Childcare Challenges faced by Lone Mothers in South Africa

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Contents

Introduction

This paper emerges from the Employment and Social Security Project (ESSP) which formed part of the UK Government Department for International Development's (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; 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 for lone mothers in relation to child care, paid work and social security are examined. One of the other papers examines lone mothers' experiences of employment and unemployment (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).

This paper draws from focus group material collected as part of the ESSP project in 2006/7. 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.

In the absence of a comprehensive social security system, low income lone mothers experience poverty whether they are unemployed or in low-skilled and poorly paid employment (Ntshongwana, 2010). This poverty is multidimensional and includes food insecurity, living environment deprivation and compromised education for the concerned children. An additional challenge that lone mothers face is – in the absence of adequate resources – the provision of adequate care for their children. Accordingly, the challenges faced by low income lone mothers regarding provision of care for their children are explored in this paper. Depicting the tension between a lone mother's unpaid care responsibilities and paid work a woman in Nxarhun said:

> *"I left my job, working in the kitchens* [domestic work] *in East London, chose to stay at home and look after my children rather than being a live-in domestic worker. Either way it's not an easy choice because I don't have a salary anymore, it wasn't much but it was something. I couldn't bear to leave my children here with someone else like I have done in the past, abandon them, they lost their father only a year ago, he left us, at least if one parent is around there's some comfort for the children. But it's not easy, whatever food I buy I give mostly to the children and I go hungry sometimes. It's not easy, I feel weak at times from the hunger and I can't carry my little one, but I am here, I am here with them …"* (Female CSG, Nxarhun Village, 2006).

This lone mother had to choose between 'abandoning' her children by retaining her job or forfeiting her employment and caring for her children who had lost their father a year previously. She chose the latter, giving up her job in order to care for her children. However, as she no longer had a salary she could not afford to sufficiently feed herself as she prioritised her children's nutrition:

> "*whatever food I buy I give mostly to the children*"

Risking her health she ends up compromising the very care that is of such great importance to her that she gave up her income:

> "*I feel weak at times from the hunger and I can't carry my little one*".

With all the difficulties the respondent endured she found solace in the fact that she was living with her children:

> "*but I am here, I am here with them*".

Analysing challenges such as these faced by low income lone mothers will help illustrate apparent social policy disjunctions in the country which put an expectation on low skilled lone mothers to be *independent* by being in full time employment but, at the same time, having to provide care for their children.

Accordingly, in this paper the following issues will be explored. First, current government commitments about childcare will be outlined, including treaties ratified at international and region level, as well as South African-specific policy commitments. Such exploration will demonstrate the extent of incongruity between government policy and the needs of low income lone mothers and their children. Second, childcare facilities available in South Africa for young children will be reviewed, including an account of the different types of care provision available in South Africa for all income groups. Finally the physical and emotional needs of children in lone parent families and how these are addressed are discussed.

Government's commitment to childcare needs

In an attempt to tackle child poverty the South African government ratified the United Nation's Convention of the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in 1995 and 1999 respectively. The country is also a signatory to the International Labour Organisation's Convention 138 and 182 on child labour. In giving childhood its explicit and appropriate acknowledgement, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recognises childhood as:

> "meaning much more than just the space between birth and the attainment of adulthood" and refer to childhood as "the state and condition of a child's life: the quality of those years" (UNICEF, 2004).

In contrast to UNICEF's approach to childhood, the concept of *'ukukhulisa umntwana'* ('growing a child' in Xhosa[1]) when referring to child care connotatively gives salience to the importance of the *"attainment of adulthood"* rather than the quality of a child's life. In Xhosa tradition emphasis is often put on childhood's temporary or transient nature rather than on the condition of childhood in its own right. This is especially so with low income families where financial resources are strained and children are seen to deplete them with caregivers also bearing the guilt of not being able to adequately provide for their children. The term *(ukukhulisa umntwana)* further implies that reaching adulthood and the acquisition of independence is not only an imperative and ultimate goal in life, but a state that confers wholeness. Once one has been raised *(ekukhuleni)* and adulthood (physical, emotional and intellectual) is attained one is no longer a 'lesser being'. Although discipline and respect for ones elders are inferred in both the terms 'raising a child' and child care - 'raising a child' (*ukukhulisa umntwana)* puts emphasis on

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[1] An official South African language in which all focus groups were conducted.

the unequal aspect of the relationship between carer and child rather than the nurture aspect. *Ukukhula* (the state of being 'raised', reaching adulthood) and acquiring independence can become the focal point of child care which for children of low income lone mothers can be much more urgent. There is also an expectation, generally, for children from low income families to generate income for their parents and siblings once they have grown up. Asked about the needs of their children lone mothers in Mdantsane and Khayelitsha, respectively, displayed distress:

> *"It's hard raising a child. I love them but it's a very long process and a big responsibility. I have three and I wish they would grow up quickly and be independent because I can't even afford to care for them properly. I never have money and their fathers couldn't be bothered ..."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

> *"I am just waiting for this child* (her daughter) *to grow up so that I can reclaim my life, it can get too much for me and money is scarce. Sometimes I leave her at my sister's house. She helps me to raise her ..."* (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

Lamenting the emotional and material dependency of their children both these women convey the message that their children's anticipated independence and adulthood takes precedence over the quality of their care. The respondents do not have adequate income to give their children proper care and the young lone mother from Khayelitsha is eager to "reclaim my life" as soon as her child is independent. It can be argued that the financial strain on the young lone mother and the pressure on her to be independent is causing her to project pressure onto her child also to be independent, thus compromising the quality of her daughter's childhood.

> *"You raise them with the hope that when they start working they will help you and give you money. I raise them to be independent; there is no time to play because I have to work. The older ones take care of the little ones. My eldest is 12, already she can cook, clean and look after the little ones. Her sister is 10, she likes to do our laundry, she does it well ..."* (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006)

Again the notion of raising children for independence and adulthood at the expense of the quality of their childhood years is conveyed as this lone mother recounts the different responsibilities her children shoulder in her home. Evidently deprived of a childhood, her eldest daughter is, to some degree, a primary carer to her siblings, a chore which arguably translates to child labour (Budlender and Bosch, 2002). Such a situation (child labour within families) is not unique to this family in South Africa as many children, girl children in particular, find themselves in the same predicament (Department of Labour, 2003). As a signatory to the International Labour Organisation (Convention 138 and 182) on child labour the country has not thus far effectively dealt with the issue of 'sibling child carers'. It is a predicament that is arguably an inevitable outcome of a lack of a comprehensive social security system for low income lone mothers further compounded by the pressure on such women to work and be independent, supporting their children in order to be deemed 'good enough' lone mothers by both society and government:

> *"I know I need to find work but who is going to take care of my children? Everybody expects you to find work. The government, the village... You hear it on the radio all the time, that us young mothers need to find work and not depend on the grant. ..."* (Female CSG, Nxarhun, 2006).

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Another lone mother who participated in a focus group in rural Nxarhun in the Eastern Cape Province had made the decision to locate her children in other households. When asked why she responded as follows:

> *"It's not that I'm away from home and can't look after my children, I have all the time for that because I'm unemployed. As it is all I do is sit at home. It's just that I went to school for only three years and I've forgotten most of what I learnt anyway. I have two children, one in Grade 7 and the other in 9. I can't help them with their school work and they struggle so I sent one to my cousin to raise and the other lives at a friend's house who is more educated in the next village. They may not have that much food or money but they are better off than me. They have 'ubuntu' even though the separation from family is affecting my children ..."* (Female CSG, Nxarhun, 2006).

This family is faced with numerous social challenges - the lone mother is unemployed, has very limited education (three years of schooling) and as a result has sent her two children to live in separate households that "may not have much" but "are better off than" her household. Consequently her children have been "affected" by the separation from their family. The effects of inadequate care will be explored later in this paper. Sharing responsibilities of raising a child (*'ukukhulisa umntwana'*) in the Xhosa tradition with other adults is not necessarily bad in its origin – *ubuntu.*[2]   Indeed social adages such as:

> *'it takes a whole village to raise a child'* and *'my child is your child'*

speak to the nature of solidarity and collective spirit of *ubuntu*. It is about members of society helping one another and altruistically providing within their means for the development of a child. However, in the context of high unemployment rates and low wages *ubuntu* has, in effect, translated to high reliance on community and relatives to provide social welfare, including child care, for low income lone mothers. Such patronage of welfare is usually provided by less poor members of a community and often means that short term security is exchanged for long term vulnerability which is characteristic of informal security regimes (Gough and Wood, 2004). The following lone mother shares the CSG that she receives on behalf of her four children with her sister who is also a lone mother:

> *"I receive money for my four children. They get R180 each but it runs out because I also have to share and help my sister who is a single mother with a young boy. What can I do if in the middle of the month she's crying because her child won't sleep at night because of hunger. I have to take from my children's money and help my sister's child. What can I do?"* (Female CSG, Mncotsho, 2006).

Such a situation could be seen as a depiction of an informal security regime as government plays a limited role in social security provision resulting in an overwhelming reliance on individuals, leading to a cycle of insecurity and vulnerability, which can arguably compromise a child's development. Indeed, UNICEF in 2005 declared that:

> "It is the fundamental responsibility of government to protect the vulnerable and to protect the future. Children are both. Protecting children from the sharpest edges of

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[2] The concept of ubuntu is based on the principle that "each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationships with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of ...[other]... individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being" (Department of Welfare, 1997: 2).

poverty during their years of growth and formation is both the mark of a civilised society and a means of addressing some of the evident problems that affect... [their] ... quality of life" (UNICEF, 2005).

Both the South African Constitution and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, however, have a caveat in their declaration to *"protecting children from the sharpest edges of poverty during their years of growth"* (UNICEF, 2005) – it is a commitment made in accordance with state resources. Thus, whilst *"everyone has the right to have access to social security including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance"* the South African Constitution (1996) goes on to say that government *"must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources[3], to achieve the progressive realisation of* [social security provision for mothers and dependents who are unable to support themselves]" (Bill of Rights: Section 27,1996). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also states that:

> " ...governments shall, in accordance with their means and national conditions take all appropriate measures to assist parents and other persons responsible for the child and in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, health, education, clothing and housing".

Such caveats in national socio-legal commitments arguably compromise the obligation a middle income country like South Africa may otherwise have to provide comprehensive social security to low income citizens.

In relation to parental care, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child states that:

> "Every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of parental care and protection and shall, whenever possible, have the right to reside with his or her parents. No child shall be separated from his parents against his will, except when a judicial authority determines in accordance with appropriate law that such separation is in the best interest of the child" *(*African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1999).

This social right, however, is often not enjoyed by low income mothers in South Africa. Separated from her child due to a lack of resources a distraught lone mother from Makhaza, Western Cape Province, related the anguish of leaving her child in the Eastern Cape Province:

> *"I had to leave my child at home with my relatives, I couldn't imagine living with her in a shack in this Cape Town weather, the rain, the wind is too much. And who's going to look after her when I get piece jobs? That is what I came here for, work. They* (the respondent's relatives) *tell me that she is changing, my daughter – withdrawn now. I can believe it, I can still hear her harrowing screams as I left home, walking to the bus stop to come to Cape Town. It's only the distance, as I got farther away that silenced her screams ..."* (Female CSG, Makhaza, 2006)

As demonstrated by the above quote, the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child has strict stipulations for the right to parental care. In contrast to the African Charter, the South African Constitution does not refer to the will of the child:

> "Every child has the right to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment" (Bill of Rights: Section 27,1996).

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[3] Underlining indicates our emphasis.

Like all member states, the South African government has the responsibility to ensure that rights accorded to children in the CRC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the ILO are given effect at country level. In addition and in order for such rights to be effectively implemented it is imperative that the citizenship rights of low income lone mothers, the duty bearers are met (Bray and Dawes, 2007). The following quotation illustrates a situation where these rights are not met:

> *"... I do prefer it that my children are with me even though things are hard, we are a support to one another. They eat what I eat and many times, it can be the whole day or for days even, it's dry bread and water with sugar to drink. There are times when we eat the air because there's nothing. But it's fine my children are with me. I look after them even if it's in a shack, I'm their mother ..."* (Female CSG, Makhaza, 2006).

This lone mother speaks of her food insecurity (meals of *"dry bread and water with sugar"* and at times *"the air"*) and her living environment deprivation, her *"shack"* (Noble et al., 2006). The respondent takes solace in the fact that she is looking after her children herself as she has been separated from them before, even with the challenges of food insecurity and inadequate shelter. She appreciates the social capital in her children as they *"are a support to one another"*.

In terms of the South African government's policies regarding childcare for low income families, the main provision is the Early Childhood Development Programme (ECDP) which falls within the framework of government's EPWPs. The Department of Education's departure point for all Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy is that the primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of young children belongs to their parents and families (Department of Education White Paper on Early Childhood Education, 2001):

> "However, because of the inequality in income distribution, and because ECD is a public good whose benefits spill over from individual parents to society as a whole, the Department sees it as the state's responsibility to subsidise and assure the quality of ECD services" (Department of Education White Paper on Early Childhood Education, 2001:20).

To this end the Department of Education prioritises the allocation of resources for ECD on children (0-5 years with a particular focus on children younger than the age of four years) with low income mothers (Department of Education, 2001). In trying to meet the varied ECD needs of low income families government subsidises a range of programmes that target the intersecting needs of women and children which include employment opportunities for unemployed women with children younger than 5 years (Department of Social Development, 2005). In the White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Department of Education, 2001) early childhood development is defined as the process by which children from birth to the age of nine years grow and thrive – physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Such a broad definition encompasses access to a number of services within the health, social development and education government sectors - the purpose of which is to protect a child's rights to develop his/her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential (Department of Education, 2001).

Under the auspices of the Departments of Education, Health, Social Development, and the Office on the Rights of the Child in the Presidency, government has an Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in place for children 0-9 years of age with a particular focus on children under the age of four years (Department of Education, 2007) as these are crucial years for survival, cognitive and psychosocial development (Biersteker, 2004; Myers, 2004). In acknowledging that early childhood care and development begins within the context of a child's home where family members, or caregivers, play an imperative role in the care, development

and protection of young children, the Department of Education has embarked on a programme that aims to provide information to vulnerable families living in poverty and those with young parents on birth registration, access to healthcare, psychosocial care and support, nutrition and intellectual stimulation (Dawes et al., 2007). According to Dawes et al. (2007) there were no readily available figures in 2007 on the number of homes the DoE had reached or information on the impact of such a programme.

In 2008 there was a total of 12 264 registered ECD sites, nationally, spread across all provinces with 2 568 in the Eastern Cape and 963 in the Western Cape Provinces respectively (Department of Social Development, 2008). The government's target is to have a million children in registered sites with 19 000 ECD qualified practitioners (employed or self-employed) by 2010 (Department of Social Development, 2008). The Department of Social Development manages the registration of the ECD sites (12 264 in 2008) and subsidises children whose caregivers cannot afford to pay the required fees (Department of Social Development, 2008). In 2007 provinces allocated 1,1% (just under R1 billion) of provincial education expenditure to ECD with the exception of the North West Province (three percent) and the Western Cape Province (two percent) (Department of Social Development, 2008). DSD's subsidy per child ranges from R5.20 per day to R11 per day according to provincial determinations and level of need. Subsidised children in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape Provinces where focus group interviews were conducted were, in 2007, allocated R9.00 per day and R7.50 per day, respectively.[4] The subsidy is used to provide day time care, nutrition and payment of personnel overhead expenses such as furniture, equipment, educational material and maintenance (Department of Social Development, 2008).

As mentioned earlier in this section, the Department of Education's departure point for all ECD policy is that the primary responsibility for the overall care of young children rests with their parents and families (Department of Education White Paper, 2001). This is also the position of the Department of Social Development unless a child is orphaned with no alternative care, or seen to be at risk of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation. Should a child be orphaned and at risk, he/she is ordinarily placed in foster care, failing which the child is placed in a Children's Home by a social worker (Capegateway Government Information Services, 2006). Provincial Departments of Social Development register, fund and monitor Children's Homes (Capegateway Government Information Services, 2010). These conditions for children seen to be in need of state care are in line with stipulations on child care in the Children's Amendment Act (2007).

Childcare Facilities in South Africa

This section considers different types of childcare facilities available in South Africa. Both formal and informal care arrangements will be considered.

Childcare provision for high income families with young children in South Africa is mostly a matter of choice from varying types of programmes such as nurseries, crèches and day care facilities. The most commonly used form of childcare provision for high income families in South Africa is a combination of the live-in domestic work system, or au pairs, and private ECD institutions. Availability of such private facilities are usually within reasonable proximity of the children's home with children often being driven by their parents to school or walked by their au pairs (Panos, 2008). In contrast children from low income families at times have to forfeit the

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[4] This is in practice a very small subsidy, amounting to approximately 70 pence per child per day. In contrast, private daycare centres are much better resourced.

use of public ECD facilities even when fully subsidised by government because of transport costs (Biersteker and Kvalsvig,2007). Such was the case for the following lone mother's child:

> *"It's good what the ANC ...[government]... is doing with these crèches, it's good for people like us because we don't have to pay and the children get something to eat and will be ready for school, but our problems never end, us black people, my child stopped going to Nkqubela ... [an ECD facility] ... because I can't afford the transport"* (Female CSG, Duncan Village, 2006).

> *"You can't really say they are free these pre-schools because you still have to pay for transport so your child ends up missing out on this new South Africa ..."* (Female CSG, Duncan Village, 2006).

Respondents using the ECD facilities, however, often complained about the overcrowded nature of such programmes which were perceived to hinder their children's development and compromise their health:

> *"There are only two women working there, they need more for that many children if the government really wants our children to develop well. That hall is too small for the children that's why they are always infecting one another with all sorts of illnesses. It's only a good idea because it gives me time to look for work or do a piece job even if it's just a few hours ..."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

Asked if she would, given a choice and with the provision of adequate social security provision for herself and her child, use the ECD facility the lone mother responded:

> *"No, definitely not right now, she's too young, not even a year old. Maybe if she was a bit older I would feel better because one has to work ..."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

Another lone mother from Khayelitsha expressed similar sentiments in support of the general idea of ECDPs, but highlighted the risks posed by a lack of adequate facilities, suggesting instead that government could provide support for low income lone mothers to look after their own children:

> *"This would never happen under apartheid, for our children to have somewhere to go like this while we look for work, so we are grateful. But you know instead of the government spending all the money on these programmes maybe for young children under two they can help us look after our own children, surely that has to be best. With all the diseases going around because of AIDS these days your child can be exposed to too much, and it's overcrowded. It's better if they are older..."* (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

Both these lone mothers have children younger than the age of two years – they express preference for caring for their children and not using the ECD facilities.

The Department of Education found that *"ECD provision for African children from birth to- 5 year olds in poverty-stricken rural and informal areas is far lower than in formal urban areas, both in terms of quality and quantity"* (Department of Education, 2001). This observation is supported by material emerging from the focus group interviews. Lone mothers in two rural locations,

Mncotsho and Nxarhun villages respectively, expressed the desire to migrate to an urban area, Mdantsane, not only to seek employment but to access ECDPs for their young children as well:

> *"I only went to school up to Standard 3, I'm worried that with the advancement of education these days I can't teach my children anything useful, at least in Mdantsane they have these ECDPs I can take them to and maybe I can do piece jobs. I just don't know where I would stay."* (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006)

> *"The nearer you are to East London the better off you are in all respects. If I move to Mdantsane I can find work, even if its domestic work and my children can enrol in these child development programmes ..."* (Female CSG, Nxarhun, 2006).

A greater variety of independent and private ECD services exists in South Africa with better quality of care that is more suitable for young children. Such institutions are mostly funded by parents' fees, community fundraising and/or donations. A lone mother from Duncan Village, East London, juxtaposed the public ECD facility used by her child and that to which she accompanied her employer's child:

> *"Without money you are nothing. I take my boss's child to crèche every morning, I tell you it's like a luxury hotel there and the children are kept clean, they are fed properly. It pains me, my child goes to a government crèche, well ... it's the opposite. It's just that you see these things, otherwise maybe one wouldn't notice so much."* (Female CSG, East London, 2006).

A considerable number of middle-class professional households in South Africa employ nannies, like the above interviewee, to care for their children. For purposes of this paper this aspect of care provision will be considered from the viewpoint of low income lone mothers who are themselves nannies/domestic workers. Responsibilities for such employment can range from wet-nursing, holding, feeding, to psychological support and affection – in essence a form of substitute mothering:

> *"I feel like my real children are the ones I work for because I do for them what I should be doing for mine, I feed them, dry their tears, put them to sleep ..."*
> (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

> *"Yes, I am a mother, just not to my own children ..."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

Rothman (1994) refers to this process as the commodification of children and the proletarianization of mothering. For the nannies, who are lone mothers, there is arguably a premise for the *degradation of mothering* (Silva, 2000)[5]. Their mothering (lone mothers who are domestic workers/nannies) has socially and administratively, through social policy, been devalued as they care for their employees' children while being unable to care for their own.

Low income lone mothers' children who are in employment in South Africa are often informally cared for by unemployed relatives or neighbours (Dawes et al., 2007) as illustrated by the next two quotations:

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[5] The thesis of the degradation of mothering is part of a socialist tradition which builds on the concept of the degradation of work in capitalist societies where there is a loss of workers' control of the process and product of their labour due to the separation of conception and execution (Braverman, 1974). An analogy is (thus) drawn with the lack of control low income lone mothers have over the use of their mothering skills.

> *"I'm lucky, my sister looks after my children and she does it well. Since she finished matric she couldn't find a job so I work for all of us ..."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

> *"When I'm at work I leave my little girl with the neighbour, she doesn't have a job, I give her a bit of money sometimes, when I can ..."* (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006)

This type of child care provision can continue for months at a time:

> *"I left home ... [Cala] ... when my baby was five months old with my cousin to work here in East London because we kept running out of food and the children would go to school hungry having gone to bed on an empty stomach the previous night. When I came back in December she was already walking ..."* (Female CSG, Duncan Village, 2006).

Upon probing as to how her child learning to walk in her absence made her feel, the lone mother responded:

> *"I feel robbed, I don't feel whole. It looked like she didn't recognize me, I know she didn't recognize me it's just hard to admit … or maybe she did recognize me but didn't show that she cared because she thought I didn't care, having left her for so long. I don't know. At least I know she didn't go hungry after I started working. I don't know..."*
> (Female CSG, Duncan Village, 2006).

The respondent had a difficult choice to make; either she stayed at home to provide day to day care to her children at the cost of food insecurity and compromised education as she could not always afford to meet her children's school needs, and emotional strain due to her inability to provide for her children or opt to leave her children in the care of her unemployed cousin in rural Cala to seek employment as a live-in domestic worker in East London. She chose to work in East London at the expense of her children suffering maternal deprivation. Consistent with literature on extended maternal deprivation and its possible effects on a mother, missing the milestone of her child learning to walk had adverse effects on the lone mother's emotional wellbeing, she no longer feels whole as a human being (Clarke and Clarke, 1998; Riley, 1983). When the interviewee is eventually able to go home and see her children she is faced with the distressing possibility that her youngest child, who had learnt to walk in her absence, could no longer recognise her. The physical, mental and emotional care needs of children of varying ages are further explored in the next section.

Physical and Emotional Child Care needs

In order to elucidate the care needs of children and how this intersects with the obligation to work placed on lone mothers, this section explores the varying needs that children have. UNICEF defines care as the practice of caregivers that affects nutrient intake, health, cognitive and psychosocial development of a child. In a useful analysis Engle et al. specify six types of activities caregivers ought to practise (Engle et al., 1999):

1) First, it is important for women to take reasonable care of themselves during pregnancy. Rest and nutrition are of particular importance as neglect (of proper nutrition and rest) may compromise the health of the unborn child.

2) Breastfeeding and nutritious feeding of young children is essential for survival and proper development;

3) Food preparation and appropriate storage (like refrigeration) contribute to adequate nutrition;

4) Psychosocial stimulation and support for the development and socialisation of children;

5) Hygiene practices and

6) Care for children during illness.

According to Engle et al. such care activities require caregivers to have, amongst other factors, limited stress, self-confidence, autonomy, control of resources, reasonable workload, adequate time, social support from family members and the community (Engle et al., 1999). Analysing the child care environment of low income lone mothers in South Africa according to this framework yields results that convey the inadequacy of care given to children of such women and the suffering their lone mothers consequently endure. Relating to Engle et al.'s first activity, care during pregnancy, two lone mothers said:

> *"People like us cannot take leave during pregnancy, you lose your job, I was on my feet until the very end."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006);

> *"I am always down, I feel low all the time. I try to think of a way out of this kind of life, in a shack. It's no place to bring a child to the world ..."* (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

The first lone mother could not afford to have the necessary prenatal care because she had to work *"until the very end"* while the second (who had a son and was pregnant at the time the focus group was conducted) was distressed about the home environment, a shack, into which she was bringing her unborn child. Pregnancy and the early years of life (0-5 years) are a particularly sensitive period for survival, growth and mental, psychosocial and physical development (e.g. September and Blankenberg, 2004). A pregnant lone mother in Khayelitsha was concerned about the success of her then current pregnancy as she had lost a baby before:

> *"The strain can be too much, you stand from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night, chasing money, just to survive. I lost my previous baby because of that, this time my mother is going to help me from her pension and I won't work as much..."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

Proposals for social security reform by the Forum of South African Directors General, social sector, include recommendations for adequate perinatal care for low income women (FOSAD, 2007). A number of lone mothers who had been separated from their infants because of work responsibilities felt aggrieved that, amongst other things, they had to abruptly and prematurely stop breastfeeding even though they believed in its benefits (Duncan et al., 1994; Humphreys et al., 2002).

> *"I left my baby with my sister because my boss said if I don't go back to work I'll lose my job. I was still breastfeeding because I believe in it, it's important, my baby wasn't even weaned but what could I do I have to think of providing for the other children as well ..."* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

> *"You wonder about your worth, who you are, if you can't even breastfeed your child, I know what you are talking about ... "* (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

For some, breastfeeding was a way of ensuring that young children were nourished taking into consideration that there was no food security:

"I worry because when I was breastfeeding I was sure my baby was getting some nourishment, but now I can't be sure, being here in Mdantsane, I have to work, food is expensive my cousin doesn't always have enough money, I send money home but it's never enough..." (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

Children's sense of identity is directly connected to their primary caregivers, a process which begins early on in their development (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In this age range the relationship and attachment to primary caregivers is a key developmental concept (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Disruptions in care provision at this stage (0-2 years) of a child's life have been cited as the possible cause of autism, on the one hand, and indiscriminate attachment on the other (for children who have had a series of transient caregivers) (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Developmentally children 0-3 years learn to acquire crucial physical and social skills such as walking, talking, integrating information around them and toilet training (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Evidence from some lone mothers demonstrates that inadequate care during this stage of development can have embarrassing, long lasting consequences:

"My son is incontinent, he's twelve, because, I don't want to say I neglected him because I had to work, but I left him alone too much when he was little, he was only three. I took him with me to work doing washing [laundry] *in people's houses, but I couldn't pay too much attention to him otherwise my job would be at risk. So I would just leave him to play outside, I don't think he understood that ..."* (Female CSG, Duncan Village, 2006).

"It's not good. I'm glad apartheid is over, but where exactly is this democracy. The only benefit I see is that people don't get beaten up and arrested for nothing. People don't get killed by the police anymore like my father – otherwise the poverty is horrible, it's painful, my child is like a fool because I didn't care for him properly, working. He wets his bed, he speaks funny ... (Female CSG, Nxarhun, 2006).

Both these lone mothers are grappling with the guilt that their children have not properly developed (as the first lone mother's child suffers from incontinence and the second from both incontinence and speech impediment) because of inadequate care provision due to their (the respondents') work commitments. The latter questions the purpose of the country's democracy having experienced no poverty alleviation since the demise of apartheid. Her experience is that poverty continues to be "*horrible"* and *"painful".*

Preschool years (3-5years) require further cognitive and psychosocial stimulation outside the home environment ideally for a limited period of time in a day (Myers, 2004). Trained caregivers and qualified education agents who interact with children in a consistent, respectful, protective and supportive way are important for this stage of development (Dlamini et al., 1996) with a good ratio of children to adults (Tarullo, 2002). According to the Department of Education, the minimum requirement for a caregiver employed or volunteering in a government ECD programme is Grade 10, an equivalent of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Department of Education, 2001). It could be argued that such a low qualification requirement for an ECD practitioner could compromise a child's development. In addition, childcare centres need infrastructure, access to water and sanitation, safe and secure premises, cleanliness and space to care (Department of Education, 2001). As will be presented later, overcrowding was a concern for a number of low income lone mothers. According to Myers children from the age of 3-9 years need play equipment inside and outside an ECD centre (Myers, 2004). The need to play and the need to participate (interactively with other children) give children the opportunity to practise different types of behaviour without serious consequence in order to explore higher levels of social, cognitive and linguistic skills (Pelligrini, 2001).

> "[...] from a rights point of view, an environment which allows for and encourages these pleasurable activities is also one in which there are opportunities for the child to learn a wide variety of skills safely and effortlessly" (Pelligrini, 2001:178).

Children from low income families in South Africa, however, often assist in running the household and in caring for younger siblings (Bray, 2003). Depicting the strenuous developmental process of their children these respondents were demonstrably distressed:

> *"My daughter is a child only in years, she's eight, but she cleans the huts and can feed her sister after school when I'm working at the shop ..."* (Female CSG, Nxarhun, 2006)

> *"Our children cannot be children, there is no time to be a child and play like a child, carefree. They are born into adulthood because they deal with separation from us from the time they are born, they learn to live on hungry stomachs when there are no jobs. They walk long distances to school sometimes with the cold wind and the rain on their backs, this is the life they live here, something has to change"* (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006).

Biersteker and Kvalsvig (2007) have found that South African children who spend their after-school hours working on their household chores do not have time to develop skills and talents more suited to a modern job market when they come of age. Reading skills, in particular, are said to suffer as such children are often tired and depressed:

> *"The teachers are always complaining that Nandipa doesn't do her homework, that she should be reading properly by now. But she's a good girl, the school in Rose* [a rural Eastern Cape village] *never used to complain, I think the schools here in Cape Town are much better, she goes to a Coloured school, the standard is higher. They are demanding, they say she shouldn't be doing housework after school, but I can't stop looking for work so that Nandipa can read after school.."* (Female CSG, Langa, 2006) [6].

Having migrated from an Eastern Cape village to a township near Cape Town, Langa, in order to find work, this lone mother could not see a way of relieving her daughter, Nandipa, from household responsibilities in order for Nandipa to be able to have time and energy to do her homework; as a result she cannot "read properly".

In an environment with adequate care provision the need for private space, time and independence begins to set in during adolescence (Rice,1990). This need, however, becomes an issue for many adolescents from low income families in particular those living in shacks:

> *"I'm praying for an RDP house, my children fight all the time, you can't blame them. They are what they call teenagers, a boy and a girl in a shack with their mother, they are not happy, I want to do more for my children, before you know it they will be grown and gone ... "* (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

A lack of supervision for adolescent children can also have grave consequences:

> *"I want to go back home* [the Eastern Cape]. *It's not safe here for young children when you have to work, especially girls. Someone I know almost raped my daughter, a neighbour. By grace I came back early from work on that day. Khayelitsha is no place to raise a child, maybe she will go back and live with my mother because there are no jobs in Ngcobo and I'll remain, it's the lesser pain ..."* (Female CSG, Makhaza, 2006).

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[6] All names in the focus group quotations have been altered in order to preserve anonymity.

The need for childcare provision during school holidays was a common theme in focus groups around Cape Town. A number of lone mothers were concerned that unsupervised their teenage sons will turn to crime:

> *"They want all these things we cannot afford these children. Labels, Nike takkies and jeans with names. You worry because you see your child wearing Levis and he won't say where he got them and he always gets these things during holidays when he's in the township with nothing to do. I can't stop working to look after him, he's fourteen."* (Female CSG, Langa, 2006)

> *"My son is sixteen and he already knows what it's like to be arrested. It's a problem, they bring themselves up these children because we are working all the time but they don't really see what it is we are working for, we earn next to nothing"* (Female CSG, Langa, 2006).

Vulnerability to crime for boy children was frequently discussed in the Western Cape especially:

> *"I'm sending my son back to Ngcobo, he gets forced into all sorts of things here, bullies want to use him for stealing. Back home [in Ngcobo] my mother will look after him, she doesn't work like me and its safe there"* (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

Risks of sexual abuse for girl children were frequently raised as concerns, again particularly in the Western Cape:

> *"We have to be careful, it can happen to any child because our children look after themselves in this Cape Town while we work. Grown men abuse children here, they have no shame, no sense of community like in the village"* (Female CSG, Khayelitsha, 2006).

According to a UNESCO report on South African black African children on farms have very inadequate ECD provision, and more generally children from rural areas are more likely to suffer symptoms such as stunted physical growth and lags in emotional and cognitive development (UNESCO, 2006). Rural former homeland areas including those in the Eastern Cape have much higher levels of child deprivation than others such as the Western Cape (Wright et al., 2009). A lone mother from a village in Mncotsho spoke of her daughter:

> *"I receive a Disability Grant (DG) for my child. She's not quite right. It's not that she's mad or totally stupid, but there's something wrong, she's not like the other children, a bit slow. She's three classes behind in school but she's very loving, compassionate. I used to feel guilty, I still do because one doctor said it's because of the poverty, the lack of food those years when she was a baby. We had nothing, it's better now with the DG..."* (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006).

> Crying and in response to the above lone mother another respondent said:
> *"I am just afraid hearing you speak like this. I see your child in the village, sometimes at the shop. I know what you are talking about and I am afraid because I think Zozo (the respondent's daughter) is the same. She is almost three years old but she can hardly talk properly, I know that girls speak faster than boys but I tell you, a mother knows when there's something wrong with her child ..."* (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006).

Upon probing about the doctors' report on Zozo's cognitive development the lone mother responded:

"Eish, I took her to the clinic and they say she needs a specialist. Where am I going to get that kind of money? Anyway that specialist would tell me what I already know, at the clinic they said nothing can be done. It's this poverty, if I had followed my sister to Cape Town maybe Zozo would have had a better chance in life ..." (Female CSG, Mncotsho village, 2006).

Both these women are living with the challenge of having children with learning disabilities apparently caused by food insecurity. The first lone mother blames herself as she could not provide adequate care in the form of sufficient nutrition for her daughter. The interviewee has not had medical confirmation that her child does indeed have a learning disability, however, as "a mother" she "knows". The second respondent further states that if she had "followed" her "sister to Cape Town Zozo would have a better chance in life" - confirming UNESCO's report cited earlier in this section on high ECD risks in rural areas (UNESCO, 2006; and see Dawes et al., 2010).

According to the World Health Organisation (2005)
"Children and adolescents with good mental health are able to achieve and maintain optimal psychological and social functioning and well-being. They have a sense of identity and self-worth, sound family and peer relationships, an ability to be productive and to learn, and a capacity to tackle developmental challenges and use cultural resources to maximize growth. Moreover, the good mental health of children and adolescents is crucial for their active social and [future] economic participation" (WHO, 2005:2)

There was evidence of children suffering from depression, lack of confidence, low self-esteem and at times an inadequate sense of identity from low income lone mothers (both in the Eastern and Western Cape Provinces):

"What is the way out for our children? I wish I could see a way for them. My daughter is depressed all the time because of the poverty after her father died. I have to work now, life has changed and she has to be mother to her sister..." (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

"When Nosipho looks at other children with proper families she wonders why she has to be responsible for all the household chores, working all the time. It knocks her confidence, she has no confidence. I can see she walks like she is not worth anything, I try to encourage her, I tell her I'm working for her, so that she can go to school ..." (Female CSG, Makhaza, 2006)

Speaking of their children's confused sense of identity lone mothers from Langa and Mdantsane said:

"My son thinks he's my sister's because she's looking after him back home, I have been looking for work here in Cape Town for a long time now" (Female CSG, Langa, 2006)

"Every time I go home, the first week is a struggle for my little girl, she doesn't know whether to relate to me as her mother, by the time she gets used to me I have to come back to work again..." (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how, in the case of employment, low skilled lone mothers' engagement in the labour market intersects with childcare responsibilities and the struggle for unemployed lone mothers to provide adequate care for their children. Having experienced both employment and unemployment as a lone mother, a woman's account about her childcare challenges encompassed both the difficulties experienced by low skilled lone mothers in South Africa and some of the policy discrepancies that impact on their lives:

> "You see when you are poor, you are black and you are a woman life is very difficult even with this ANC. Sometimes it's better if you have a husband, you have somebody to help you ... They have these public works programmes for people like us to work in, it's a good thing, but does the government expect us not to have children to look after. They say the jobs are for people like us, we are not very educated, we can't pay someone to look after our children, at the same time we need to work so that we can eat. You see, it's impossible, you end up leaving your child with people you don't even trust. I don't know, because even these public works keep finishing and there's nothing after that and you are hungry again" (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006)

At issue is the denial of social citizenship rights enshrined in the South African Constitution (1996: 27 and 28) when, in this case "*you are poor, you are black and you are a woman*" - even under the current democratic dispensation, "*this ANC".* Introduced in 2003 in order to alleviate poverty and for low skilled people to *"graduate out of dependency on social grants"* (President Thabo Mbeki, 2007) the EPWP offers intermittent employment whereby one is able to *"eat"* (when employed) and go *"hungry"* when *"these public works keep finishing".* Such diswelfare (Titmuss, 1968a and 1968b) depicts the manner in which low skilled women's relationship to employment is structured in the South African context (du Toit, 2007). The words 'eat' and 'hungry' are used symbolically in this context depicting being able to provide for ones' self when 'eating' and being unable to do so when 'hungry'. The majority of lone mothers' perception of relevant South African social policy in the focus group interviews was such that they felt penalised for having children while being poor as they were expected to do the *"impossible"* - be in full time employment (in order to be independent, providing for themselves and their children) and provide childcare simultaneously:

> "... when I think about it I find it impossible to work out, you know, in my head. When I hear government people on the radio saying we should work and not go after the grant. I mean, how are we supposed to work and look after our children at the same time. They have maids to look after their children, you know what I mean? People like us do those jobs, leaving children behind, sometimes with strangers. It's a painful thing. Maybe poor people are not expected to have children ..." (Female CSG, Gugulethu, 2006).

> "If I didn't feel like a beggar I would ask the official who always says nasty things when I go get the grant, I would ask him, you know, if poor people are not meant to have children, or if he can give me a job where I can look after my child at the same time. But I can't ask these things because I am the beggar, I am begging aren't I?" (Female CSG, Mdantsane, 2006).

Consequences are such that childcare for children of low income lone mothers is severely compromised for both employed and unemployed women. According to the official definition of unemployment (LFS, 2007) there was a female unemployment rate of 30.8% (the male counterpart was 21.1% with an overall national average of 25.5%) in 2007 – people employed in

elementary occupations (21.9%) accounted for the largest single share of total employment (LFS, 2007). While some (Castillo, 1994; Ratcliffe, 1999) would argue that unemployed low income lone mothers in South Africa who struggle to provide for themselves and their children are socially excluded, the plight of employed low skilled lone mothers in the country resonates with du Toit's description of adverse incorporation:

> "[...] poverty results not from people's exclusion from the labour market but from the ways they are included" (du Toit, 2007:34)

The manner in which the above quoted lone mother from Mdantsane, for example is, to use the words of former President Thabo Mbeki 'integrated' from the *'second economy'* (Mbeki, 2007) into the labour market, in this case EPWP, is arguably adverse in that her job is irregular without any form of social security, her childcare needs are compromised – putting her child at risk and she continues to live in poverty even though she is working. It can, therefore, be conclusively argued that social policy in the South African context overlooks the broader social relations within which low income lone mothers are embedded and the childcare responsibilities that they shoulder for the country's future social capital.

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