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EDITORIAL NOTE

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From Policy to Practice: Governance, Education, and Social Transformation in Africa:

Welcome to the October 2026 issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society and Education (JCSE). The sixteen articles assembled in this volume reflect the journal's commitment to rigorous, interdisciplinary scholarship on the pressing social, political, and educational challenges confronting contemporary Africa. Together, they illuminate a central tension of our time: the persistent gap between policy ambition and lived reality.

Several contributions in this issue grapple directly with the question of governance and service delivery. Motadi examines the opportunities and barriers shaping digital transformation in South African government departments, while Moloto and Pillay explore technology's influence on governance at the local municipal level. Akindele, Sanni, and Lamidi assess citizen satisfaction with public transportation in Lagos State, offering an important reminder that the legitimacy of the state rests on the quality of everyday services. Jutta and Alao interrogate the democratisation of the administrative state through South Africa's Government of National Unity, and Okudolo examines decentralisation and the effectiveness of local political leaders in Nigeria. Kambiri's analysis of governance challenges in managing internal displacement further underscores the consequences of normative commitment without implementation capacity. Agbor's critical perspectives on the operational independence of Elections Cameroon and the Constitutional Council round out this focus on democratic institutions.

Education remains a cornerstone of social progress, and this issue devotes considerable attention to it. Mtshali and Meyiwa assess the role of climate change education in maritime studies, while Modiba asks whether rural secondary schools are adequately managing learners with special educational needs associated with HIV/AIDS. Babalola interrogates the legal and policy complexities of foreign partnerships in Nigerian higher education, and Shabangu examines how school management teams respond to violence in rural South African schools. Nephawe and Mudimeli offer a distinctive contribution on the indispensability of English as a lingua franca in interpreting selected Pauline epistles.

The issue also foregrounds questions of gender, culture, and well-being. Nesane and Amaechi explore *Mamalo* as a resource for gender equality and women's empowerment in Limpopo, while Gudani, Khosa, and Nomatshila examine adolescents' perceptions of child support grant management through a family systems lens. Matheere offers an

exploration of the life journey of traditional healers in rural Limpopo, and Nkuna and colleagues provide an analytical study of compounding and naming in Siswati personal names. These articles remind us that social transformation is experienced at the level of culture, family, and community.

Collectively, these contributions demonstrate the vitality and breadth of contemporary social science research in Africa. They challenge scholars and policymakers alike to move beyond policy pronouncements toward meaningful implementation. We thank our authors and reviewers for their dedication and trust that this issue will stimulate further inquiry and debate.

Editor

Prof. TJ Mudau

Institute of Gender and Youth Studies

University of Venda, South Africa

Email: Thizwilondi.Mudau@univen.ac.za

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**ADOLESCENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD SUPPORT GRANT
MANAGEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS ON WELL-BEING IN SOUTH AFRICA:
A FAMILY SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE**

Lilimu Donald Gudani

*School of Public Health,
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences,
Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, 5117,
South Africa;*

250666715@mywsu.ac.za

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1724-3963>

Vinny Ntiyiso Khosa,

*School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences,
Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, 5117,
South Africa*

Email: nkhosa@wsu.ac.za

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3857-8225>

Zanele Benedict Nomatshila

*School of Public Health,
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences,
Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, 5117,
South Africa;*

&

*Department of Social Work,
Faculty of Law, Humanities and Social Sciences*

Email: znomatshila@wsu.ac.za

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7286-7584>

ABSTRACT

Background: The Child Support Grant (CSG) aims to reduce child poverty in South Africa, yet little is known about how adolescents perceive its management within family systems and how it affects their well-being. This study aims to investigate how adolescents perceive the management of CSG and its impact on their well-being in Phomolong, Tembisa, South Africa.

Methods: A qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was conducted in Phomolong, Tembisa. Twenty-four adolescents aged 15–18 years and whose caregivers/parents gave consent, all CSG beneficiaries, participated in in-depth interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, guided by Family Systems Theory.

Results: Adolescents reported being systematically excluded from discussions regarding how the grant was allocated. They also reported that CSG is used positively for food, school supplies, healthcare transport, and personal care. However, they also described misuse (e.g., spending on alcohol), leading to emotional distress, compromised school participation, and loss of trust.

Conclusions: While the CSG supports basic needs, its effectiveness is undermined by poor management and a lack of adolescent involvement. Strengthening oversight, financial literacy, and inclusive decision-making is important.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Child Support Grant, family systems theory, parent-child relationships, South Africa*

1. Introduction

Poverty remains a significant challenge affecting many children and adolescents in South Africa. Despite different initiatives implemented to significantly address this pressing issue of poverty faced by Children and adolescents, many families continue to experience unemployment, food insecurity and limited access to the resources that are necessary for child development, therefore social assistance programs have been ways South African's government uses to reduce poverty and improve wellbeing of vulnerable population. Amongst those programs, the South African government introduced the Child Support Grant (CSG) in 1998 as a poverty-alleviation strategy designed to provide financial support for qualifying households to help them to meet children's basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare. (Zembe-Mkabile et al., 2018). The CSG

is a right for every eligible child (Malatji & Makwalete, 2021). By March 2025, over 13 million children received the grant, with more than 2 million in Gauteng alone (South African Social Security Agency [SASSA], 2025).

Although the CSG is intended to benefit children, some caregivers misuse the funds, for example, by spending on alcohol (Makhubu & Ndenze, 2013; Zembe-Mkabile et al., 2018).

A critical gap remains; existing literature focuses on early childhood and caregiver reports, largely ignoring adolescents' own perspectives on how the grant is managed and how that affects their well-being. This is significant because adolescence is a key developmental stage characterized by identity formation, increasing autonomy, and rising educational and social needs (Jordan et al., 2014). Furthermore, most CSG studies rely on quantitative

methods and caregiver reports, with relatively few qualitative studies capturing adolescents' lived experiences (Granlund & Hochfeld, 2020). The absence of adolescent-centered research limits understanding of how grant management affects adolescents' emotional well-being, educational engagement, and sense of agency within their families.

This study addresses that gap using Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978), which conceptualises the family as an interconnected emotional system in which ongoing interactions, social roles, boundaries, and modes of communication shape personal experiences and actions. This theory provides an analytical framework for exploring how parents' and caregivers' management of CSG influences adolescents' well-being through everyday family interactions rather than through isolated financial decisions.

The study aims to investigate how adolescents perceive the management of CSG and its impact on their well-being in Phomolong, Tembisa, South Africa. By prioritizing adolescents' perspectives, the research enhances understanding of family dynamics in settings marked by poverty and social support.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social protection initiatives

Cash transfer programs are becoming a worldwide method of increasing positive

outcomes for adolescents, as opposed to just focusing on young children. A study completed outside South Africa indicated that cash transfer programs in developing nations were associated with increased school attendance, better financial stability, and less risk of sexual/reproductive health issues; however, there is limited evidence regarding the impact of these programs on adolescent nutrition (Bastagli et al., 2016).

Additionally, cash transfer programs can provide psychosocial benefits such as decreasing anxiety and depression. As of 2008, 48 countries had implemented cash transfer programs, with rapid expansion occurring throughout South Asia and Latin America. Mexico's Oportunidades program was found to improve the physical development and social/emotional well-being of young children, and adolescent girls were found to be using contraception at higher rates and delaying pregnancy. These results demonstrate that program design influences the type of outcome received from cash transfer programs versus unconditional assistance (Fernald et al., 2008; Darney et al., 2013). Several sub-Saharan African countries have also implemented cash transfer programs, including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (de Groot et al., 2015). A pilot program for teenage girls in Malawi was able to reduce emotional distress, and a subsequent nationwide implementation of this program resulted

in a decrease in depression, especially among females, due to improvements in education, caregiver health, and community relationships (Baird et al., 2013; Angeles et al., 2019). Similarly, the Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children program in Kenya showed that depressive symptoms were decreased, predominantly among males. This demonstrates that the effect of cash transfer programs on mental health varies based upon gender and location (Kilburn et al., 2016). The Child Support Grant (CSG) in South Africa was established in April of 1998 after the Lund Committee. The CSG initially provided support for children under seven years old but expanded to include children up to eighteen years old in 2012 (Klasen et al., 2010; Du Toit & Lues, 2014).

Although concerns remain about whether or not the CSG provides adequate support for adolescents, studies internationally continue to examine the effects of cash transfer programs on adolescent mental health, education, autonomy, and transition into adulthood.

2.2 Intended Versus Actual Use of the Child Support Grant

2.2.1 Intended Use and Positive Outcomes

Policy intentions and empirical evidence indicate that the CSG is intended to alleviate poverty and improve child well-being by supporting basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education. National evaluations have shown that

social grants contribute to reductions in poverty and hunger, as well as improved school attendance (Department of Social Development, 2004). Several studies report that caregivers primarily use CSG to purchase food, thereby enhancing household food security and children's nutritional outcomes (Lombard, 2008; Pauw & Mncube, 2007). Increased access to education has also been documented, with grant receipt linked to higher school enrolment and attendance, particularly among poor households (Nkosi, 2009; Samson et al., 2010).

2.3 The CSG as a Household Source of Income

Despite its child-centred intent, the CSG often serves as a broader source of household income. In the context of high unemployment and chronic poverty, caregivers may pool grant money with other resources to meet collective household needs, including food, utilities, and transport. While such practices may support household survival, they can dilute the grant's specific focus. Granlund and Hochfeld (2020) observed that grant money may be borrowed, shared, or redirected to non-child-related expenses, reflecting the complex realities of poverty-driven decision-making.

2.4 Responsible and Irresponsible Management of the CSG

The literature presents mixed findings regarding caregivers' management of the CSG. On the one hand, many caregivers are described as responsible managers

who prioritize children's needs, resulting in positive outcomes such as improved nutrition, school participation, and access to healthcare (Delany et al., 2008; Samson et al., 2010). On the other hand, several studies report instances of misuse in which funds are diverted to non-essential expenditures, adversely affecting children's well-being (Makhubu & Ndenze, 2013). Jordan et al. (2014) argue that while extensive research exists on the CSG, limited attention has been paid to how grant utilization decisions are made within households and how beneficiaries experience these decisions.

2.6 Gaps in Literature

There has been a lot of research about children's development from an early age; however, there is little research regarding adolescent development. Adolescence is a period of rapid change, where young people are forming their identities, becoming more independent, and having greater educational and social needs. As such, they need continued material and psychological support. However, there has been very little research regarding the experience of adolescents receiving social protection. Additionally, most CSG studies have used quantitative methods and caregiver reports. There have been few qualitative studies which provide insight into the views and experiences of adolescents themselves.

2.7 Relevance of the Current Study

This study addresses these gaps by exploring adolescents' perceptions of how parents and caregivers manage the Child Support Grant and the effects of this management on their well-being. By foregrounding adolescents' voices, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the discrepancy between the CSG's intended and actual use. It provides evidence to inform more inclusive and adolescent-responsive social protection policies.

2.8 Theoretical Framework: Family Systems Theory

This study is grounded in Family Systems Theory (FST), developed by psychiatrist Murray Bowen in the late 1940s and 1950s (Bowen, 1978). The FST conceptualises the family as an interconnected emotional system in which individual experiences and behaviours are shaped by ongoing interactions, roles, boundaries, and communication patterns within the family unit (Drew, 2022). Individual wellbeing is understood as inseparable from family dynamics. The FST is particularly appropriate for this study because the CSG is managed within the family system, where decisions about its use are influenced by power relations, cultural norms, communication styles, and socioeconomic constraints (Henry et al., 2015).

2.8.1 Interdependence

Interdependence is a key principle of Family Systems Theory, emphasizing that family members rely on one another for emotional and material support (Drew, 2023). In this study, caregivers' decisions about the use of the CSG directly affect adolescents' access to food, education, healthcare, and personal needs. Adolescents' perceptions of fairness or neglect in resource distribution influence trust, emotional security, and motivation.

2.8.2 Family Roles and Boundaries

Family roles and boundaries regulate authority and decision-making within the family system. Parents or caregivers are designated as custodians of the CSG and are expected to manage it in the child's best interests. When adolescents perceive that grant funds are misaligned with their needs or that they are excluded from decisions affecting them, rigid boundaries may undermine trust and contribute to feelings of helplessness (Henry et al., 2015).

2.8.3 Communication Patterns

Communication patterns within the family play a critical role in shaping adolescents' emotional well-being (Rousta et al., 2014). Open communication about the use of the CSG promotes transparency and mutual understanding, helping adolescents appreciate household constraints. In contrast, closed communication or secrecy may lead to mistrust, stress, and

assumptions of mismanagement, negatively affecting family relationships and adolescent well-being.

2.8.4 Feedback Processes and Homeostasis

FST explains family functioning through feedback loops that either reinforce or disrupt existing patterns. Effective use of the CSG can create positive feedback loops, whereby improved adolescent well-being reinforces responsible caregiving practices. Conversely, misuse of the grant may result in adolescent distress and conflict, destabilizing family equilibrium and potentially leading to dysfunctional patterns if unaddressed.

2.8.5 Subsystems, Culture, and Poverty Context

Families consist of interacting subsystems, including parent–child and sibling subsystems (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Power imbalances within these subsystems may limit adolescents' agency over financial decisions, particularly in cultural contexts where children are discouraged from discussing money. Poverty further compounds family stress, often necessitating survival-based spending decisions that may dilute the CSG's child-centred intent (Booyesen et al., 2021).

Cultural norms related to seniority, power and finance also shape the dynamics of each subsystem providing a theoretical base from which both

caregivers and youth respond to their environment in this research. Many South African households subscribe to the collectivist/elder-centered philosophy of Ubuntu which states "a person is a person through other persons" (Mbiti, 1969). Ubuntu provides a foundation for the role of guardians as the rightful managers of household resources and the ultimate decision-makers for the entire household including children.

While this philosophy is intended to create unity within the family by encouraging shared responsibilities, it may also justify excluding adolescents from participating in conversations about household finances. Money is often seen as a taboo subject and a matter of maturity, even among close family members (Alsemgeest, 2014).

Therefore, the reluctance of parents and/or caregivers to discuss Child Support Grant (CSG) expenditure should be viewed as an example of culturally sanctioned leadership and not merely an absence of communication; withholding information about finances demonstrates an adult's status and reinforces the age-based social hierarchy, regardless of whether the funds are specifically designated for the child. The reactions of adolescents who felt marginalized appear to be shaped by the same cultural structures. Adolescents are likely to defer to their guardians' decisions due to the emphasis on respect toward elders; therefore, adolescent dissatisfaction with the way the grant

was administered is generally expressed internally as sadness, emotional distance or passively accepting the situation instead of openly defying their parents' authority. Family Systems Theory has been used in recent South African studies to examine how the ownership and control of wealth contribute to a household's status in terms of power relationships and reinforce age-based hierarchies as families deal with new stressors (Sikhakhane & Roman, 2025). When viewed in this context, the feelings of marginalization reported by the teenagers in this study represent more than just a lack of communication. They represent a logical outcome of cultural norms that link financial control with age and family status. Both guardians and youth are socialized into these cultural norms and existing CSG policies do not address them. This conceptual framework provides a sophisticated approach to examining how household financial choices influence the psychological, educational and social well-being of adolescents and represents a significant area of investigation within the discipline of family studies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research methods used to explore adolescents' perspectives on how parents or caregivers manage the Child Support Grant (CSG) and its effects on their well-being in Phomolong, Tembisa. The study employed a qualitative approach, purposive sampling, semi-structured

interviews, and thematic analysis. Ethical principles and quality assurance measures were applied to ensure trustworthiness.

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive-phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to understand adolescents' perceptions of parents'/caregivers' management of CSG and its effects on adolescents' well-being. Descriptive phenomenology focuses on understanding participants' lived experience, especially how they perceive, experience, and make sense of a phenomenon (Tavakol & Sandars, 2015).

3.2 Study setting

The study was conducted in Phomolong, Tembisa, which is in the Ekurhuleni District of Gauteng province, South Africa. This setting was selected because it has high population density, socio-economic challenges, and high CSG uptake. The area represents a typical urban township, which is a low-income area in South Africa where there is overpopulation, high unemployment, poverty, and dependence on the Child Support Grant model decision-making, and adolescents' wellbeing.

3.3 Participants selection

According to Shukla (2020), a population refers to the entire group to which a researcher aims to generalize the study's findings. Adolescents aged 15 to 18 years whose parents gave permission and who were beneficiaries of the CSG,

residing in Phomolong, Tembisa were purposively selected for this study.

3.4 Sampling method and sample size

Purposive sampling was used to select 24 participants aged 15-18 who reside in Phomolong, Tembisa, and confirmed to be beneficiaries of the CSG. Data collection commenced with the eligible participants after the parents/caregiver consent and adolescents' assent were obtained. The sample size was guided by data saturation, which was achieved at the 24th interview. Saturation refers to the point in data collection at which no new issues are identified (Hennink et al., 2020).

3.5 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria define the characteristics of participants eligible for the study (Polit & Beck, 2018). Adolescents were included if they were beneficiaries of the CSG, aged 15–18 years, and residing in Phomolong, Tembisa. Participation was voluntary, and both male and female adolescents were eligible.

Exclusion criteria identify attributes that prevent participation (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). Adolescents were excluded if they were not beneficiaries of the Child Support Grant, did not reside in Phomolong or Tembisa, or fell outside the 15–18-year age range.

3.6 Data Collection

In-depth interviews lasting 30- 45 minutes were conducted at participants'

homes to ensure their privacy and safety. The interview guide was structured around Family Systems Theory and informed by pertinent literature, employing open-ended questions to explore adolescents' lived experiences. Interviews were conducted in both English and Sepedi, according to participants' preference, and were recorded with prior permission from participants and later transcribed. A response rate of 95% was achieved, and data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from the discussions, leading to the conclusion of data collection after interviewing the 24th participant.

3.7 Data analysis

Data were analyzed utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which consists of familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The initial coding process was primarily inductive (data-driven), while Family Systems Theory served as a sensitizing framework during the subsequent interpretive stages. Data management was carried out using Microsoft Excel, as outlined by Bree and Gallagher (2016).

3.8 Measures to ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility is a measure of how well the research reflects the lived experiences of the participant(s) (Daniel and Harland 2017). The four standards of

trustworthiness for this study were credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation and researcher reflexivity were all used to increase the credibility of the research. Transferability was addressed in the detailed description of the research setting, participant characteristics and research methods. Data collection and analysis documentation was maintained to ensure that the research was dependable (Tobin & Begley 2004). To maintain confirmability, findings were clearly tied to the data using direct quotes and systematic analysis (Tobin & Begley 2004).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

An ethical approval was given by Walter Sisulu University HREC 274/2025. Phenomenological ethical principles were applied (Yegidis et al., 2018). Participants participated voluntarily (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Written consent was received from parents/caregivers, and assent was received from adolescents; they had been informed about the purpose of the study, the methods of the study, and their rights to discontinue participation at any time with no penalties (Moriña, 2021). The interviews did not include questions that would cause distress. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, and all identifying information was removed (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Interview recordings and transcripts were kept safe. Findings were presented accurately and based

upon the stories of the participants. A qualitative research design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis were used in Phomolong, Tembisa.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Participants Characteristics

The study comprised 24 participants aged 15–17 years (15 male, 9 female)

who were interviewed to explore their perspectives on how parents or caregivers manage the Child Support Grant and its effects on their well-being in Phomolong, Tembisa. Nineteen relied primarily on parents, and five on mothers only. Twenty-one reported CSG as their sole source of income; three reported additional sources.

Table 1: Summary of participant traits in the qualitative study

Category	Description	Frequency (n=24)
Age range	15–17 years	24
Sex	Male	15
	Female	9
Primary reliance	Parents	19
	Mother only	5
Income source	Child Support Grant only	21
	Child Support Grant + other source of income	3

4.2. Thematic Finding

Four main themes emerged: (1) adolescents' perspectives on positive CSG use; (2) adolescents' perspectives on CSG misuse; (3) effects of misuse on well-being; and (4) adolescents' perspectives on how the CSG should be used to benefit them.

Theme 1: Positive use of CSG.

Sub-theme 1: Prioritization of household basic needs

All participants reported that their Child Support Grant is directly used to meet their basic needs. However, their responses varied on the basic needs that the grant covered. They noted that this assistance prevents hunger and fosters family stability.

“They buy food stock.” (Participant 1, male, 16 years)

“They buy me food, basic food in general, like milk and bread.” (Participant 23, male, 16 years)

“They buy me food that I should eat and be full.” (Participant 3, female, 15 years)

“They usually buy food, and if there is extra money, they buy me clothes.” (Participant 4, male, 16 years)

“My parents buy maize meal, Bry pack, cabbage, onion, tomatoes, and cooking oil.” (Participant 19, female, 16 years)

“They usually buy basic needs like bread, water, and electricity.” (Participant 9, male, 17 years)

Sub-theme 2: Educational support

All participants reported that their grant money is commonly used to support their education. However, their responses varied on the educational needs the grant covered. This helps adolescents pursue their education without obstacles.

“If I need more stationery or schoolbooks, they buy them for me.” (Participant 1, male, 16 years)

“It helps me because I always have stationery from that money. “My parents used the money to get me stationery for school.” (Participant 13, female, 15 years)

“I can buy stationery because, without stationery, that means I cannot be educated, because I will not be able to go to school, and I am also able to buy uniform.” Participant 4, male, 16 years)

“They also buy our school clothes and stationery, school stationery, everything.” (Participant 5, female, 16 years)

“Because as they buy something like a study guide, the school uniform, they also pay for the trips at school.” (Participant 16, female, 17 years)

“The grant helps me with my school needs by, what you call, sometimes it helps me buy school stuff, like stationery, pens, books, things that I need for school.” (Participant 11, female, 16 years)

Sub-theme 3: Health and personal care

All participants reported that the Child Support Grant helps them to meet their health-related needs. As a result, it contributes to their overall well-being.

“It helps because, like, they buy toiletries, something like pants. Yeah, yeah.” (Participant 16, female, 17 years)

“They buy me, like, now I am sick, they buy, they bought me medicine so that I can get better.” (Participant 15, male, 17 years)

“When I need lotion and toothpaste, I take money from the grant and buy them.” (Participant 1, male, 16 years)

“If I am sick, they can take me to the clinic or hospital for me to get help, and even if I am sick, they are able to buy me medicine from the pharmacy, because of, yes, for me to recover, so

that I am able to go back to school.”
 (Participant 4, male, 16 years)

“Like they buy me medication, if it is too far, they can take me to the hospital or clinic.” (Participant 10, male, 16 years)

“They also buy sanitary pads.”
 (Participant 19, female, 16 years)

Theme 2: Child Support Grant Misuse.

Sub-theme 1: Substance use

The findings revealed the adolescents’ concerns regarding the misuse of the Child Support Grant, such as spending on alcohol and gambling.

“My parents take the child support grant and use it for substance abuse.”
 (Participant 9, male, 17 years)

“My parents misuse the grant by buying alcohol.” (Participant 17, female, 15 years)

“My father buys alcohol to get drunk.”
 (Participant 6, male, 17 years)

“Sometimes my parents buy alcohol in the house.” (Participant 14, female, 15 years)

“Some parents, like my fathers, usually go and buy beer or smoke.”
 (Participant 18, male, 17 years)

Sub-theme 2: Absence of openness and adolescents’ exclusions

The findings revealed that all adolescents have no idea how the grant is spent because they are excluded from

the decision-making process. This led to frustration and mistrust towards their parents/caregivers.

“No, they do not involve me when it comes to my grant because they think that I am not yet of age to be part of their discussions on how to use the money.” (Participant 19, female, 16 years)

“No, they do not involve me because they say I am still too young to be involved.” (Participant 17, female, 15 years)

“Most of the time they just use it without including us as their kids.”
 (Participant 12, male, 16 years)

“No, they do not involve me.”
 (Participant 8, male, 16 years)

“They never involve me.” (Participant 2, male, 16 years)

Theme 3: Effects of Misuse on Well-being

Sub-theme 1: Emotional and mental distress

All participants reported emotional distress and overthinking, especially when their basic needs were not met because their parents or caregivers misused the grant money, which led to depression, self-isolation, and loss of trust in their parents.

“It will put me under some pressure where I always have to overthink. It will give me stress. Why are they using this money this way, and they are not

planning on how to use it?"
 (Participant 14, female, 15 years)

"I would have depression, and I would not feel comfortable with myself with other people because I would not have the proper clothes to wear. I would always be at home." (Participant 15, male, 17 years)

"As a child, I would not be safe and would maybe have health problems also. It would not be good for my health." (Participant 3, female, 15 years)

"I can be depressed thinking about what I can eat today, what I am going to use, like, all this kind of stuff".
 (Participant 11, male, 16 years)

Sub-theme 2: Compromised education and school participation

The findings revealed that misuse of the Child Support Grant leaves adolescents without essential school supplies and toiletries, resulting in poor performance or dropping out of school due to fear of being judged or bullied by other learners.

"Well, my school performance will decrease because I will not have the correct school supplies." (Participant 9, male, 17 years)

"I will not be able to cooperate in class; I won't have energy because I didn't eat, and I will not be able to cooperate."
 (Participant 20, female, 16 years)

"I will end up like dropping out of school because, like, they will not be

providing my basic needs." (Participant 16, female, 17 years)

"I once lacked a roll-on, and at this stage that I am in, 16, we all know that roll-on is an essential; it's something that's needed. As you know, I might sweat a lot playing around, so while my armpits were smelling, I lost confidence and it made me not want to go to school because I was afraid of bullying, being taunted by my peers, and being pushed to do bad stuff such as stealing the roll-on in order for me to feel fresh."
 (Participant 19, female, 16 years)

Theme 4: Recommendation for CSG Use by Adolescents.

Sub-theme 1: Prioritizing adolescents' basic needs

Adolescents expressed that their basic needs, such as food and school supplies, shelter, and clothes, should be prioritized

"I feel like first, they need to start with the most basic thing, the four basic needs, which are education, shelter, clothes, and water." (Participant 4, male, 16 years)

It should be used for food and for education, like basic needs. Yeah, for the food." (Participant 16, female, 17 years)

"They must focus on their children's basic needs, not their own basic needs."
 (Participant 16, female, 17 years)

"Parents or caregivers should use it to benefit adolescents. Well, they should take care of the basic needs and try as

much as possible to push for the child's education.” (Participant 9, male, 17 years)

Sub-theme 2: Improved financial management and accountability

The findings revealed the need for guidance and education for parents/caregivers to use the Child Support Grant effectively. This will help them equip their children with the skills they have acquired, so that they can also manage money wisely as they grow up.

Caregivers and parents should receive more education on how misusing their money can affect their child or impact their child negatively, and they should also provide them with educational programs on the use of the grant in order for them to improve on using the money.” (Participant 19, female, 16 years)

“Half of the grant money should be used for savings. Half of the money should be used for household needs as the money comes the other half goes straight to the savings, the other half goes like this so the more the money increases just know that the young ones in high school they have money that they can spend If their parents pass on.” (Participant 11, female, 16 years)

My opinion is that parents should give sometimes kids, but not like give them like money, a lot of money.” (Participant 18, male, 17 years)

Sub-theme 3: Government oversight and support

The findings revealed the need for structural and governmental solutions to ensure the Child Support Grant benefits adolescents.

“Maybe the government can set up seminars or camps teaching parents about how to use the social grant to better the child's welfare.” (Participant 9, male, 17 years)

“The government that provides them with the grant should provide them with free programs that can help them and build them in ways to use money effectively in improving their children's lives.” (Participant 19, female, 16 years)

“Maybe if the government could provide them with a financial advisor, where they could advise them in terms of how they should use their money, where should they buy groceries.” (Participant 4, male), 16 years)

“I think they need financial support, like, from the government and from the social workers, because when there's someone that's guiding you on how to use your money and someone that's telling you how to use it, you can use it in the right way, unlike you just using the money that you think that is right.” (Participant 5, female, 16 years)

“I feel like they should get support from social workers because with social workers, they can help them open their

mindset on how to use the money.”
(Participant 13, female, 15 years)

“I feel like they should participate in programs where they can teach them how to use the grant money. Then they'll feel so motivated, and they'll feel the support of how they can use the grant money.” (Participant 14, female, 15 years)

5. Discussion

This study explored adolescents' perceptions of CSG management within families and its effects on their wellbeing, using Family Systems Theory as an interpretive lens. The Family Systems Theory conceptualizes the family as an interconnected emotional system in which individual experiences and behaviours are shaped by ongoing interactions, roles, boundaries, and communication patterns within the family unit (Drew, 2022). Individual wellbeing is understood as inseparable from family dynamics. The findings reveal a dual reality that the CSG directly benefits adolescents by enabling access to food, education, and healthcare, confirming the grant's poverty-alleviation potential (Delany et al., 2008; Lombard, 2008; Oyenubi & Rossouw, 2024). However, adolescents also described significant family dysfunction, misuse of funds, exclusion from decision-making, and closed communication patterns that undermine their well-being and family relationships.

Family Communication and Decision-Making

Adolescents' systematic exclusion from grant-related decisions represents a critical family communication breakdown within the family system. This aligns with Bowen's concept of rigid family boundaries, where parents maintain authority without transparency or collaboration (Bowen, 1978; Henry et al., 2015). The finding that adolescents are excluded because they "are not yet of age" reflects cultural norms that discourage children from engaging in financial discussions. This pattern contributes to adolescent frustration, mistrust, and loss of parental confidence, eroding the family relationships the CSG aims to support.

This exclusion can be theorised more fully by situating it within the broader cultural logic that governs family authority in this setting (see Section 2.8.5). Communal, elder-centred values consistent with ubuntu, in which personhood and belonging are constituted through relationships with others rather than individual autonomy (Mbiti, 1969), position caregivers as the rightful custodians of household resources, including grants formally intended for children. Within this logic, caregivers' silence about CSG spending is not simply a communication failure but an enactment of a culturally legitimated role: financial matters are widely treated as an adult, and often taboo, domain in South African households (Alsemgeest, 2014), so

withholding information from adolescents may be understood by caregivers as appropriate parenting rather than as exclusion. Adolescents' responses were similarly patterned by this cultural logic. Norms of respect for elders discourage direct questioning of caregivers' decisions, which may explain why participants described internalised distress, such as "overthinking" and loss of trust, rather than open confrontation, when they perceived misuse. Recent South African family research using Family Systems Theory similarly found that control over money functions as a marker of authority within family power hierarchies (Sikhakhane & Roman, 2025), reinforcing the interpretation that adolescents' exclusion from CSG decisions in this study reflects a wider cultural pattern linking financial control to generational status, rather than an isolated feature of individual households.

Research shows that 72% of parents do not discuss money with their children (Boeing Employees Credit Union, 2019; Gailey, 2023). Parental attitudes towards inclusion influence children's attitudes and behaviours (De Boer et al., 2010; Leyser & Kirk, 2011). Closed communication patterns may lead to mistrust, stress, and assumptions of mismanagement (Rousta et al., 2014), as reflected in participants' narratives.

Family Interdependence and Resource Distribution

Adolescents' perceptions of unfair resource distribution when grant funds are diverted to substance use reflect disrupted family interdependence. Caregivers' decisions directly affect adolescents' access to basic needs, school participation, and personal care. When resources are misallocated, adolescents experience food insecurity, educational disadvantage, and hygiene-related stigma. The 16-year-old female participant's account of lacking deodorant and being bullied illustrates how material deprivation within the family system has cascading effects on social participation and emotional wellbeing.

This aligns with findings that parental substance use is associated with symptoms of depression in children (Vitaro et al., 2008), and that financial problems are associated with relationship difficulties and loss of trust (Wurtzburg & Tan, 2011; Darbyshire et al., 2001). The CSG's intended positive feedback loop, whereby the grant improves child wellbeing and reinforces responsible caregiving, is disrupted by misuse, creating a negative feedback loop of adolescent distress and family dysfunction.

Gender Considerations in CSG Management and Well-being

Even though the coding framework for the interviews was not designed to assess gender differences in experiences, the

data collected from the participants' narrative responses revealed a significant gender-related trend. The female participants reported difficulties with self-care due to the misuse of grant funds in gender-specific ways. The females specifically reported problems with obtaining deodorant and/or menstrual pads. A 16-year old female participant (Participant 19) reported not having access to deodorant. She stated that her inability to obtain deodorant caused her to worry about harassment, have lower self-esteem, and stay home from school. Global studies have shown that a lack of hygiene products put female teenagers at risk for certain types of social hazards and stigmas in educational settings that male teenagers do not experience as often (Benshaul-Tolonen et al., 2020). Both male and female subjects provided comparable accounts of how CSG misuse affected their ability to make financial decisions within their households. This indicates that some of the negative effects of CSG mismanagement, particularly the loss of control and trust that result from exclusion, may be experienced equally by all genders.

However, the social consequences of poor personal hygiene appear to negatively impact females more than males. Because there was a disproportionately high number of males (n=15) versus females (n=9) in the study population and no specific questions were asked about gender-related issues, these results are considered exploratory

rather than conclusive evidence of systematic gender disparities. These findings are presented as potential areas for future research on gender-related topics.

Implications for Family Studies

This study contributes to family studies by demonstrating how social protection programmes are experienced within families. The findings suggest that CSG effectiveness depends not only on financial transfer amounts but on household governance, communication patterns, and inclusive decision-making practices, core concerns of family studies (Granlund & Hochfeld, 2020). The study extends Family Systems Theory by applying it to understanding financial decision-making in low-income families, illustrating how poverty, cultural norms, and social protection policies shape family interactions.

6. Conclusions

This study explored adolescents' perceptions of CSG management within families and its effects on their well-being in Phomolong, Tembisa. The findings reveal a dual reality: the CSG directly benefits adolescents by enabling access to food, education, and healthcare, confirming the grant's poverty-alleviation potential. However, some parents/caregivers misuse the grant by spending it on alcohol and other self-serving expenses, harming adolescents' well-being. Critically, adolescents are systematically excluded

from decision-making about their own grant, fostering emotional distress, mistrust, and compromised school participation. This exclusion undermines the very family relationships the CSG is meant to support.

This study makes an important contribution to understanding social protection within families by shifting focus from early childhood to adolescence and by centring adolescents' lived experiences. The findings demonstrate that CSG effectiveness depends on household governance, communication patterns, and inclusive family practices. Without stronger institutional oversight, financial literacy support, and mechanisms for adolescent participation in family financial decisions, the CSG risks perpetuating the poverty and family dysfunction it was designed to alleviate.

7. Recommendations.

Based on the findings of this study, the following evidence-based recommendations are made to improve the management of the Child Support Grant (CSG) and safeguard adolescent well-being in Phomolong, Tembisa, and similar contexts or socioeconomic status. The implementation below would require collaboration among parents/caregivers, community stakeholders, and the DSD and SASSA while taking into account existing resource and capacity constraints.

1. Mandate regular household oversight for CSG receiving households with adolescents

The DSD and SASSA must require social auxiliary workers to conduct quarterly home visits for all CSG households that have an adolescent (15 – 18) using a standard checklist to evaluate how the grant is being used and the overall health of the household. SASSA will identify households that need to be visited and schedule the visit. There are several challenges to this process including; lack of staffing, transportation issues, caregivers' unwillingness to allow visits and stigma. These challenges can be overcome with mobile teams and integrated outreach.

2. Family-based financial literacy programme linked to grant renewal

SASSA needs to implement an obligatory 2-3-hour family-based financial literacy module in conjunction with the CSG renewal process for caregivers of adolescents. This will cover budgeting, spending on children as a priority and the negative consequences of misspending on other things. It would be delivered through workshop-based sessions, using both English and Sepedi materials. The workshop attendance would be recorded, and where there is non-compliance, this would be referred to DSD for support purposes. Barriers include time constraints, low literacy, transport costs, resistance, and facilitator shortages, mitigated by flexible sessions, childcare, visual materials, and integration.

3. Inclusive decision-making forums

DSD, SASSA, and local NGOs could pilot a 60 to 90 minute 'family forum' in which adolescents and their caregivers make joint decisions about using grant money and are assisted by trained social workers. Potential barriers include the norm that adults should make decisions; caregivers want control over how they spend money; adolescents don't want to tell strangers what they do; and facilitators may lack experience. However, all of these barriers can be overcome by involving communities in the design of the forums, ensuring complete privacy, and conducting pre-forum check-ins with both adolescents and caregivers.

4. Develop and disseminate clear grant-use guidelines for caregivers

The DSD/SASSA would develop an illustrated two-page pamphlet on the Child Support Grant (CSG) indicating how it can be utilized, and how it cannot. Because many of those receiving this grant have lower-than-average educational backgrounds; because many officials who provide information to caregivers regarding the CSG are busy and do not have much time; and because many caregivers do not want to receive official advice, the pamphlet must take into account these three factors. To assist with low literacy rates, the pamphlet will utilize pictures and pictograms. To assist with time constraints and caregiver resistance, the pamphlet will include audio recordings in local languages. In addition, the pamphlet will contain

scripts that will enable officials to consistently provide messages about the CSG to caregivers.

5. Establish a confidential adolescent feedback mechanism

SASSA should establish a confidential and accessible feedback channel (e.g., a toll-free helpline or school-based reporting system) that allows adolescents to report grant misuse or seek support without fear of retaliation. This mechanism should be publicized through schools and community health centers.

6. Community-based monitoring

Local community structures (e.g., ward committees, school governing bodies, and faith-based organisations) should be trained to conduct peer monitoring of CSG use. These monitors can identify at-risk households and refer them to social work services, complementing formal oversight.

7. Future Research

Longitudinal studies could examine how adolescents' perceptions of CSG management change over time and affect family relationships. Comparative studies across different South African communities could identify contextual factors shaping family dynamics around social grants. Intervention studies evaluating family-based financial literacy programmes and adolescent-inclusive decision-making forums would contribute to evidence-based policy.

Strengths and Limitations

This qualitative study was conducted in Phomolong, a poor, crowded, urban township in Tembisa. There are very high levels of unemployment and very high numbers of families receiving the Child Support Grant. The sample size of 24 adolescents, combined with the fact that it was conducted at only one location (Phomolong), means the results may not apply to other environments, such as rural, semi-rural, wealthier areas, or areas with different characteristics regarding housing, employment, or the use of grants. The participants' experiences may have been shaped by the community's socio-economic, cultural and family environment. However, the study provides a great deal of useful information for other low-income communities experiencing similar circumstances.

While the results do not represent adolescents' experiences with the Child Support Grant in all of South Africa, they do provide valuable insights into how adolescents experience poverty and receive support through grants.

Although the sample included males (n=15) and females (n=9), no analyses were conducted to determine whether there were systematic differences between male and female participants. An exploratory gender-sensitive analysis indicated that unmet personal care and hygiene needs represented a unique challenge for female participants. Unmet personal care and hygiene needs contributed to female participants experiencing school-based stigmatization. In contrast, male and female participants reported similar experiences related to substance-related misuse and being excluded from decision-making processes.

This analysis did not utilize a specific gender-sensitive protocol, and was limited by an uneven representation of males versus females in the sample. Therefore, additional gender-sensitive research is needed.

Additionally, the results should be viewed in light of their cultural context. Cultural norms relating to age, authority, and respect for elders were influential in determining adolescents' participation in household decision-making processes. Many of the adolescent participants stated that they felt excluded from discussions about grants because they were perceived as being "too young." These types of generational hierarchies are typical in the community studied but are not present throughout all of South Africa. Therefore, the results provide insight into the socio-cultural context of Phomolong and not necessarily a general trend throughout South Africa. As with most qualitative studies, social desirability bias cannot be completely removed, and the researchers' interactions with the participants may have influenced both data collection and interpretation. Reflexivity improved credibility.

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