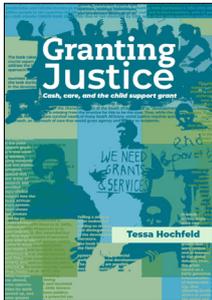




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BOOK TITLE:
Granting justice: Cash, care, and the Child Support Grant



AUTHOR:
Tessa Hochfeld

ISBN:
9780796926203 (softcover, 256 pp)

PUBLISHER:
HSRC Press, Cape Town, South Africa; ZAR172

PUBLISHED:
2022

REVIEWER:
Wanga Zembe-Mkabile¹

AFFILIATION:
¹Health Systems Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council, Cape Town, South Africa

EMAIL:
wanga.zembe@mrc.ac.za

HOW TO CITE:
Zembe-Mkabile W. Social protection and care: Does the Child Support Grant translate to social justice outcomes for female beneficiaries who receive it on behalf of their children? *S Afr J Sci.* 2022;118(9/10), Art. #14688. <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2022/14688>

ARTICLE INCLUDES:
 Peer review
 Supplementary material

PUBLISHED:
29 September 2022

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Social protection and care: Does the Child Support Grant translate to social justice outcomes for female beneficiaries who receive it on behalf of their children?

Statement of the book's purpose

Granting Justice is a comprehensive analysis of South Africa's social assistance policy for children, the Child Support Grant (CSG). The book seeks to answer questions about whether and how primary caregivers of children in receipt of the Child Support Grant 'fare well' from a dignity and social justice perspective. The author, the late Prof. Tessa Hochfeld, conducted an ethnographic narrative study between 2011 and 2014 to inform the main themes and thrust of the book.

Placing the book in context

Much has been studied and written about the CSG, widely regarded as South Africa's foremost poverty alleviation strategy, but for the most part the current literature and evidence base focus on CSG uptake, spending by primary caregivers, impact and effectiveness of the grant on child health and well-being outcomes, and its impact on poverty and economic outcomes.¹⁻⁴ Very few studies have delved deeper into the social justice outcomes of this policy instrument, and even fewer still have done this using a feminist narrative lens. This is Hochfeld's unique contribution to the existing body of work, here in South Africa and elsewhere, regarding the qualitative impact of small cash transfer programmes targeting low-income women and children in the Global South.

The book's genre and potential significance

The central question of the book is whether the CSG is a just instrument that leads to recognition, representation, freedom and dignity for the low-income women and children who are the beneficiaries. This is an important question to ask in our context of entrenched patriarchy where receipt of income can at once be liberating to women, while at the same time reinforcing their unpaid reproductive labour. It builds upon and expands the current literature and evidence base on social assistance and dignity⁵⁻⁸; on women's empowerment⁹; and how state-citizen relations work out and manifest in women's access to the CSG in South Africa^{10,11}. It also makes an important contribution to our understanding of how child cash transfers are experienced by and impact on female primary caregivers who receive the money on behalf of their children, but who themselves are often an afterthought when discussing the outcomes of such grants on children – often the focus is on child outcomes, with little attention being paid to the women (the exception is only in reference to the dependency and perverse incentives discourse) who are tasked with making miracles out of these small amounts of money. In Tessa Hochfeld's book, the primary caregivers of CSG recipients, who are all women, are, for better or worse, central to the story of the CSG.

Overall evaluation

Hochfeld writes with academic precision, sensitivity, care and, at times, vulnerability, and candour about her own positionality as a white, middle-class woman conducting research on motherhood, care and social assistance in a low-income area populated by women of colour.

The book's beginning and context of the author's conflict

The book begins by situating the establishment of the CSG within the wider context of South Africa's political and welfare history, and the global context of social protection. It starts off by making the case for a gendered and feminist perspective of social protection which takes into account the degree to which a given social protection instrument – in this case the CSG – has the potential to be transformative, and the extent to which it fosters or doesn't, the dignity and freedom of the women who receive it.

The author then discusses in detail South Africa's history of poverty and inequality, correctly identifying and locating both the role of the past (i.e. legacy of apartheid) and the failure of the present in addressing poverty and inequality. In this chapter, the book highlights the delicate tension between the country's constitutional imperative of and commitment to redistribution, and a neoliberal macro-economic framework which prioritises the market, and how these contradictions continue to shape South Africa's social protection system.

Unlike welfare states in developed countries which comprise a care model of the state, market and family nexus, the author distinguishes South Africa's 'care diamond' model by its four key players: the state, the markets, the family and private relations, and non-state actors (not-for-profit organisations). In so doing, the author provides a critique of the residual model of welfare that characterises the country's social security system which assumes that people (outside the elderly and children) can take care of their welfare needs, with the government often only stepping in when the family and non-state actors are unable to do so. It also critiques the state's [over]reliance on and high expectations of the not-for-profit sector for service delivery while providing little support and resources to it. It points out the contradiction, and indeed the fallacy, of building a social assistance system on the assumption of near-universal employment, and thus having no provision for able working-age South Africans, in a country with record-breaking unemployment rates.

In the first chapter, the history of the CSG is discussed in great detail, including the trade-offs, compromises, and negotiation that characterised its formation as well as its evolution over the years. Later parts of the book are summarised, showing how the author has related her own experiences to the experiences of others and to the philosophies that were dominating.

The second chapter of the book presents and discusses the theoretical framework of the book. Hochfeld centres Fraser's social theory of need and Sen's capabilities approach as the conceptual springboard from which she seeks to understand the CSG and the women who receive it on behalf of their children. She asserts that

both these conceptual frameworks allow me to ask questions of politics in relation to welfare. It is not just a question of a body of 'rights', nor is it a functionalist question of 'what we should do about poor people', nor is it an institutional, often path-dependent one of 'what is possible' in the institutional structure we have created. (p.43)

This chapter also provides an in-depth analysis and problematisation of redistribution and 'the politics of need' as concepts within the welfare space. The author calls for the 'politicization of social protection' (p.42), and presents an elegant argument on how redistribution – at both the state and household level – is inherently politicised; determinations about who is entitled to what and whose interests are served and prioritised are not merely technical considerations, but have power at their core.

An understated, but equally important, contribution of the book is the methods chapter (Chapter 3) which details the author's process of conceptualising the study, the methodological framework used, and personal reflections. In this chapter, she takes the reader through the process of collecting data in the field, and through her field notes where she noted observations, self-reflections, and wrestled with her responsibility toward an 'ethic of care' in her interaction with her participants, while being aware of the power imbalances that may have been inevitably fostered in the process. In discussing reciprocity in a research context, and how, in an attempt to hold that delicate balance between reimbursing and thanking participants for their time with gifts of food and children's books as part of her ethic of care, *and* being careful to not let the gifts 'reinforce class and power distinctions between researcher and participant', the author still had to contend with the 'continued discomfort that I not only appear to be all-powerful but also to continue to fail' (p.63).

The empirical Chapters 4–6 report, often in moving detail, the stories of the women Hochfeld interviewed for this book. Hochfeld centres each empirical chapter around a specific case study of one of the women she interviewed for the book. With each case study she looks at a woman's experience of different kinds of institutional injustices as she navigates the social grants and social services systems. In Chapter 4, Hochfeld provides a window into the life of one woman, who was not a typical CSG recipient 'caught in long-term and persistent poverty as are so many others' (p.67), but rather someone educated, intelligent and who had lived a middle-class life working as a civil servant before falling on hard times. The case, Hochfeld argues, is 'a story about the fragility of success'. In examining this woman's story, the author identifies the injustices she suffers despite being a recipient of the CSG: first in losing her job as a result of a long illness, and then having no assistance in negotiating the labour, health and social services systems that would have corrected this wrong, and later being wrongly accused of social grants fraud, the woman suffers institutional injustice leading to her experiencing 'maldistribution, misrecognition, and misrepresentation'. Her loss of status as someone who was once a middle-class, financially secure professional renders her invisible to the state, in the same way that low-income women experience invisibility everyday of their lives as they try to make a living for themselves and their children. The case study powerfully demonstrates the irony of CSG receipt status, which should 'automatically entitle the recipient to a range of benefits, and then open up avenues to necessary social services without the person in need having to fight for or negotiate the confusing landscape of state and NGO offerings available' (p.76), but instead renders low-income women, by reason of their poverty status, invisible and powerless to access the help

they need beyond the CSG income. This also highlights the fragmented nature of welfare and social services in South Africa, and the absence of a 'Cash Plus Care' approach in how social grants are administered and implemented – in other words, the lost opportunity for a cash transfer like the CSG which reaches more than 12 million children and caregivers per month, to be a 'one-stop shop service design where a person only has to negotiate one route to service delivery' (p.76). Ultimately, the main thrust of this chapter is about how even though South Africa is a developmental state with a pro-poor policy agenda, policy instruments such as the CSG only serve to 'intervene to lessen the severity of... injustice, but it cannot [on its own] alter structural injustice' (p.77).

In Chapter 5, Hochfeld presents another case study which illustrates how in South Africa's social protection and welfare systems 'the more you need, the less deserving you are' (p.90). She presents the poignant story of a young mother who has been 'cyclically rejected by society since her childhood' (p.90). Her needs are many and complex. Deprivation and need layer every area of her life. The author terms these as 'thin vs thick needs', arguing that this young woman's needs can only be described as 'thick' due to the complex and multi-layered nature of them. She needs more than just cash, she needs mental health services, security (emotional and physical) and hope for the future, and yet accessing the CSG is the only straightforward entitlement she is able to lay claim on; all the other services and support are hard to come by.

Chapter 6 tells the story of a woman who receives the CSG on behalf of her son. She lives in a small flat overcrowded with family members and relatives. Her story demonstrates the ubiquitous nature of dysfunction in households ravaged by poverty and deprivation. The woman and her child live with her family in a state of what appears to be continuous conflict, drug and alcohol abuse. In this case study we are able to see the inadequacy of the CSG, as the primary source of income for herself and her child, to meet her need for private, safe accommodation away from her dysfunctional family environment. In this way the case study demonstrates once again, the need for a Cash Plus Care approach – this primary caregiver needs much more than cash to be able to live a socially just life of dignity and freedom for herself and her child. She needs adequate, safe housing, and mental health services for herself and her son. However, Hochfeld warns against writing off the CSG as a powerless bargaining chip in intra-household dynamics. The author notes in this chapter that

while the CSG does not offer freedom as a capability, it is without doubt a source of power...along with the other social grants in the household...these forms of income are the only solid and dependable forms of monthly cash, and [the primary caregiver] is thus an important resource in the family system. This might protect her and her son from the worst of her mothers' fickleness (p.118)

Hochfeld ends the book with the conclusion that, for low-income women to realise the social justice outcomes of a transformative social protection framework for themselves and their children, we need to put in place a Cash *and* Care framework. She calls for a bolder developmental agenda that not only ameliorates poverty, but also addresses the underlying, structural causes of poverty, thereby enabling women who are recipients of social assistance to more fully experience recognition, representation, dignity and freedom. She quotes Fredman¹² who observed that:

Cash transfers can only be palliative. Universal access to good quality services such as health and education, free at the point of delivery; availability of childcare and flexible working [environment]; equal rights in relation to property and family law; minimum wage laws and a particular focus on the informal sector are all essential components of any strategy to address women's poverty. (p.131)

Overall impression of the book

While deeply engaging, the book is not without limitations. For one, as the research was conducted between 2011 and 2014, some of the



background statistics are outdated. For instance, the book lauds and credits the CSG for reducing poverty in South Africa, but does not present more recent stats which show that, despite the presence of the grant, steady increases in poverty, hunger and malnutrition have been observed since 2015.¹³ Indeed, Devereux and Waidler's¹⁴ 2017 synthesis of evidence on social grants in the context of child malnutrition and food security suggests that there has been very limited improvement in child nutrition indicators in South Africa in the last few years despite the presence of the CSG; that while the CSG improves food security, it is too small to reduce severe child malnutrition, and that the impact of the CSG is eroded and diluted by multiple uses and multiple users in households where it is often the only reliable source of income. The evidence about the inadequacy of the CSG speaks to its benefit level being too low for it to be effective; being upfront about this adds nuance to the Cash and Care debate – it is not that we merely want the care components of welfare delivery to be strengthened within the Cash and Care framework, but we also recognise the need to ensure that the cash value of the CSG approaches a level of adequacy.^{15,16} The author alludes to this in later chapters when discussing the inability of recipients to escape dysfunctional family environments because of the CSG being too small to pay for decent accommodation. Even in proposing a Cash and Care approach as a way of improving the social justice outcomes of the CSG, the author does so in part to highlight the inadequacy of the grant to, on its own, help low-income women and their children. The limitation of the book, therefore, is only in not explicitly discussing the inadequacy of the CSG in the background chapters. This is understandable as the book was published posthumously, a few years after Hochfeld's passing – a period which coincides with much of the erosion of the CSG impact that has been observed in the last few years.

There is also a small error on Page 16 where the date on which the CSG was established is incorrectly reflected as 1987 instead of 1998.

These small limitations notwithstanding, Tessa Hochfeld's *Granting Justice* is an immense contribution to the field of social policy. While her style of writing is graceful, empathic, and unpretentious, the book is also written with intellectual rigour and elegant prose. Social policy analysts, scholars, practitioners and students alike will find this book useful in understanding the architecture of the South African social assistance system, and in particular how the CSG holds up as a policy instrument in 'granting justice' to the women and children who are its recipients. The posthumous publication of the book provides living testament of Hochfeld's incredible contribution to the field of social policy and development in South Africa, as a scholar, a feminist, and a mother.

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