

Lone Mothers' Experiences of Employment and Unemployment in South Africa

Phakama Ntshongwana

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Introduction

This paper emerges from the Employment and Social Security Project (ESSP) which formed part of the UK Government Department for International Development (DfID) Strengthening Analytical Capacity in Evidence based Decision making (SACED) programme. The SACED programme was a partnership between DfID, the South African Department of Social Development (DSD), the Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy (CASASP) at the University of Oxford and the School of Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The main focus of the ESSP was to explore attitudes to paid work and social security among recipients of Child Support Grant and Disability Grant in South Africa and to investigate the extent to which there was any evidence of a 'dependency culture' emerging amongst grant recipients. The main findings of the project were reported in Surender et al. (2007) and in two related papers (Noble et al., 2006 and Surender et al., 2010). In this paper and in two others (Ntshongwana, 2010; Ntshongwana et al., 2010) the data collected in the ESSP are further interrogated in respect of lone mothers in South Africa. In this paper issues relating to employment and unemployment among lone mothers are explored. One of the other papers examines the issues that emerge in relation to lone mothers, child care, paid work and social security (Ntshongwana, 2010) whilst in Ntshongwana et al (2010) possible social assistance options for lone mothers are explored using SAMOD (a tax and social security microsimulation model).

As there is no social assistance provision for unemployed people of working age in South Africa unemployed lone mothers need to be both full time caregivers and prospective breadwinners simultaneously (Lewis, 1997; van Drenth et al., 1999). Furthermore, the country's high unemployment rate (22.7% according to the official definition of unemployment) puts low skilled lone mothers in a precarious position (LFS, 2007).¹ Limited work opportunities for low skilled black African women, in particular, has compelled them to accept menial jobs that often deny them their social citizenship rights (Bentley and Habib, 2008; LFS, 2007):

"I'm from Willowvale, I usually work as a maid in town [East London] then I go home every second month for a long weekend. The money is not much but at least I go home with something. My eldest daughter is sixteen, she looks after the younger ones. My little one is five years and is going to start school. We are used to being apart there's nothing else we can do, the children don't have a father. But it's difficult looking after children at work when mine are on their own" (Mdantsane CSG Focus Group, 2006).

The issues the lone mother raises in relation to her work and her children are numerous and complex. Similar to millions of low skilled migrant workers in South Africa the respondent has

¹ The official definition of unemployment in South Africa refers to able bodied people of working age (15–65 years) who did not have a job or business in the seven days prior to the LFS survey interview but had looked for work or taken steps to start a business in the four weeks prior to the interview and were available to take up work within two weeks of the interview. The expanded definition of unemployment includes discouraged work-seekers - people who want to work and are available to work but who say that they are not actively looking for work. In September 2007 there were 3 443 000 discouraged work-seekers in South Africa (LFS, 2007).

left her rural home and moved to the city of East London in order to be a domestic worker (Posel et al., 2004). She highlights the sacrifice she has made in order to work – living away from her children and the infrequency of her ‘visits’ to her home. The lone mother’s sixteen year-old daughter has become the head of household in the respondent’s absence and the primary caregiver to her siblings. The lone mother has a young child aged five, who is about to start school probably in her absence. The maternal deprivation her children experience is further compounded by the fact that her job entails looking after somebody else’s children, her employer’s, while hers are deprived of her care. The lone mother also raises the inadequacy of her wage which reflects the low earnings of unskilled women in South Africa (Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, 1998; Pabale, 2008) even in the context of ‘live-in’ work.

In this paper the way low income lone mothers’ relationship to paid work is structured in South Africa is examined with a view to exploring attachment to the labour market such women may or may not have and challenges they face in their day to day lives. The main message to emerge from this analysis is that, due to the lack of employment opportunities in South Africa and the impact of the Apartheid legacy, black African lone mothers are excluded when out of work and excluded when in work.

Lone mothers’ motivation to work is explored leading to a discussion about the financial and non-financial benefits of work for lone mothers. The costs of paid work for lone mothers are considered using domestic workers as a case study. Such an analysis will serve to elucidate the types and extent of exclusion experienced by low income lone mothers in South Africa even when in paid work. The issues relating to the provision of care for children by lone mothers is taken up in a further paper emerging from this project (Ntshongwana, 2010).

The analysis in this paper largely draws on focus group material conducted in the Eastern and Western Cape Provinces in 2006 and 2007. Please see Surender et al. (2007) for details about the methodological approach that was used and the areas in which the focus groups took place. It is supplemented by quantitative material drawn from the 2006 and 2007 South African Social Attitudes Surveys (SASAS).

Lone mothers, unemployment and deprivation

According to the Labour Force Survey the unemployment rate for black African women was 36.4% in 2007, 22.4% for the coloured female population, 17.9% for Indian women and 4.6% for white women (LFS, 2007). Most commentators have argued that the high levels of unemployment are mainly due to a lack of suitable available jobs (e.g. Du Toit, 2007; Seekings, 2003). Focus group respondents (both male and female, young and old, rural and urban based) confirmed the scarcity of jobs in the country:

“There are no jobs here in Khayelitsha” (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006)

“It’s not that there is a scarcity of jobs in Mncotsho village, there are no jobs at all, they are simply not available” (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006)

“Here we all are unemployed, there are no jobs here” (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

In addition to a lack of employment opportunities, lone mothers are also impeded by their education levels when trying to find work. The education profile of lone mothers of working age in SASAS 2007 is as follows²:

Table 1 Education level of lone mothers of working age by population group

Population Group	Level of Education					
	No Schooling	Some Secondary Schooling	Secondary School certificate (Matric)	Skills Certificate	Diploma/Degree	Post Graduate
Black African	4.0%	62.1%	26.6%	5.43%	1.8%	0%
Coloured	4.5%	72.7%	15.6%	5.1%	0%	0%
Indian/Asian	0%	14.8%	84.1%	1.1%	0%	0%
White	0%	23.2%	58.2%	13.7%	4.9%	0%

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2007)

As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of black African lone mothers either have no formal education at all or had some secondary schooling – two thirds of black African lone mothers had not obtained their secondary school certificate (matric) in 2007. The consequence of unemployment in the absence of an effective social security system is severe poverty which impacts on both the lone mothers and their children. Lone mothers defined their poverty status as follows:

² All reported percentages are statistically significant with $p < .001$ unless otherwise stated.

Table 2 Self-reported poverty status of lone mothers of working age by population group

Population Group	Non-Poor	Just get by	Poor
Black African	25.2%	36.3%	38.5%
Coloured	20.1%	44.2%	35.7%
Indian/Asian	85.0%	15.0%	0%
White	48.1%	28.7%	23.2%

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2007)

Almost 39% of black African lone mothers of working age defined themselves as being 'poor' as compared to just 23.2% of white lone mothers.

The impact of having a lone mother who is unemployed on children has many aspects, including the inability to pay school fees which was a prominent theme in the focus groups:

"My children have been sent home a few times because I couldn't pay their school fees. Sometimes it's a choice between buying food and paying school fees from the CSG, where else am I going to get money" (Female CSG, Crossroads, 2006)

"If you haven't paid school fees your child cannot sit for her examinations" (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

"I receive the CSG, the teachers know that so they say I have no excuse for not paying school fees even though I don't have a job. They also sent my child home" (Female CSG, Mncotsho, 2006)

As will be discussed later in this paper, certain poor areas have been exempted from paying school fees for secondary schooling in South Africa (Department of Education, 2008). However, at least at the time of the focus groups, it had not been adequately implemented. The lack of financial resources to pay their children's school fees compromises the youngsters' education progress as they are constantly being sent home - a destitute environment where, at times, a choice has to be made between buying food and securing a primary education (Female CSG, Crossroads, 2006). Crying, a lone mother from Gugulethu expressed the humiliation she constantly undergoes having to borrow money from neighbours to buy bread:

"My children have forgotten the taste of meat. Since I lost my job I cannot afford it. Even just to buy bread I often have to borrow money from neighbours. It's embarrassing, they belittle you ..." (Female CSG, Gugulethu, 2006).

Food insecurity, particularly for young children, has been proven to have adverse effects on child development (Human Development and Food Security, 2007).

Black African lone mothers also expressed their vulnerability to crime as a result of their housing deprivation (Noble et al., 2006), having to live in shacks for a lack of financial resources:

"I lost my house after I lost my job. I couldn't pay rent anymore so we live in a shack, my children and I. It's not secure, I feel like anyone can break the door down and crime rates are so high in Khayelitsha" (Female CSG, Makhaza, 2006)

"I never thought I'd end up in a shack for so long in Cape Town. The huts at home [rural Eastern Cape village] are much better, stronger. It's so unsafe here, the crime, it's really violent. Living in a shack, it's not safe" (Female CSG, Makhaza, 2006).

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

"It's dangerous here, living in shacks, if you happen to need the toilet in the middle of the night, you just can't go. You can't ..."(Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

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

"I've lost count, the number of times we've had to build a new shack because of the heavy rains here. It's not good for the children the worry, the insecurity during the rainy season" (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

Unemployment can also lead to isolation:

"I'm still young, I don't want to just stay at home, I mean I have matric [secondary school certificate]. It's so lonely being at home, just me and the baby and my grandmother. I want to interact with other people, people of my own age group you know" (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006).

In addition, people who are unemployed and/or in poverty are said to be prone to depression and a low self-esteem, making it difficult to form lasting partnerships or marriages (Millar, 2000). Asked about their emotional state in SASAS (2007) the difference in the emotional well being of lone mothers who were employed full time and those who were unemployed (both actively looking for work and too discouraged to do so) was considerable:

Table 3 Lone mothers' Self-reported happiness - 'Taking all things into consideration, would you say you are':

State of Happiness	Lone mothers in full time employment	Unemployed Lone Mothers
Very happy	6.7%	3.7%
Happy	55.9%	44.3%
Neither happy nor unhappy	17.4%	20.5%
Not happy	20.0%	19.3%
Not at all happy	0%	12.4%

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2007)

None of the lone mothers in full time employment declared themselves to be *'not at all happy'* while 12.4% of unemployed lone mothers did (SASAS, 2007). In addition, a higher percentage of lone mothers in full time employment were either happy or very happy than those who were not employed. It could be argued that employed lone mothers would be even happier if they did not have child care concerns, which probably exist considering the elementary nature of most lone mothers' employment status and thus the lack of affordability of decent child care facilities (see the section below on the cost of paid work for lone mothers). In the next section, challenges faced by unemployed lone mothers and their families are explored.

Lone mothers' attitudes to paid work

In the absence of any social assistance support for unemployed lone mothers in their own right, there is enormous pressure for them to seek employment in order to survive. In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that the vast majority of low income lone mothers have a strong attachment to work for various reasons. Asked about a lone mother with a child/children under the age of five, lone mothers of working age residing in both rural and urban locations had similar attitudes with a resounding positive response for lone mothers to *'go out to work to support her child'*:

Table 4: Lone mothers of working age 'Thinking about a single mother with a child under 5. Which one of these statements comes closest to your view?'

	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	ALL
She should go out to work to support her child	67.0%	67.6%	78.1%	18.6%	59.5%
She should stay at home to look after her child	7.4%	4.5%	0.1%	0%	8.4%
She should do as she thinks best	25.5%	19.8%	20.5%	81.4%	31.2%
Undecided	0.1%	0%	0%	0%	0.9%

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2007)

This, some may argue, could be the result of the internalisation of the 'moral order' in South African society whereby a mother who, having broken the moral code of being a member of a nuclear family and failed to 'retain' her male partner (if she is not a widow) should, at the least, work to provide for her child/children. Such economic independence and 'good working behaviour', at whatever cost, does not only serve to provide for the children of lone mothers but would provide a 'good enough' role model to children who are perceived to be already morally disadvantaged by being members of lone-parent families (Murray, 1989). There were, however, variations in response to the same question when analysed according to racial group. It should be noted that in Table 4 only 18.6% of white lone mothers thought a lone mother with a child under the age of five ought to *"go out to work to support her child"* compared, for example, to 67.0% of black African lone mothers. This may be because white lone mothers are likely to have more financial resources than lone mothers of other racial groups and could thus afford to *"do as she (they) think(s) best"* (81.4%) having the option to stay at home to care for their/her child/children.

Rather than internalising the 'moral order', this suggests that black African lone mothers appear to be responding to the dire reality of conditions without employment, in the context of no social assistance support. Indeed, a higher percentage of black African lone mothers stated that they should go out to work to support the child than did the population at large (67% versus 59.5%). This, we argue, strikes at the root of the dependency culture thesis in South Africa, as the (non-

white) lone mothers are clearly demonstrating strong attachment to the labour market (see also Surender et al., 2007; Noble et al., 2006; Surender et al., 2010).

Indeed, if we look at how black African lone mothers of working age respond to the same question by self-defined poverty status (Table 5, row totals), over 85% of those who state that the lone mother should go out to work are those who define themselves as poor or 'just getting by', whereas just over half of those who say that the lone mother should stay at home to look after her child define themselves as 'non-poor'.

Table 5: Attitudes of Black African Lone Mothers of working age to Employment by Self-defined poverty status – “Thinking about a single mother with a child under 5. Which one of these statements comes closest to your view?”

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

Source: South African Social Attitudes Survey (2007)

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

“If I didn’t work how would my children go to school? If you don’t pay school fees the children can’t write their exams. They always turn them away. I need full-time work [...] right now I only have part-time work in a hotel. I pay school fees, buy books and uniform. The children need to eat. I need money to take them to the clinic when they are sick.”
(Female CSG, Makhaza 2006)

The lone mother raises a myriad of reasons for her need to work not just on a part-time basis but full-time. She needs to provide for her children’s educational needs, health-care and nutrition. Upon probing about whether she was aware that national education policy (South African Schools Act, 1996) stipulates that school fees could be formally waived for pupils from poor families and that no child is meant to be turned away from school for a lack of school fees, the lone mother’s response was that she had heard about such a policy but that it “*obviously does not apply to my children’s school*” (Female CSF, Makhaza 2006). The lack of social policy integration at national and local level has, in this instance, lead to considerable distress for the lone mother and probably her children as well such that the respondent is anxious to find full-time work in order to meet her children’s needs.³

In line with other research findings (e.g. Amoateng, 2005; Russell, 2004; Ferreira, 2003) some lone mothers in the focus group interviews indicated that they lived in households with extended family members who were in receipt of other forms of social grants which were pooled together in order to meet, as far as possible, the basic needs of all family members. Such a situation,

³ Since 2006 all schools in areas with high rates of poverty have been exempted from paying school fees (RSA Government Gazette, 2007:510; Department of Education, 2008).

Gough and Wood would argue, locates unemployed low income black African mothers in South Africa in informal security regimes (Gough and Wood, 2004).⁴

Without a comprehensive social security system for low income lone mothers, it is likely that poor lone mothers who opt to stay at home to look after their young children, forfeiting employment in order to do so, would only have the CSG and informal, sporadic, financial assistance to depend on. Notwithstanding these challenges, lone mothers do not necessarily support the notion of employment at any cost: when asked if *“it is alright for lone mothers to live at their place of work even if it means they are separated from their children”* (a situation quite common with black African domestic workers) – forty six percent of black African poor lone mothers responded negatively (either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing) whilst only 16% of non-poor black African lone mothers responded in the same way (SASAS, 2007). It is likely that, having possibly experienced being a *‘live-in’* domestic worker, or at least knowing someone who has had such an experience, and being separated from their children, poor black African lone mothers are more likely to be aware of the adverse effect of such an arrangement compared to non-poor black African lone mothers.

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

“It is important for all us here as black parents to ensure that our children have better lives than we did. Education is crucial. We did not have all these opportunities under apartheid but our children can have a chance. That is what I work for when I have work and that is why I continue to look for work” (Female CSG, Langa, 2006)

As a lone mother from Mdantsane describes the situation:

“It’s better for my children when I have work. I am all they have” (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

A number of lone mothers responded indignantly when asked whether they would opt to work if a job were available, with a few muttering - *“I would have thought that is obvious”* - that they would. One lone mother so desperately needed work that she could not respond to the question, crying (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006). The next section explores the cost of paid work for low income lone mothers.

⁴ According to Gough and Wood there are two additional (to Esping-Anderson’s) worlds of welfare in sub-Saharan Africa – informal security regimes and insecurity regime. In informal security regimes there is a high reliance on community and family to provide for welfare needs. There is a high reliance on patronage where short term security is exchanged for long term vulnerability (Gough and Wood, 2004).

The cost of paid work for lone mothers

The lack of social assistance provision for low income lone mothers in South Africa translates to women accepting and staying in arduous jobs in order to support themselves and their children. According to the LFS thirty four percent of the country's elementary labour force comprises of women in domestic work (LFS, 2007). In order to illustrate the challenges a low skilled black African lone mother in employment can face, the archetypal example of the life of a lone mother who is a domestic worker is explored. In South Africa most domestic workers are part of an urban working class, however, many of them are from impoverished rural backgrounds with little or no schooling (Dinat and Peberdy, 2007; SASAS, 2007). For a poor, rural and low skilled migrant from the Eastern Cape domestic service in the city of Cape Town, for example, can provide a solution to the problems of unemployment and lack of accommodation once in an economic hub. A lone mother originally from the Eastern Cape Province who was visiting her sister in Khayelitsha, also an economic migrant, raises several of these issues:

"We often did not have food back home. The neighbours sometimes helped but they too don't have much. All the time it's difficult, it's still difficult but when you work in the kitchens (domestic work) at least I don't have to worry about food, I accept whatever they give me. I have a place to sleep here, I don't have to sell my body at Sea Point and I can send money home to the children" (Makhaza CSG, 2006).

Driven by poverty and the lack of employment opportunities in her village, this domestic worker has to earn money to support her children even if it entails being separated from them. She reiterates that even though she has a job, sends money to her children and does not have to "sell her body" life is still difficult for her. The domestic worker's allusion to prostitution as the worst option to earn money suggests that some migrant women may indeed find themselves in such a fate in order to survive and support their children. Indeed, women in focus group interviews in Langa and Gugulethu, both near Cape Town, raised the issue of prostitution as a means for living:

"It happens, women using their bodies at Sea Point for money. These days I don't judge them, times are hard there are no jobs" (Female CSG, Langa, 2006).

"We need jobs in Gugulethu, interesting jobs for our children otherwise they end up in Sea Point, you know, earning money in ways that are not meant to be" (Female CSG, Gugulethu, 2006)

Domestic workers are likely to face further challenges at their place of work. To be a live-in domestic worker means that one is dependent on one's employer not only for wages but for basic necessities such as food and accommodation (Momsen, 1999). Such dependence both reflects and reinforces the inferior structural location of black African women in South African society. Furthermore, the relationship between domestic workers and their employers has remained generally paternalistic even after the demise of apartheid (Momsen, 1999). The attitude of most domestic work employers towards their domestic workers reflects class discrimination and in some instances racism:

"Sometimes it's no better working in black people's kitchens. They think you are less human just because you are not educated. They can forget that you are a person too just like some white employers towards us blacks ... " (Female CSG, Makhaza, 2006).

However, it is the very desperation of domestic workers, as expressed by focus group respondents, that makes them all the more vulnerable and forces them to keep a job no matter

how bad the conditions. Domestic workers are still largely exploited in terms of the number of hours they work and wages paid (Dinat, 2007) even though the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) is meant to legally protect them. By virtue of being a low skilled, black African lone mother, therefore, the average domestic worker finds herself at the nexus of four structures of discrimination - race, sex, class and marital status. Such discrimination renders such women vulnerable to exploitation as evidenced, in practice, in their lack of employment benefits as well as deprivation of a social life (Momsen, 1999).⁵ The most common form of recruitment for domestic workers is by word of mouth (Dinat and Peberdy, 2007) from friends and relatives. This form of recruitment contributes to the lack of records kept in terms of conditions of employment which leaves the domestic worker unprotected in the event of a dispute (Female CSG, Langa, 2006).

"I left my last job working in the kitchens because they were not paying me properly. Sometimes they would try to cheat and insist on a particular payment they made. Just because I'm not educated doesn't mean I'm a fool" (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

With the experience of her intelligence being undermined (*"just because I'm not educated doesn't mean I'm a fool"*) this lone mother conveys the insecurity around her wages whilst in domestic employment. This feature of subordination and lack of protection makes domestic workers vulnerable to arbitrary dismissal, deductions from wages for breakages or lost property, evictions from the backyard rooms in which they stay and possible withholding of wages by the employer.

"I have to go back to my village, I can't stay in East London anymore. I was a domestic worker [...] I lost my accommodation when I lost my job. I got fired, it was all so sudden ..." (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

A lone mother in Mncotsho village who worked as a domestic worker was suddenly dismissed and replaced by her employer's relative who had lost her job:

"I used to work in the city and got fired when my employer decided to get her relative who had lost her job to come look after her children" (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006).

Concerned about not being able to pay her children's school fees on time, a woman in Langa said:

"If my children go to school and get a good education they won't go through the bad experiences we go through. The money they earn won't be withheld because they've broken a bowl at work or something is missing and the madam thinks they've stolen it" (Female CSG, Langa, 2006).

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

⁵ Domestic Workers are entitled to an Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) – the amount that they (domestic workers) are able to claim depends on how long they had been contributing to the fund (whilst in employment). Domestic workers get paid a percentage (up to 58%) of a day's salary for every 6 days that they worked while contributing to the fund (Department of Labour, 2007).

"It's tough, you go home [Eastern Cape village] and you don't know your children anymore, you don't get along with the people that are bringing them up. You live at work [city of East London] and of course you are a social imposter there...." (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

The 'all encompassing' nature of live-in domestic work may lead the women to suffer from extreme isolation for various reasons. First, entry into their workplace is likely to be restricted by high walls, guard dogs, alarm systems and locked security gates – very different from communal living in rural Eastern Cape villages. Second, many domestic workers live alone in backyard rooms with limited access to visitors (Dinat and Peberdy, 2007). For the live-in domestic worker the place of employment is also a place of sleep (supposed rest) and recreation under the same authority. Domestic service for most low skilled South African women, therefore, obscures boundaries between work and a private life, possibly depersonalizing a woman and compromising her sense of self.

Having depicted the typical life of a low income lone mother who is a domestic worker, a common occupation for low skilled black African women, it is evident that social citizenship rights for low income women in South Africa are still to be fully realised. Furthermore if 'economic independence' (State of the Nation Address, 2007) for low skilled women can be at such a high cost we would argue that there is a case for state support for low skilled lone mothers and their children.

Lone mothers and the Expanded Public Works Programme

So far we have focused on lone mothers' experiences of unemployment on the one hand, and the challenges of low paid employment on the other hand. There is a third strand that needs to be discussed when considering the employment 'choices' available to lone mothers. This is the so-called Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). The EPWP is considered by government as an integral part of its social protection programme. It is the justification given for the absence of social assistance provision for healthy adults of working age. However, as this section demonstrates, the EPWP does not provide social protection for all who need it. Indeed, evaluations of EPWP have consistently demonstrated that it does not deliver what was intended (McCord, 2005).

According to a World Bank report the EPWP offers short-term employment and training on the premise that supply-side interventions are an appropriate and effective response to transitional unemployment (World Bank, 2004). Such a policy approach is consistent with the use of public works programmes in a context of temporary economic dislocation (Meth, 2004). However, the structural unemployment and labour market challenges faced by South Africa, are not transient (McCord, 2005). Low skill supply-side interventions have only limited potential to address the technologically advanced and globalised labour market issues (Kingdon and Knight, 2001).

The EPWPs have names resonating with the political discourse of '*graduating out of dependence*' into economic autonomy, compounding existing pressure for unemployed lone mothers to work. 'Zivuseni' building maintenance programme in Gauteng means '*get yourselves up*' when literally translated and '*uplift yourselves (by working)*' figuratively. 'Vuk'uphile', one of the EPWP learnerships, means '*wake up (by working) and live*'. Such lexicon suggests that the EPWPs' targeted population group is indolent and needs to be '*awakened*' from unemployment slumber (Noble and Ntshongwana, 2008). In his work on addressing the employment needs of the American ghetto underclass, Julius Wilson rejected policies that are based crudely on the reshaping of incentives for the structural underclass because of their pejorative and destructive nature (Wilson, 1987). EPWPs have proved not to be the intended panacea for the high rate of structural unemployment in South Africa and have not lead people to "*graduate out of dependency*" (McCord, 2004). Public works programmes might be seen as a useful short-term strategy, but are not, by themselves, a long term solution. Their average tenure is 10 months at the end of which most people go back to joblessness (Meth, 2004).

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

"I take my son with me when I work. We sweep and clean around the streets. There is no one to look after him, but the dust is so bad for him, he's always coughing. He gets so tired because I can't always carry him on my back and I don't think he likes the constant noise in the streets. But I must work, we can't depend on this CSG, it's not enough" (Female CSG, Langa, 2006)

"I really want to work, there were public works jobs going at the main school here, cleaning jobs. At least if you work there people get to know you and you are in a better position to get more work when this public works finishes. I started but had to stop

because my cousin couldn't look after my children anymore, she got a piece job. What does one do, I ask?" (Khayelitsha, 2006)

Underlying the Expanded Public Works approach is the idea that economic participation is an essential component of modern citizenship - citizen's *responsibilities* rather than *rights* are emphasised, in particular the responsibility for self/family-support through work or self-improvement to become employable (Noble et al., 2006). However, in the context of high unemployment, a low skills base, and limited and short-term EPWP opportunities, unemployed people's constitutional rights to social assistance are being neglected; this is particularly pertinent in the case of lone mothers who individually face the additional challenge of ensuring that their children are well cared for.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that low income black African lone mothers are often faced with unemployment on the one hand (and the lack of social security provision to help them meet their needs) and, if a job can be found, poor quality employment conditions on the other hand. Although the South African constitution (1996) states that:

“Everyone has the right to have access to health care services, including reproductive health care, sufficient food, water and social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance” (Republic of South Africa, 1996)

and every child (under the age of 18 years) has a right to:

“basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services”

the focus group material used in this paper has provided examples of the extent of multiple-deprivation experienced by low income, low skilled lone mothers and their children (whether they are unemployed or employed in menial jobs). A lack of health care, food insecurity, housing deprivation, inadequate child care and susceptibility to crime are some of the unmet social rights in the lives of black African lone mothers, in particular. Rendered low skilled with inadequate education by the apartheid legacy, low income lone mothers shoulder a disproportionate responsibility of reproducing and raising the country’s human\social capital.

The social policy framework of the country arguably reinforces and rewards wage labour as the main vehicle for social inclusion (du Toit, 2007). It does so, however, in a highly problematic context where wage labour is not only scarce but is becoming increasingly embattled (with the influx of immigrants), frail (due to advanced technology) and vulnerable (with current global economic challenges). For lone mothers, employment is often at a high cost with inadequate wages (causing distress as lone mothers struggle to meet their children’s basic needs, maternal deprivation for their children and inadequate care). Even under such adverse working conditions there is evidence of strong attachment to the labour market amongst low skilled lone mothers - disproving the perception of a dependency culture for those in receipt of the CSG and, indeed, refuting Mead’s and Murray’s moral underclass theory (Mead 1989, 1997; Murray 1989, 1994). According to the lone mothers’ accounts from the focus groups, the *diswelfares* (Titmus, 1968) of unemployed women appear to be similar, and at times worse, than those of women in elementary employment. Bereft of hope women in isolated rural areas, in particular, seemed to be ‘just surviving’.

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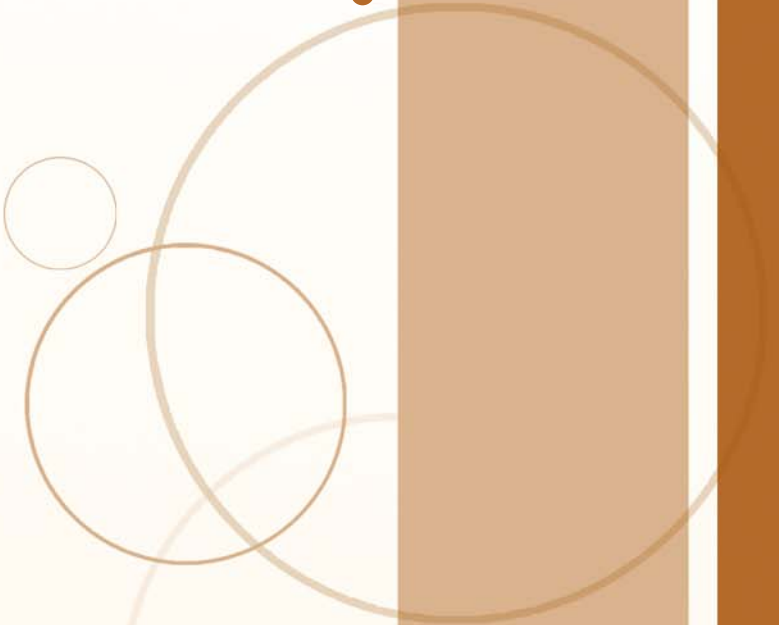
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Department of Social Development
Private Bag x901
PRETORIA
0001

Toll Free no: 0800 60 10 11
Website address: www.socdev.gov.za

