

Foster Parents' View On The Sufficiency Of Foster Care Grant In Meeting The Basic Needs Of Recipients In Alice, South Africa

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Abstract

Initially, foster care grant was instituted to assist children removed from their families of origin and placed in alternative care due to their vulnerability, neglect and abuse. Foster care grant forms part of the child protection system and it is issued to children who require care and protection and are deprived of proper upkeep. The aim of the study was to explore the view of foster parents on the sufficiency of the child support grant in meeting the basic needs of beneficiaries. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Moreover, in-depth interviews were used to collect data with purposively selected participants. The study sample consisted of twenty-five participants. The finding of this study revealed that the grant is sufficient in providing for the nutritional, educational and sartorial needs of beneficiaries. The study concluded that the grant is sufficient but could be increased to provide funds for some additional stuffs like educational policies, which is essential in securing a decent future for children. Some recommendations made after conducting this study are that social workers should be more involved in the lives of foster families; another recommendation is that government employs more social workers to increase availability of support to foster families.

Keywords:

Sufficiency, basic needs, foster care grant, beneficiaries.

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Introduction and Background

After apartheid era, the democratic government introduced multiple programmes in aid of assisting formally disadvantaged citizens deprived of many rights and denied access to resources in the South Africa. Government came up with ways of reducing poverty such as RDP houses and social welfare system. Social Welfare aimed at empowering the disadvantaged groups across South Africa through the disbursement of social grants to individuals in need (Bonti-Ankomah, 2011). Post-apartheid programs aimed to reduce inequality and alleviate the social-economic impact of poverty. As one of the programmes that were introduced in the country social welfare catered for disadvantage societies due to an increasing number of unemployment in the country (Bonti-Ankomah,2011).

Some of the challenges associated with foster care placements include 'the social work profession, which is mainly responsible for safeguarding children, is pressured because of a shortage of human and other resources. This hampers the quality of foster care services because professional responsibility cannot be taken for all the children in the statutory system' (Böning& Ferreira, 2013:2). The goals of foster care namely 'child protection and development in a safe and healthy environment, rehabilitation, and family reunification' (Children's Act 2005:202) and other more permanent types of alternative care or adoption cannot be properly reached because of these challenges. 'Seeing that foster care practice in South Africa is primarily influenced by a legal discourse, these challenges also have implications in terms of the fulfilment of stipulations of the Children's Act, children's rights, social work ethics and values such as professional accountability and social justice' (Böning& Ferreira, 2013:2). Furthermore, foster children often lack strong cultural identity, which contributes to mental health resilience, higher levels of social well-being, and improved coping skills, among other benefits. Foster children face

and deal with trauma, changing home environments, and lower levels of social well-being than the general population. Often, due to this disruption, former foster children have lower cultural identity strength than those who did not experience foster care (Waniganayake, Hadley, Johnson, Mortimer, McMahon & Karatasas, 2019).

According to Rogan and Reynolds (2019) as employment rate increases the prices of food increases as well, while the average household income remains insufficient to provide for basic needs (average household in South Africa is R2 500 per month). Therefore, social welfare introduced the foster care grant provided to children separated from their biological parent(s) due to abuse, neglect or death (Rogan & Reynolds, 2019). Foster parents receive the grant, which enables them to care for foster children. South Africa's current system of social assistance provides a sense of relief to the well-being of vulnerable children and their families (Rogan & Reynolds, 2019). However, the extent of poverty and unemployment undermine the benefits of the existing grants. Most families use the grants for all the household essentials, as the grant is the only source of income (Hall & Proudlock, 2011). The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How effective is foster care grant in meeting the basic needs of beneficiaries?
2. Which supplies do foster parents use the grant for mostly?

Literature Review

This section of the article covers in-depth literature on the rights of foster children, responsibilities of foster parents and the usefulness of the foster care grant.

The rights of foster children

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996 section 28 (3) describe child as “a person under the age of eighteen years”. A foster child is a child placed in alternative care and raised by somebody who is not his or her biological parent.

The Children's Act No 38 of 2005 section 150(1) (a) to (i) states “to identify a child as someone in need of care and protection. The child should be under eighteen years of age, have been abandoned, abused, neglected or orphaned, deprived of any resources for upkeep, and begging for a living on the street. Furthermore, the child can be dependent on illegal substances and without any support to acquire treatment for addiction, have been exploited or exposed to abuse. Lastly, the child will be in physical or psychological threat when returned to biological family.”

Foster children like any other child have the equal rights to any other child in the country. Section 28 of the Constitution of South Africa 108 of 1996 focusses on human rights and provides a systematic outline of children's rights. This does not mean that other rights cherished in our constitution do not apply to them. The following paragraphs from section 28 of the Constitution protects children from being victimised and exploited they are as follow “every child has the right:

- b) To family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment;
- c) To basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services;
- d) To be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation;
- e) To be protected from exploitative labour practices;

- f) Not to be required to perform work or provide services that,
- g) Are inappropriate for a person of that child's age; or
- h) Place at risk the child's well-being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development.”
(The Constitution Of The Republic Of South Africa 108, 1996).

Responsibilities of foster parents in providing for the need of beneficiaries

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 section 188 (1) as cited in Nsthongwanaand Tanga (2018) stipulates that “a foster parent of a child has those responsibilities and rights in respect of the child as set out in the order of children's court, placing the child in the care of the respective foster parent”. The foster parent is responsible for providing a secure and stable home for their children. However, Rhodes, Orme and Mcurdy (2013) argue that the absence of unanimity between social service professionals around the duties of foster parents has created role confusion amongst foster parents. According to Rhodes et al(2013), welfare organisation have not approved uniform descriptions of foster parenting. Rhodes et al.(2013) mention that references for refining enlistment, training and preservation of foster homes and assuring quality care for children requires the provision of clear guidelines to foster parents on their role and responsibilities.

Foster parents have a distinct and an important role that integrates family and agency responsibility, foster parents follow roles, which are given to them by the welfare system and they assist children dealing with issues such as separation, attachment and uncertainty (Rhodes et al, 2013). According to (Ntshongwana and Tanga, 2018) in the process of caring for vulnerable children, foster parents determine the child's outcome and foster parents

have a significant role of caring and nurturing the children(Rogan & Reynolds, 2019).

NtshongwanaandTanga(2018) stipulate foster parents have substantial roles in providing care, support and supervision in aid of facilitating holistic development of children in their care. Ntshongwanaand Tanga(2018) wrote, “the family should provide unwavering support and maintain family stability in order to facilitate the emotional, physical and spiritual growth of children. Furthermore, foster parents have a great contribution and impact in the provision of family-based care that they have complicated histories which sometimes lead to troubled and challenging behaviours”.

The foster care placement process

Foster care placements require time-consuming and expensive investigations by social workers as well as statutory procedures in the Children's Court. A foster care plan must be compiled after the placement with an outline of the foster care supervision services that must be rendered for the duration of the placement. The foster care order must be revised every two years in terms of Section 159 to apply for renewal or discharge of the child. The new amended Children's Act (No. 41 of 2007) allows, in terms of Section 186, the option of a long-term placement if it can be proven that family reunification is not a possibility. In such cases the child stays in foster care until the age of 18 years. The statutory renewal of the order every two years is no longer expected, although the social worker has to assess continuously if the placement is still in the best interests of the child. This possibility allowed by the Children's Act can bring relief in the workload of the already overloaded social work practice in terms of statutory intervention and report writing.

Usefulness of the child support grant

Hall and Woolard (2012) found the disbursement of social grants in South Africa considerably reduces poverty particularly amongst low-income homes. Although it is a very small benefit, the “foster care grant effectively buffered poor households against shocks, including the worst effects of the global recession of 2009/10” (Hall & Woolard, 2012). According to Neves, Samson, van Niekerk, Hlatshwayo and du Toit (2009:23) “social grants inclusive the foster care grant create potential economic benefits for instance, it increases beneficiaries' abilities to cope with potential risks and insecurities, and lessens recipients' exposure to shocks. The provision of social grants has generally resulted in positive outcomes concerning improving the lives of vulnerable and poor people”. Halland Proudlock (2011) found the foster care grant has developmental effects for children as it advances children's access to nutrition, education and other basic human rights, and health care facilities. Patel (2012) mentions that the majority of foster care grant beneficiaries specified that they used the grant money to purchase food stuff, pay school fees and purchase school uniforms. For many, the foster care grant is a vital source of income as Patel(2012) identifies areas such as the Northern Cape and Limpopo where, “overall, the grant made up 40 percent of household income and closer to half of household income”. Barrientos, Møller, Saboia, Lloyd-Sherlock and Mase (2013) highlight that the grant potentially indorses labour, as foster parents invest in education of their children, which ultimately increases the changes of foster children being employed, and stable after their placement is dissolved (Patel & Hochfeld, 2011).

Methodology

This section of the paper briefly describes the research design, study area, population, sample and sampling strategy, instruments of data collection, the method of data analysis, and the ethical

issues that were considered in conducting the study.

Research Design

Constructed on the phenomenon that was explored, the research design adopted was exploratory in nature; hence, the study adopted a qualitative research method. When a qualitative approach is used, the participants share their experiences and understanding without any judgement from the researchers. The type of qualitative research design chosen was an exploratory case study. The case was defined as the views of foster parents on the sufficiency of the foster care grant in meeting the basic needs of beneficiaries in Alice Town. An exploratory case study simply means that the exploration and description of the case occurs through detailed and in-depth methods from multiple sources that are rich in context (Denzin and Lincoln 2012). The researchers do not embrace any information that could change the meaning of anything expressed by a participant. A qualitative approach affords the researcher an opportunity to learn and understand diverse social and cultural contexts. Qualitative data takes the form of comprehensive explanations and experiences of the phenomenon investigated by individuals. These data could include interview transcripts, images, and audio and audio-visual recordings (Denzin and Lincoln 2012).

Study area

The study was conducted with foster parents in Alice Town, Eastern Cape Province. There are nine provinces in South Africa amongst which the Eastern Cape has the second highest percentage of foster care grant beneficiaries after Limpopo Province.

Population, Sample and Sampling Strategy

The population for this study consisted of all foster parents in Alice Town. The purpose of a sample is to permit the researcher to conduct a study using individuals from the population, to gather authentic results and to ultimately reach conclusions that will relate to the population as a whole. It is very similar to the process of give and take. The population “gives” the sample, and then it “takes” conclusions from the outcomes obtained from the sample (Strydom 2011). Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used to select the foster parents who had experience of the foster care system. The foster parents who participated in the study were selected from one residential area in Alice called Hillcrest where foster care is common due to the high numbers of Human Immunodeficiency (HIV) related deaths of biological parents. Furthermore, the researcher chose these participants with the assistance of Department of Social Development because they lived in close vicinity to each other, their foster children attended the same schools and they were affluent in English. Thus implying that the selected participants were knowledgeable and informed. Participants varied in terms of age, ethnicity, education, employment status, marital status and experience in fostering children. Hence, the sample of this study consisted of twenty-five foster parents. The inclusion criteria that were used to select participants stipulated that participants had to be knowledgeable on foster care and be fully able to express their feelings and experiences.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection is an important aspect of research. The data was collected through in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews allow depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewees' responses. As

the previous point explains, in-depth interviews have the advantage of enabling researchers to elicit richly detailed responses from participants through open-ended questions and to allow participants to express their views more generously (Denzin and Lincoln 2012). Punch (2013) further explains that information acquired through in-depth interviews can be compared, as all the participants are asked to express their feelings and experiences about the same general themes.

Thematic analysis as termed by Rubin and Rubin (2012) was used to analyse interviews. The process included reading the interview transcriptions after transcribing the recordings and coding the descriptive notions. The researchers analysed the data thematically by organising individual notions into categories that shared similar notions. This was accomplished by reading through the different interviews and recognising individual ideas that share the same meaning and by using quotations from the participants to confirm themes identified. These concepts were composed into themes that were articulated based on concepts that emerged out of the interviews conducted.

Ethical considerations

Punch (2013: 60) has emphasized the importance of ethical considerations, “researchers have two basic categories of ethical responsibility: responsibility to those, both human and nonhuman, who participate in a project; and responsibility to the discipline of science to be accurate and honest in the reporting of their research.” The participants selected to participate in the study did so voluntarily there was no form of coercion. The participants were assured of no harm as they were informed that they are not obliged to answer questions that make them uncomfortable and also that they may leave at any time when they feel uncomfortable.

Findings and Discussion

This section elucidates themes and sub-themes derived from the study findings. The participants were identified as FP, which is short for foster parent.

Theme 1: The effectiveness of the foster care grant in meeting the basic needs of beneficiaries

Sub-theme 1.1: Nutrition

According Abraham Maslow who is an American psychologist in his hierarchy of needs states that food is one of seven basic needs, which is available to human species to provide nutrition support for organisms and promote nourishment and growth. All twenty-five foster parents agreed that food is the basic need of the foster children; hence, a huge amount of money is spent on buying food.

FP 12 stated, “I spend one thousand rand on food and there are other things like rent that I have to pay”.

FP 5 said, “I buy food with most of the grant money as the two boys I care for were extremely neglected when they came to live with me. The children were undernourished and this concerned as I was aware that it could hamper their progress in school”.

“Young children, whose brains are rapidly developing, need a nutrient-dense diet to help them as they process the world around them. Without the right nutrients, toddlers and pre-schoolers might struggle to develop the skills to maintain concentration, which becomes increasingly important, as they get older. The research is endless: fish, broccoli and berries are just a few foods shown to improve cognitive functions and memory. Conversely, 'anti-nutrients' such as refined sugar, bad fats and additives can negatively affect a child's mind, even making them feel hazy and less

focused” (Bevans, Sanchez, Teneralli and Forrest., 2011:424).

FP 22said, “I spend more money on groceries especially during school holidays because children are around all day during that period”.

FP 15mentioned, “I buy groceries like flour, sugar and maize every month. During school holidays if the children performed well as per indication in their report cards I spoil them with sweet treats”.

Hendricks and Tanga (2019) found that studies of fostered children reflect nutrition disadvantage among fostered children as a health risk. This due to unequal treatment by the foster parents however, in recent years social workers are more active in monitoring the intake of nutrition of foster children and punish parents who fail to comply in providing proper nutrition to children (Nsthongwana&Tanga, 2019)

Sub-theme 1.2: Academic Needs

According to Ayasse (2005), foster children often experience a variety of social and emotional problems that stem from maltreatment in foster homes; these problems have a negative influence on their ability to progress in school. From the findings of this study, some foster parents agreed that education is important to all children, as it will enable them a successful life in the future. Whilst, a few foster parents were of the opinion that though education is important it does not guarantee success as there are many unemployed graduates in South Africa and the rates of unemployed graduates keep on rising annually.

FP 3stated, “I pay for the child's transport to school, buy school uniform each year and buy stationery”.

FP 25reported, “I encourage my child to do homework every day after school. I am very strict when it comes to leisure time, no television unless I am shown that all

homework is done”.

FP13 mentioned, “I give my child lunch money everyday day even though there is a feeding scheme at school I know that children often get hungry and cannot function of an empty stomach”.

International evidence highpoints the significance of education for long-term welfare, and this is mainly true for children and youth in foster care. While some youth in foster care do well in education, many (a majority) fare less well, achieving less, and exiting the education system earlier. There are complex explanations for this, including the effects of earlier disadvantages and stresses. These may lead to lower self-confidence or aspirations, and lower prospects on the part of others (Brady and Gilligan, 2018).

Sub-theme 1.3: Recreational Activities

Recreational activities are activities performed by students that fall outside the realm of the formal curriculum of school. Many of the foster parents agreed that is important for children to be involved in recreational activities and it creates balance in the lives of children. According to Hendricks and Tanga (2019), the period of advisability for partaking in recreational activities forms part of an open deliberation within the academic settings, the family and social setting. However, recreational activities are important for the development of social skills in children.

FP 24 stated, “I do pay for the child's school trips because I think it is good for them to go and learn outside the classroom”.

FP 16 stated, “It is important to pay for their sport trips so that they do not feel left out”.

FP 10 motioned, “Children need balance in life, I believe that sporting activities is a form of exercise

which releases endorphins in the brain and makes them happy”.

On many occasions, families that have their foster children involved in recreational activities find that it is beneficial to the children. Hendricks and Tanga (2019) argue that the participation of children in after-school activities do not always lead to successful results, some children suffer consequences of such as failure, lack of concentration and fatigue. Ntshongwana and Tanga (2018) concur the findings of the study as majority of parents across the globe view recreational activities as a good way to keep children out of trouble.

4.3.2 Theme 2: The identification of necessities that foster parents use the grant for

Sub-theme 2.1: Academic Investment

Every foster parent should consider the future of the child and invest for their academic, which is, saving money so that the child can be able to further his or her studies. Academic investment is defined as “an investment or saving for your child's education using unit trusts gives you control over your investment where you decide how to invest, when to access the money and what to do with it, based on the total years of education you are planning for” (Cichello, 2015:1889).

FP 2 said, “I do invest one hundred and fifty rand monthly as I was told by the magistrate and social worker during the placement and review process and I don't usually skip a month as it is debited by the bank”.

FP 3 stated that, “I save one hundred rand monthly but when a child need money for school purpose I with draw some money and continue with savings”.

FP4 stated that, “I don't save every month there are months where the money is insufficient so I don't save

but I make sure I don't skip more than two months to put some money in savings for the future of my two girls save”.

FP 23 said, “I was mandated by the court to save one hundred and fifty rand per month with an Old Mutual Trust to ensure that the future of my foster child is secured”.

When it comes to academic investment for foster children, most foster children who are close bound to their foster parents are motivated towards education and are given similar human capital investment as biological children (Hall & Proudlock, 2011). In contrast, those children in the foster care system who do not have a close bond hardly enrol for college or universities (Hall & Proudlock, 2011).

Sub-theme 2.2: Sartorial

Sartorial refers to clothing that falls in the basic needs of a child. The wearing of clothes is mostly regulated to human beings and is a feature of all human societies and it serves many purposes. All participants agreed that it is important to purchase clothes for the children in foster care.

FP 4 mentioned, “I do not afford to buy new clothes for each season for my foster child however, I sent my daughter who works in one of the retail shops in Cape Town money to buy clothes for everyone in the house in December.”

FP 25 said, “I depends on lay bys which I makes twice a year, for summer and winter that makes it much better and more affordable.”

FP 14 stated, “I buy clothes for all my children once a year in December, during the year I buy as the need arises depending of the funds I have available”.

Parents understand that each and every child deserves to have new clothes in both seasons of the year which is summer and winter but at times it is difficult to maintain that due to the inadequate funds of foster care grant to spend on clothes but they do try by all means to make those clothes available(Hall & Woolard, 2012).

Sub-theme 2.3: Funeral Insurance

According to (Neinaber & Preiss, 2006:5) funeral insurance is described as “an undertaking by one party, the insurer to another policyholder to provide in consideration of predetermined contribution usually payable at predetermined regular interval, a funeral service or cash back or combination of both on the death of the life assured in respect of whom the policyholder has an insurable interest”. Regardless of the aggregate of contributions, the insurer may have received in respect thereof at the time of the death of the life assured. All participants agreed that this is a necessity for all South Africans not only foster parents.

FP 3 mentioned,“Although at times funeral policy will not deduct the monthly premium on the exact date of the grant payment, I make sure that I do not take that money *because* I do not want the policy to lapse”.

FP 5said,“The world has become so unsafe in recent years hence, I feel that all people should have funeral policies”.

FP 2 states,“I feel relieved every time when the policy deducts the premium and I wish that the funeral policy could be the first to deduct it's money monthly”.

“Funeral (burial) insurance is one of the most common micro insurance policies sold in Africa. Funeral insurance is important because it pays for the cost of funeral arrangements, thus forming an important part of protection for low-income workers” (Ramsay and Arcila, 2013:64).

CONCLUSIONS

Foster care parents attempt to provide for the basic needs of children in majority of cases the grant is just enough to cover the basic needs of beneficiaries. Foster parents were of the view that the grant could be increased to provide funds for some additional stuffs like educational policies, which is essential in securing a decent future for children.

Like any other parent, foster parents want their children to have a better future and continue their tertiary education. Through associating with other children in recreational activities it assists children in establishing a confident personality and learn what they like and what they do not like.

Recommendations

- Social workers need to frequently monitor the academic investment and advice foster parents to invest affordable amount
- Foster parent need to encourage children to participate in recreational activities especially sport as it assist children's development
- Parents that are saving or investing to accounts that are accessible should consider having investment where they will not be able to withdraw money until the child has reached a certain age like eighteen or twenty-one years.

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