	15
Village Hut	7
Four Roomed brick house	5
Widows House	3
Total	30

As illustrated in Table 1, most of the old age grant recipients (15) were staying in Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses followed by those who were staying in mud huts in the villages with a few (five) staying in bricked houses. Furthermore, the participants were asked to indicate the number of years they had been receiving the grant. The distribution of the participants is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Duration as a recipient of OAG

Number of Years	Number of Participants
0-5	10
6-10	11
11 or more	8
Total	30

The results of the study as shown in Table 2 indicate that the least number of participants had been receiving the grant for more than eleven years. Most of the participants indicated that their duration was between 6 and 10 years. Those that had received the grant for five years and below were ten. The participants were further asked whether they had any other source of income besides the OAG. A significant number of twenty-four mentioned that they had no other source of income whilst the remaining six had. Additionally, in terms of being satisfied with the money from the OAG only six were satisfied whilst the majority of twenty-four were not satisfied.

Theme One: Living arrangements of elderly people

In order to understand the family setup of the recipients, they were asked about the number of people that were staying in the same households as them. It was found out that most recipients did not stay alone. Thirteen recipients indicated that they had between 4-6 people who were staying in their households. These were followed by twelve who stayed with less than three people. The results also showed that five participants were staying in household with more than seven people. Among the people that were Table 3 shows the number of children that the recipients indicated that they were staying with.

Table 3: Number of children staying in the households of OAG recipients

Number of children	Number of Participants
0	4
1-3	16
4 and more	10
Total	30

The study also highlighted that the participants had other adults who were staying in the same household with them. The majority had 1-3 adults who were staying with them.

Theme Two: Financial Support from Extended Family

The study sought out to find out about the nature and extent of support that was received by the old people from their extended families. Firstly, the participants were asked whether they expected any financial assistance from their children, grandchildren or family members. The majority of the participants (20) confirmed that they expected financial assistance. The following were some of the reasons cited by participants:

There are other siblings that are still at school so I need money from the older siblings that are working for me to be able to pay for their school fees. (70 year old woman, rural dweller).

I believe that I should get assistance because when I was working I supported them now that I am retired it's their turn to look after me. They should provide me with financial assistance because I am staying with their children. (68 year old woman, urban dweller)

The cost of living is too high and I cannot afford to buy most of the things that I like from this OAG. (72 year old man, urban dweller)

However the remaining ten mentioned that they did not expect financial assistance. Some mentioned that their families were too poor and their children were unemployed, some were still studying. Nevertheless some participants said that they were receiving the grant so they did not expect to be financially helped. Some of the participants said that:

The money I get from the government is enough to support myself financially because I stay alone so I do not expect more financial assistance from my children because they are unemployed. (70 year old woman, rural dweller)

The money from the grant helps me a lot and I understand that my children have their own families to take care of. Things are hard these days so I do not expect to get more money from them. (69 year old man, rural dweller)

My children are still studying at university therefore I do not expect financial assistance from them now but they

should help me clean the house and do other house chores. (65 year old woman, urban dweller)

Furthermore the study asked the participants if they were receiving any financial support from their elder children. Majority of the recipients mentioned that they were not receiving any support. Several reasons arose which included the children being unemployed. Significantly many respondents argued that their children did not support them because of their receipt of the OAG. One participant was quoted saying that,

I do not receive anything because my children say that government gives me money so I should use that money for my needs. (72 year old man, rural dweller)

The other participant mentioned that,

The only help that they give me is to take care of me when I am sick, financially it is on and off because they say that I have money from the grant. (68 year old woman, urban dweller)

The participants were further asked to give a comparison regarding the time they were not receiving the grant and the time when they started receiving the grant, if there was any difference in receiving the support from the elder children. Majority (18) mentioned that there was a negative difference; five said there was no difference whilst the remaining seven said that there was never any help before or after. Among those that mentioned that the children had stopped supporting them, one participant said:

My elder children were able to send money home before I started receiving the grant but now they say that I have money they no longer send the money. (75 year old man, rural dweller)

My children still send me money even though I have recently started receiving the grant. So there is no change for now. I do not know maybe in future they will change. (62 year old woman, urban dweller)

I have never received any help from my children before I started receiving the grant even now when I am receiving the grant. (69 year old woman, rural dweller)

The opinions of the participants were explored in terms of what they thought about the role of their elder children or family members in taking care of their parents. All the thirty participants voiced out that children should take care of their aging parents. Some of the answers provided include the following:

The role of the family is to take care of each other. Children should support the elderly as the elderly supported them in their youth in order to receive blessings of God. (64 year old woman, rural dweller)

Yes I believe they should assist especially those who can. This is so because the elderly parents cannot work anymore and some do not have pension from their previous jobs. The OAG is not enough therefore the children should support the parents. (72 year old woman, urban dweller)

The participants were asked about the sufficiency of the OAG in the absence of the financial assistance from their children. Most participants indicated that without other sources of income relying on the OAG alone made them to live under poor conditions. Several reasons were highlighted which include high medical costs, high food prices they were not sufficient. Some of the participants mentioned that:

The OAG is not enough to maintain our health and needs therefore we deserve additional assistance. (70 year old man, urban dweller)

In my case the OAG is simply not sufficient because I use it for the whole family, I am staying with my children and my grandchildren. It does not last for the whole month. I need assistance from my older children. (68 year old woman, rural dweller).

Theme Three: Attitudes of elderly parents on receiving financial support from their adult children

Another objective of the study is to find out about the attitudes of the elderly in relation to children giving them financial assistance. Therefore, the participants were asked about their opinions about the role of family especially their adult children in supporting the elderly. All the thirty participants were of the opinion that children should support their parents. Some of the reasons are highlighted in the responses below:

Children should support their parents because they raised them and put them to school for a better future. (70 year old man, urban dweller)

Yes children have to take care of their parents in every way of supporting them either financially or emotionally. (60 year old woman, rural dweller)

I think that children that are working have a responsibility to take care of their parents. (65 year old woman, rural dweller)

Furthermore the participants were asked whether they believed that by sending their children to school they should be helped when they are old. Most participants indicated that by sending the children to school they will be giving the children a brighter future however, they expected to be taken care of in return. Some of the participants mentioned that:

Children should help because the time I am sending them to school I want them to help me financially. (62 year old woman, rural dweller)

I believe that by sending my children to school it is an opportunity that tomorrow they will look after me showing that they are grateful. (65 year old woman, urban dweller)

In conclusion, the study found out from the participants whether they viewed the OAG as a barrier to receiving financial assistance from their children. The majority of the participants mentioned that it was a barrier whilst a minority highlighted that their children were unemployed and poor hence they could not support them. However among those that argued that the OAG had reduced chances of them being offered support by their children, some said that:

Yes it has made my children stop because they now think that I have a lot of money. (70 year old man, urban dweller)

My children always tell me that I have OAG so they cannot give me money. (65 year old woman, rural dweller)

Truly speaking the OAG has reduced chances of my children helping me because they say it is enough to take care of me for the whole month. (75 year old man, rural dweller)

Yes, because while I was not receiving the grant I was getting money transfers from my child but since I started receiving the grant he stopped sending money. (68 year old woman, urban dweller)

DISCUSSION

The major objective of the study was to explore the nature and extent of financial support received by elderly people who are receiving an Old Age Grant in South Africa's rural areas. More theoretically, one can think of the receipt of financial/material assistance as a matter of kinship availability, functional limitation, and an economic need. Turning 60 years old for women and turning 65 for men does not automatically turn someone into a feeble, needy elder deserving of assistance from kin and community. Many older men and women are still married with dependent never-married children; some are still working, and report themselves to be in good health. The question for this study is whether, as one or more of these factors mentioned above changes, the elderly parents receiving the Old Age Grant provided by the government receive more assistance. Furthermore, the study explored the attitudes and expectations of the parents from their adult children in terms of financial support.

Carapas (2011) argues that in South Africa, as in many other developing regions, the extended family is a long established institution which endows its members with an economic support to meet their basic needs like food, shelter, and clothing, and a wide circle of relatives on whom to fall back in times of crisis, unemployment, sickness, poverty, old age, and bereavement as put forward by African Union in 2004. Certainly, the African Union asserts that the continent's development thus far can be largely attributed to the strength of the family as large families were traditionally a source of labour and prosperity, and the extended family ensured that poor families were generally supported by the better-off. However, is this still the case in the rural areas of South Africa?

The findings of the study highlighted that the participants mentioned that since the receipt of the OAG the financial assistance from the children ceased to exist. Therefore this means that as far as the position of elderly parents is concerned, intergenerational relationships have changed fundamentally. One would argue that the OAG has become a substitute or an excuse for children for not taking care of their aging parents despite their filial responsibility. However, there is a minority who mentioned that they still received financial assistance but they were not satisfied as it was rare. If we want to do away with the notion of making OAG an excuse, one might argue, on the other hand, that after the economic crises of the 1990s, which affected the whole world, for the majority of older adults it became difficult to pay everyday expenses. Many of the older adults now have to rely on the financial help of children, who themselves are confronted with very high levels of unemployment (in South Africa the unemployment rate is 27.7%), decreasing income levels and increasing housing costs (Robila, 2004; Defo, 2010; Statistics South Africa 2017). This state of affairs heightens tension and the escalation of poverty with its many manifestations such as its relationship to crime as described by al-Shudaifat and Khamesh (2016) in Jordan.

It was also noted that many adult children had migrated to urban areas in search for employment which then caused the long distance to affect the flow of financial assistance to the parents. When looking at the history of apartheid and labour migration, the African families were systematically divided by recruiting men and women to the centres for employment (Boon et al., 2010). As a result, Nyasani et al., (2009) argue that traditional family roles are being reversed as older family members take responsibility for the physical and psychosocial needs of children, instead of being cared for, they are supplying the care (Bohman et al., 2007). Therefore, urbanization may be eroding extended family obligations. But, Morrison (2006) found out that migration resulted in rising remittances as well as other forms of transfers (material, emotional, practical support, staying in touch and sharing knowledge and skills) from family members living and working abroad. Even Alber et al. (2008) argued that when blood relations are separated geographically, family ties generally remain intact emotionally and financially. Also, the results from a study by Stewart (2015) suggest that interaction is maintained despite changes in socioeconomic status among family members. Tangwe (2016) also highlights the need for family staying intact, which is good for children's academic performance. Accordingly, this might be reciprocated in the near future if poverty permits. In the light of the above assertions then the only reason left for not providing for the elderly parents comes back to the receipt of OAG.

Regarding the attitudes and expectations of the elderly parents, firstly, the majority of the participants claimed that financial assistance depends on the needs of the elderly parent and the ability of the adult child to provide financial

assistance that is being employed. Both these claims essentially reflect the theory of reciprocity whereby adult children are obliged to provide their parents with support when their parents have insufficient resources for their needs and when their adult children can afford it because the parents once took care of them. As explained by Ugiagbe and Edegbe (2017), the rich, poor, young and old depend on the family for social security especially at old age. Secondly, the majority of elderly parents viewed giving financial support to parents as an obvious and ultimate obligation that should be done by adult children. These findings mean that elderly people think that adult children should be highly obliged to their elderly parents in terms of giving them money whenever they have insufficient resources to meet their own needs despite the state intervention. The results of the study concur with the conclusion reached by Wicclair back in 1990 that children owe their parents varying amounts of gratitude which can be expressed by providing care for them as they age, yet there exists no standard for identifying the content of binding gratitude-based duties. The idea that adult children owe their parents something in return can be viewed as a common sense moral belief as argued by Van den Hoven (2006:44), which has been passed on through generations “that goes without saying”.

Majority of the participants also highlighted that they sent their children to school hoping that they would get a better future and in return they would take care of them. This popular idea of why children have obligations towards their elderly parents is that of reciprocity (Blieszner and Hamon 1992; Dykstra and Fokkema 2007) The adult children owe something to their elderly parents because their parents have done much for them. The findings of this study suggest that the elderly view financial support within the family as an exchange process and as symmetrical and reciprocal relations, in which adult children and their elderly parents assist each other whenever one side needs help and the other side can afford it, thus confirming the reciprocity theory.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study present strong evidence to support the fact that extended family support networks are no longer as strong as they used to be in the past in rural South Africa. Evidence from the study reveals that a significant proportion of the elderly who are receiving the OAG are not getting support from their children precisely because of their receipt of the grant. Even though other reasons emerged which range from unemployment of the families, poverty and migration.

There are an insignificant proportion of those that are receiving support from the children. Nevertheless, the frequency of support received has not been regular. It was found out that a large proportion of the supports received are actually occasional and rare in some instances. It was also noted that even the frequency of the support received is also affected by the proximity of the elderly that is being left in the rural areas and the children migrating to urban areas. Furthermore among the few who receive the support a small proportion of the elderly find the support received adequate. This can be explained as largely being due to the high cost of living and large intergenerational families to take care of. This has a lot of implications for the overall well-being of the elderly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study may have implications for social policy makers and service provision for those elderly people who are sitting on the poverty line or slightly above it and cannot afford to meet their basic needs. The study has emphasized the importance of understanding of elderly attitudes and expectations about intergenerational family obligations. In this light, more formal services will have to counteract the informal care provided by family members, in particular that provided by adult children. The question that must then be addressed is who should cater for these additional expenses between the state, the family and the elderly persons themselves. This issue, however, will have to be addressed on a macro level policy and may have implications for service provision. As a result, more men and women being recruited in the labour force may accordingly improve their socioeconomic status when they retire and enable them to support themselves through pensions without being financially dependent upon others. These socioeconomic changes may in the future affect elderly people attitudes and expectations in respect to receiving financial support from adult children.

LIMITATIONS

- Firstly, it is recognized that this research is based upon qualitative data from a small sample, and that cross-sectional data are needed to further understand the causal and temporal relations between financial support behaviour and the motives behind it among adult children in South Africa.
- Secondly, the intergenerational support studied in this investigation are one sided in that the views of adult children about the support have not been examined. Additionally, the study focused on only one set of family relationships that is parent-child relations. It is believed that broadening the scope of analysis to other relationships would therefore create a more complete description of the ways in which systems of family support to elderly people actually work. However it is recognized that the parent-child tie is the primary source of support within families but the study ignores the value to older persons of other kin relationships such as grandchildren, siblings, and their own parents.

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