



# The Adversities of Secondary Parenting faced by the Older Persons in Alice, South Africa: Social Work implications

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## ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of secondary parenting, in some contexts, presents both a pernicious and a perfidious experience to older persons who should be enjoying their sunset years with some level of relief and respite. The study aimed to explore the adversities experienced by the older persons linked to Lavela Old Age Centre, in Alice South Africa. The study took the form of community engagement sessions. Data was collected from 12 older persons linked to the Centre. Findings established that secondary parenting was burdensome, exacerbated their states of poverty, and was riddled with various health deficits among the grandparents, pockets of conflicts, and care deficits of their grandchildren. The study recommended that the older persons need to be assisted to facilitate stress-free secondary parenting so that they can enjoy old age respite; the younger generation should not leave the burden of caring for their children to the older persons; and all and sundry need to recognise that the task was stressing the health and wellbeing of the older persons. Social workers are called upon to strengthen their advocacy skills imploring the societies, NGOs, and the government to increase assistance to the older persons to carry a stress-free secondary parenting and enjoy successful ageing. The study advises the younger generation not to leave their responsibilities of taking care of their children to the older persons. The study also adds literature to the domain of gerontology as well as rings the bell for policymakers to understand and address the plight of secondary parenting as an exploitative endeavour for older persons.

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## INTRODUCTION

Conceptually, and in this article, the practice of care of grandchildren by their grandparents/grandmothers and secondary parenting have been taken to be synonymous. Further, the terms “older persons” and “the elderly” have been used interchangeably. Debatably, the phenomenon of secondary parenting presents completely opposed fronts, with one front presenting it as a desirable phenomenon, while the other side of the coin presents it as an undesirable phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the phenomenon of grandparental care is also two-dimensional. This is aptly demonstrated by a study

<sup>1</sup> Simon Kang'ethe, “Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa,” *Social Work* 54, no. 3 (2018): 283–95.

conducted in Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam on secondary parenting that heralded a situation in which both the grandparents and the grandchildren mutually and reciprocally benefited each other.<sup>2</sup> This should perhaps dissuade the perception of viewing grandparental care as a unidirectional endeavour but as a mutual and reciprocal process.<sup>3</sup> On a positive note, the role of grandparents in the care of their grandchildren facilitates the grandchildren's parents to viably engage in economic activities outside their home environment.<sup>4</sup> However, this paper seeks to explore the downside of secondary parenting, and any positive aspects ascribed to secondary parenting will only be paltry mentioned on the surface.

Just like in many African countries, studies in Asian countries indicate that rural-to-urban internal migration in tandem with international labour migration results in children being left in the custodial care of their grandparents.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in many contexts of the Western world, such as the United States, as is increasingly the case in many African countries, grandparental care of grandchildren is triggered by problematic situations that necessitate grandparents to desperately step in and provide childcare when single mothers need to work but lack access to other childcare options.<sup>6</sup> Further, the care of grandchildren by their grandparents comes in handy when the parents of the grandchild/ren are incapacitated, neglectful and irresponsible, unavailable due to drug use, face prison incarceration, or have prematurely faced death.<sup>7</sup> This scenario is also supported by a study in South Africa by Gerrand, who established that factors such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, unplanned teenage pregnancy, illegal immigration, late abortions, and a lack of family support, play a huge role in child abandonment and therefore trigger the need for secondary parenting.<sup>8</sup> However, poverty and its concomitant ramifications have dealt a pernicious blow to the arrangement of children being taken care of by their grandmothers. This is because of the ever-dwindling resources many African countries experience.<sup>9</sup> Further, the fact that the grandparents do not work and are perhaps on pension makes them an asset to nurse and take care of their children.<sup>10</sup> Paradoxically, the grandparents may offer care not because they love to do it, but because of the eminent pressure that requires them to give a hand. They are also driven by the feeling of "*blood is thicker than water*" syndrome. This is a manifestation and application of the philosophy of humanity or in the South African context, *Ubuntu*.<sup>11</sup> It would then be a cultural omission if the older persons fail to take care of their grandchildren. Perhaps what messes up the arrangement of care is the fact that these teenage mothers after realising a caring hand easily forget they have a responsibility to their children and therefore totally abdicate their caring responsibility. This imposes a subjugative endeavour.<sup>12</sup>

Amid economic pressures in South Africa due to the overwhelming state of joblessness looming in the whole country, some young mothers disappear into oblivion with state social welfare grant cards that the grandmothers need to use to tap, albeit inadequate, money to meet some of their grandchildren's needs. Empirical cases abound reporting grandparents in financial distress when they must ponder where the resources will come from for taking care of their children, while their mothers

<sup>2</sup> John Knodel and Minh Duc Nguyen, "Grandparents and Grandchildren: Care and Support in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam," *Ageing & Society* 35, no. 9 (2015): 1960–88.

<sup>3</sup> Knodel and Nguyen, "Grandparents and Grandchildren: Care and Support in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam."

<sup>4</sup> Juanjuan Sun, "Chinese Older Adults Taking Care of Grandchildren: Practices and Policies for Productive Aging," *Ageing International* 38 (2013): 58–70.

<sup>5</sup> D.E. Blackie, "Sad, Bad and Mad: Exploring Child Abandonment in South Africa" (University of Witwatersrand, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> S. Muggedya, "Exploring Juvenile Delinquency Phenomenon in Grandparent Headed Families in Hill Crest, Alice Township, Eastern Cape" (University of Fort Hare, South Africa, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Knodel and Nguyen, "Grandparents and Grandchildren: Care and Support in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam."

<sup>8</sup> Priscilla Gerrand, "Adoption of Abandoned Children in South Africa: Why Black Citizens Are Difficult to Recruit as Prospective Adopters," *Adoption & Fostering* 42, no. 3 (2018): 295–308.

<sup>9</sup> A. Sogaga, "Challenges That Grandparents Face in Caring for Their Grandchildren in Mdlankomo Location, Libode" (University of Fort Hare, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>11</sup> Peter Mwipikeni, "Ubuntu and the Modern Society," *South African Journal of Philosophy= Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif Vir Wysbegeerte* 37, no. 3 (2018): 322–34.

<sup>12</sup> Blackie, "Sad, Bad and Mad: Exploring Child Abandonment in South Africa."

have disappeared with the child support grant card. This has been a source of social, psychological, and emotional doldrums.<sup>13</sup>

Secondary parenting can phenomenally be pernicious in that, in South Africa, it threatens to aggravate their poverty by having to spend, without their volition, and are forced to share their grant, albeit inadequate, with their grandchildren.<sup>14</sup> This leaves them in a situation of financial predicament that drives a state of psychological, social, and emotional deficit. The phenomenon of an ageing person does not promise successful ageing and respite in old age.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, secondary parenting due to the dwindling state of resources is likely to put families into a conflictual path as some mature children of the older persons may feel their mother or grandmother is being psychologically vexed by the children of some of their siblings. This could discourage or reduce their assistance package to their mother or grandmother. This is a situation that could split the family members down the middle, with the older persons likely to pay the impact through spates of stress and constant illnesses. This study is predicated on the following fundamental question: What are the adversities experienced by the older persons linked to Lavela Old age centre, who engage in secondary parenting?

The study aims to explore the perceptions of the older persons linked to Lavela Old Age Centre in Alice, Eastern Cape, on the adversities they experience in the face of secondary parenting.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Secondary Parenting fills an Important Gap in Caring for Vulnerable Children

Although ageing is an entropic disorder as it affects all the body's functionalities,<sup>16</sup> it is still a phenomenon that many cultures and traditions celebrate as a precursor of God's celestial blessing<sup>17</sup> and their contributions to society have been documented by a score of researchers, with caregiving, counselling, nurturing, and advisory services, inter alia, being key roles.<sup>18</sup> This researcher believes that it is the wind of development, modernisation, civilisation, and globalisation that is a cogent driver of secondary parenting.<sup>19</sup> This is because these forces encourage migration to cities, leaving a care gap for their children.<sup>20</sup> Usually, poverty and its concomitant ramifications are a factor undermining the capability of their children to take care of their children. Besides being a vanguard and beacon of leading many social-cultural occasions and being coaches and mentors to the younger generation, the elderly persons assist meaningfully in the care of their grandchildren and therefore fill in a care gap through secondary parenting. Some researchers have established that older persons have been since time immemorial being nurturers and caregivers of the sick and grandchildren, therefore filling a very important professional niche in their communities.<sup>21</sup> This is very important in a country like South Africa, where many children have been left without nurturers as people die from various life incidents such as road carnage, and HIV/AIDS, or are rendered occupationally redundant due to excessive abuse

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<sup>13</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>14</sup> Priscilla Gutura and Pius Tangwe Tanga, "'Income for the Whole Family': Exploring the Contribution of Social Grants to Rural Household Income in Ngqushwa Municipality, Eastern Cape Province of South Africa," *Journal of Social Sciences* 50, no. 1-3 (2017): 172-81.

<sup>15</sup> Shingirai Paul Mbulayi and Simon Kang'ethe, "Social Constructions of Successful Ageing: The Case of Ruware Park in Marondera, Zimbabwe," *Social Work* 55, no. 3 (2019): 329-40.

<sup>16</sup> Simon M Kang'ethe, "The Challenge That Aging of Caregivers Poses to the Quality of Care Giving with Reference to Kanye Community Home Based Care Programme," *Botswana Notes and Records*, 2009, 76-82; Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>17</sup> Julia Rozanova, "Discourse of Successful Aging in The Globe and Mail: Insights from Critical Gerontology," *Journal of Aging Studies* 24, no. 4 (December 2010): 213-22, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2010.05.001>.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Zodwa Madonsela and Cecile Gerwel Proches, "Challenges Faced by Heads of Departments (HODs) in Driving Quality Curriculum Management in a Secondary School in Durban, South Africa," 2022, 185-206, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8896-3.ch009>; Antoinette Lombard and Elma Kruger, "Older Persons: The Case of South Africa," *Ageing International* 34 (2009): 119-35.

<sup>19</sup> S M Kang'ethe and Abigail Makuyan, "Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Care Institutions: Exploring Their Possible Damage to Children in a Few Countries of the Developing World," *Journal of Social Sciences* 38, no. 2 (2014): 117-24.

<sup>20</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>21</sup> Aseza Soganga and Simon Murote Kang'ethe, "Exploring Reciprocity in Grandparent-Grandchildren Care: The Case of Mdlankomo Location, Libode in the Eastern Cape, South Africa," *Social Work* 59, no. 1 (2023): 99-111; Doris M Bohman, Neltjie C Van Wyk, and Sirkka-Liisa Ekman, "Tradition in Transition-Intergenerational Relations with Focus on the Aged and Their Family Members in a South African Context," *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* 23, no. 3 (2009): 446-55.

of substances.<sup>22</sup> Secondary parenting means taking care of one's children's children. This means that one, usually a grandparent, is engaged again in the care of their grandchildren. However, it is their disposal to free time that makes them good candidates to take care of their children's children. This is because most may not be employed or have retired from their professional engagements. This makes them both socially and culturally relevant.<sup>23</sup> Studies by Soganga and Kang'ethe in the Mdlankomo location of Libode in South Africa express working reciprocity and mutuality between the elderly grandparents and their grandchildren, with each party demonstrating its virtue to the other party.<sup>24</sup> This makes secondary parenting, in this South African context, a socially-culturally acceptable endeavour.

### **Adversities of Secondary Parenting for Older Persons**

Despite the social and cultural value the older persons bring to their communities, such as being ardent of secondary parenting, secondary parenting presents a perfidious and pernicious environment that may drive the older persons to a state of mental health deficit as well as other life miseries, such as poverty, apathy, and despondence.<sup>25</sup> In his study in Alice town of the Eastern Cape, some older persons decried secondary parenting and heralded it as one of the phenomena that drove them to stress and despondence.<sup>26</sup> They complained that the phenomenon was painful, dreadful, and an act that was likely to drive them to graves before their years on earth. This is because it was exploitative as the mothers of their grandchildren were exploiting them. This is because they had to use part of their meagre old pension to take care of their grandchildren while the children's mothers had gone to oblivion with the social welfare cards to draw the money to assist in the care of these children.<sup>27</sup>

Further, the grant is also inadequate to meet an impoverished person's basic needs. The grandmothers, in the South African context, drift into a state of poverty through this imposed secondary parenting. The study older persons who were participants in Kang'ethe's 2018 study felt they were being considered maids without any form of remuneration. The situation was exacerbated by episodes of maltreatment and discrimination meted out to them by both their children and their grandchildren. These older persons feared the culture of substance abuse by their grandchildren that motivated delinquency that drove them into a state of exasperation, and bewilderment and gave them doldrums.<sup>28</sup> A study by Kasiram and Holscher in Kwazulu Natal established that grandparents were victims of crimes committed by the grandchildren they were caring for who stole their pension money and other important household appliances to obtain money to buy substances.<sup>29</sup> It is an environment like this that made some grandmothers succumb to high blood pressure in tandem with a cohort of other illnesses associated with stress and poverty.<sup>30</sup> Further, It was an environment like this that prompted older persons to run to old age centres for warmth and comfort as well as to reduce spates of loneliness.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Samkelo Bala and Simon M. Kang'ethe, "Exploring The Synergy Between Government And Business Entities In The Fight Against Substance Abuse In East London. A 2018-2021 Study," *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 58, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.15270/58-1-994>; Lombard and Kruger, "Older Persons: The Case of South Africa."

<sup>23</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa"; Soganga and Kang'ethe, "Exploring Reciprocity in Grandparent-Grandchildren Care: The Case of Mdlankomo Location, Libode in the Eastern Cape, South Africa."

<sup>24</sup> Soganga and Kang'ethe, "Exploring Reciprocity in Grandparent-Grandchildren Care: The Case of Mdlankomo Location, Libode in the Eastern Cape, South Africa."

<sup>25</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>26</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>27</sup> Lombard and Kruger, "Older Persons: The Case of South Africa."

<sup>28</sup> Simon Kang'ethe, Samuel Magedya, and Thanduxolo Nomngcoyiya, "Experiences of Grandmothers Looking after Grandchildren Exhibiting Delinquent Behaviours in Hill Crest Location, Alice Township, Eastern Cape: Implications for Social Work," *Social Work* 58, no. 3 (2022): 295–308.

<sup>29</sup> M Kasiram and D Hölscher, "Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities Encountered by the Elderly in Urban KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa," *South African Family Practice* 57, no. 6 (November 2, 2015): 380–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20786190.2015.1078154>.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Ralston, "The Role of Older Persons' Environment in Aging Well: Quality of Life, Illness, and Community Context in South Africa," *The Gerontologist* 58, no. 1 (2018): 111–20.

<sup>31</sup> Kalpana Singh and S K Srivastava, "Loneliness and Quality of Life Among Elderly People.," *Journal of Psychosocial Research* 9, no. 1 (2014).

In these old age centres, the elderly persons socialise with their peers, and get food and clothing, with some centres affording them some recreational activities.<sup>32</sup> In cases where the grandmothers act as foster care mothers, some report being accused of abusing the social welfare money meant for the child they foster while some children they care for coercively demand the social welfare grant to use it of their own volition. This, to the elderly grandparents doing secondary parenting, is a source of stress and despondence. Secondary parenting, therefore, is burdensome and causes mental health deficits.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework provides a well-supported rationale to conduct a study and helps the reader to fathom that the type of investigation they read is not based solely on personal instinct or guesses, but rather informed on established theory and empirical facts obtained from credible studies.<sup>33</sup> This study will be supported by the immunological theory of aging and Ubuntu.

### Immunological Theory of Aging

This theory avers that a body's immune system is programmed to decline over time, leading to bodily senescence and an increased vulnerability to diseases.<sup>34</sup> As one grows older, antibodies lose their effectiveness, and fewer new diseases can be combated effectively by the body, which causes cellular stress and eventual death.<sup>35</sup> According to Weiss, ageing is riddled with physical, social, cognitive, and psychological intricacies that are devastating to the body.<sup>36</sup> Among other factors, when secondary parenting is imposed on older persons, especially in an environment bereft of resources to facilitate their grandchildren's nurturance, it vexes their body's immune system making them more vulnerable to diseases and their bodily functionalities are grossly impaired. This explains the fact that ageing is an entropic disorder that affects the body's functionalities, whether social, physical, psychological, or emotional.<sup>37</sup> In the context of secondary parenting, the body's senescence is exacerbated by other social stresses such as the state of their grandchildren's delinquency and lack of adequate resources to facilitate nurturance.<sup>38</sup> However, it is good to state that some older persons experience what Mbulayi and Kang'ethe referred to as successful aging, where they are strong and able to carry out their life functions without strain.<sup>39</sup> Such older parents, if availed of adequate resources, may not be vexed by secondary parenting.

### The Philosophy of Ubuntu

Conceptually, the concept of Ubuntu is derived from the Xhosa aphorism connoting "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (I am because you are). Ubuntu advocates for humanity being there for one another, providing love where there is hatred and disdain, providing emotional and spiritual support for one who lacks, facilitating interdependence and interconnectedness, fostering a communitarian spirit, providing a shoulder for one to lean on, a hand to support one who is falling, and generally being of mutual assistance to one another.<sup>40</sup> The above-embedded values constitute a constellation of values

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<sup>32</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa"; B Batlala et al., "To Explore the Circumstances Driving the Elderly from Their Domiciles for Care in Phumalanga Home for the Aged in Alice," *University of Fort Hare. (A Research Report of Fourth Year Bachelor of Social Work Research Project (SWP 403))*, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> John W Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (SAGE publications, 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Mbulayi and Kang'ethe, "Social Constructions of Successful Ageing: The Case of Ruware Park in Marondera, Zimbabwe."

<sup>35</sup> Rozanova, "Discourse of Successful Aging in The Globe and Mail: Insights from Critical Gerontology."

<sup>36</sup> J.C. Weiss, *Expressive Therapy with Elders and the Disabled: Touching the Heart of Life* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Kang'ethe, "The Challenge That Aging of Caregivers Poses to the Quality of Care Giving with Reference to Kanye Community Home Based Care Programme"; Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>38</sup> Kang'ethe, Mugedya, and Nomngcoyiya, "Experiences of Grandmothers Looking after Grandchildren Exhibiting Delinquent Behaviours in Hill Crest Location, Alice Township, Eastern Cape: Implications for Social Work."

<sup>39</sup> Mbulayi and Kang'ethe, "Social Constructions of Successful Ageing: The Case of Ruware Park in Marondera, Zimbabwe."

<sup>40</sup> R. Mupedziswa, M. Rankopo, and L. K. Mwansa, "Ubuntu as a Pan African Philosophical Framework for Social Work in Africa," in *Social Work Practice in Africa: Indigenous and Innovative Approaches*, ed. J.M. Twikirize and H. Spitzer (Kampala: Fountain Publisher, 2019), 21–38; Simon M Kang'ethe, "Perceptions of Stakeholders on Drivers of Stigma Subjected to People Living with

that drive secondary parenting by older persons. Older persons use their love for their grandchildren and by extension their biological children. They share their old age pension, albeit too little with their grandchildren. They empathise with their biological children for being vulnerable and stepping in to assist their children and take responsibility as integral members of society to assist the needy children who happen to be their blood relatives.

## METHODOLOGY

The core focus of this study, through informal community engagement conversations, and with a pre-designed interview schedule was to draw insights surrounding the adversities associated with secondary parenting by investigating a purposely selected sample of grandparents linked to Lavela's old age centre in Eastern Cape Province.<sup>41</sup> The study's research domain is Lavela Old Age Centre in Ntselamanzi village of Alice in Eastern Cape Province. The Centre is around 3 to 5 km from Alice Town's administrative centre as well as the University of Fort Hare. The broad goal of the study was to engage older persons through community engagement sessions in an endeavour to help them achieve an array of psychosocial empowerment such as bolstering peer relationships, socialising, engaging in pseudo business activities of bead making, embroidery and growing vegetables both for income generation and their consumption;<sup>42</sup> as well as explore discomforts embedded within the older persons' engagement with secondary parenting.<sup>43</sup> However, the data for this article was collected at the end of 2016.

The study, therefore, was conceptualised using a qualitative research approach, and a case study design.<sup>44</sup> A purposive sampling technique was used to intuitively select suitable samples to facilitate the establishment of adversities associated with older persons engaged in secondary parenting. Moreover, the discretionary purposive sampling approach was guided by succinct inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring that all the grandparents who were investigated were engaged in secondary parenting; as well as they were 60 years and above.<sup>45</sup> Even though the lion's share of the questions followed the study's aim of seeking insights into the discomforts or the perfidy the grandparents experienced, there was a question that sought the benefits that the grandparents accrued from secondary parenting. This was to ensure a balanced discussion.

Data collection took place in a space of three hours. Moreover, all the informal discussions took place in a relaxed atmosphere in the precincts of the Old Age Centre where old persons meet to have coffee and some meals, and the space ensured utmost confidentiality. The researcher had been ethically cleared to conduct community engagements in the domain through a letter from the Head of Department. Further, the older persons orally offered consent. Data was collected through the Isi-Xhosa language. This made the researcher seek the assistance of a Social Work lecturer colleague to assist in data collection and interpretations to English. To aid the efficiency of the data collection process, the researcher was also granted permission from the participants to audio record the informal conversations.<sup>46</sup>

The collected data sets were analysed thematically<sup>47</sup> which involved firstly transcribing the audio recordings in tandem with handwritten notes into Word format using Microsoft Office software.<sup>48</sup> The transcribed information was then translated into English language which allowed a

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HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Alice Town, Eastern Cape: Implications for Human Rights and Social Service Professions," *African Journal of Social Work* 13, no. 1 (2023); Jacob Rugare Mugumbate and Admire Chereni, "Now, the Theory of Ubuntu Has Its Space in Social Work," *African Journal of Social Work* 10, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>41</sup> Syed M Ahmed and Ann-Gel S Palermo, "Community Engagement in Research: Frameworks for Education and Peer Review," *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 8 (2010): 1380–87.

<sup>42</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>43</sup> Ahmed and Palermo, "Community Engagement in Research: Frameworks for Education and Peer Review."

<sup>44</sup> Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

<sup>45</sup> E. Babbie and J. Mouton, *The Practice of Social Research* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

<sup>47</sup> Babbie and Mouton, *The Practice of Social Research*.

<sup>48</sup> W.L. Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2013).

rigorous process of data cleaning.<sup>49</sup> The cleaned transcripts were then subjected to coding that allowed ideas of the same meaning to be grouped to form a theme.<sup>50</sup> Data collected was analysed using thematic analysis.

The researcher ensured that the study observed all the ethical guidelines to maximise the ethical integrity of the research process and its eventual outcome.<sup>51</sup> The study had to reflect fairness, trustworthiness, respect for human rights, non-maleficence, beneficence, and utmost confidentiality of sensitive and private information.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, participants were informed about their right to choose to participate or not, including that they were allowed to discontinue participation at any time without any negative consequences to them or those affiliated with them.<sup>53</sup>

### Ethical Approval

The study to conduct a community engagement needed a committee chaired by the Social Work Department's Head of Department, who then wrote an approval letter on behalf of the University Ethics Committee.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

### An Overview of Demographic Qualities of Study Participants

This section will present the demographics of the study participants, followed by the generated themes. Table 1 below shows the demographic profiles of the grandparents undertaking secondary parenting. Pseudonyms were used to safeguard the participants' anonymity.<sup>54</sup>

**Table 1: Demographic profile of the study participants.**

No	Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Recipient of Old Age Grant	No. of grandchildren benefitting from secondary parenting
1	A	Above 60	F	√	2
2	B	Above 60	F	√	2
3	C	Above 60	F	√	2
4	D	Above 60	F	√	3
5	E	Above 60	F	√	1
6	F	Above 60	F	√	1
7	G	Above 60	F	√	3
8	H	Above 60	F	√	2
9	I	Above 60	F	√	1
10	J	Above 60	F	√	2
11	K	Above 60	M	√	1
12	L	Above 60	M	√	1

### Age

Study findings indicated that all the grandparents undertaking secondary parenting were above 60 years of age and recipients of old age grants. Many of them indicated that secondary parenting was exacerbating their health conditions because they found themselves falling sick now and again. This is perhaps because ageing is an entropic disorder and is associated with conditions such as heightened episodes of stress, muscle wasting, dementia, etc.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, many of them indicated they felt they needed to be taken care of or be given some additional financial support besides the childcare grant/foster care grant they relied on to effectuate secondary parenting.

<sup>49</sup> Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

<sup>50</sup> Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

<sup>51</sup> Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*.

<sup>52</sup> Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*.

<sup>53</sup> Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

<sup>54</sup> Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*.

<sup>55</sup> Mbulayi and Kang'ethe, "Social Constructions of Successful Ageing: The Case of Ruware Park in Marondera, Zimbabwe."

## **Gender**

The study showed a preponderance of females compared to their male counterparts. This is because of the cultural and social expectation that females more than males overly support their grandchildren in need of care and support.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, women in the Centre always outnumber the males.

## **Number of children taken care of**

Findings indicated that most grandparents were taking care of between one and three children, with the two males owning that they co-parented in liaison with their wives. With dire resources at their disposal amid ageing, secondary parenting presented an arduous and burdensome exercise.<sup>57</sup>

## **Themes on Secondary Parenting**

This part discusses the generated themes after an empirical exploration of adversities experienced by older persons on account of secondary parenting.

### **Secondary Parenting Burdensome to Grandmothers**

Study findings established that grandparents, usually the grandmothers, were burdened by secondary parenting as they were involuntarily forced to undertake the task as their adult children abdicated their responsibilities by neglecting their children and ran away to places their parents never knew.<sup>58</sup> The participants lamented that it was painful that some of the older children who left behind their children in the hands of their mothers or grandmothers were drugged, jobless, and living a carefree lifestyle.<sup>59</sup> The environment made some grandmothers succumb to high blood pressure in tandem with a cohort of other illnesses associated with stress and poverty.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the grandmothers also complained that their social lives were at stake as secondary parenting denied them the opportunity to attend important social and cultural functions such as funerals and weddings.<sup>61</sup> This was also aggravated by the fact that most of their grandchildren were both indisciplined and disrespectful. The following verbatim sentiments attest to the finding.

*“Our sons and daughters have dumped their children on us. It is a difficult preoccupation at our age. They are exploiting the social and cultural dispensation that makes us see their children as our children” (Participant A)*

*“At our age, we are struggling to discipline our grandchildren. The process makes our health to deteriorate” (Participant B)*

*“These tasks that have been placed on us in our sunset years are fatal. The stresses are likely to shorten our lives and push us fast to the graves” (Participant G)*

These verbatim statements are painstaking and herald a difficult preoccupation by grandparents who involuntarily undertake secondary parenting amid an environment of paucity of resources; in tandem with the grandparents' state of poor health on account of aging.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Magedya, “Exploring Juvenile Delinquency Phenomenon in Grandparent Headed Families in Hill Crest, Alice Township, Eastern Cape.”

<sup>57</sup> Clarence G Williams, “Distributed Leadership in South African Schools: Possibilities and Constraints,” *South African Journal of Education* 31, no. 2 (May 23, 2011): 190–200, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v31n2a421>.

<sup>58</sup> Blackie, “Sad, Bad and Mad: Exploring Child Abandonment in South Africa.”

<sup>59</sup> B. Samkelo, “Ramifications Associated with Drug Abuse among Female Adolescents. The Case Study of Mission Location, under Mnquma Municipality, Eastern Cape” (University of Fort Hare, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Ralston, “The Role of Older Persons' Environment in Aging Well: Quality of Life, Illness, and Community Context in South Africa.”

<sup>61</sup> Kang'ethe, “Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.”

<sup>62</sup> Mbulayi and Kang'ethe, “Social Constructions of Successful Ageing: The Case of Ruware Park in Marondera, Zimbabwe.”



### ***Secondary Parenting Exacerbates Grandparents' State of Poverty***

Virtually all the grandparents in one accord lamented that secondary parenting was painful because of inadequate resources at their disposal to take care of their grandchildren. Participants owned that the meagre old age pension was not enough for both their upkeep and that of their grandchildren, and rarely got additional financial support from the parents of the grandchildren. Participants further complained that their financial distress was aggravated by higher bouts of inflation in South Africa amid the fact that some of their adult children took with them the child support grant cards. The following verbatim sentiments confirm the above finding:

*“Some of our adult children (grandchildren’s parents) take their child support grant cards with them to cities such as Cape Town/Johannesburg or wherever they live and work, leaving us the burden of caring for their children. This is glaringly subjugative.” (Participant E)*

*“We use our meagre old age pension to support our grandchildren. Sometimes their basic needs drain all our old age pension” (Participant E)*

The verbatim statements herald an environment of the painful financial distress that some grandparents undertaking secondary parenting face.

### ***Secondary Parenting is Riddled with an Array of Health Deficits***

In one accord, the grandparents lamented that secondary parenting was heavily impacting on their health especially due to their aging and their inability to discipline their grandchildren. A more painful episode is when the grandchildren verbally abused their grandparents and reported to the social workers that they would like to have a say in how their grandmothers spend their childcare grants. The following verbatim sentiments attest to the finding above:

*“It’s painful for a grandmother to face verbal abuse from grandchildren whom the grandparents have sacrificed to care for” (Participant H).*

*“The phenomenon of a grandchild reporting that one is misusing their child welfare grant to a social worker is painful and emotionally draining” (Participant B).*

*“How can one’s health be normal when the whole community knows one’s grandchild is into drugs and other habits such as pilfering things in the community?” (Participant C).*

The sentiments above herald the grandparents’ pernicious environment likely to jeopardise their health.

### ***Secondary Parenting is Riddled with Pockets of Conflict***

Some study participants owned the fact that secondary parenting presented an environment of conflict between the grandparents and their grandchildren especially when the latter would demand to be given their child welfare grant to spend it in their ways. Moreover, grandparents indicated their level of disappointment with their daughters who went with their children’s support grant cards leaving the grandparents to sink or float with caregiving. Further, some participants also established that subtle conflicts also surfaced between their older sons and daughters when some who financially assisted their parents felt that the assistance, they accorded to their parents undeservedly went to support the children of their brothers and sisters who had abdicated their care responsibilities.<sup>63</sup> Further, the only two grandfathers who participated in the study lamented that their wives were not able to give them due attention because of the burden the grandchildren placed upon their lives. The following sentiments attest to the finding above:

*“We grandfathers feel let out in the priority of care as our wives engage in eclectic activities to effectuate secondary parenting” (Participant J).*

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<sup>63</sup> Sogaga, “ Challenges That Grandparents Face in Caring for Their Grandchildren in Mdlankomo Location, Libode.”

*“We get embarrassed when our grandchildren take us to the social workers demanding their childcare grant money. Social workers also vehemently deride us” (Participant F).*

*“Some of our older responsible children who assist some of us are threatening to stop any assistance if the money is being used to support the children of their irresponsible daughters and sons” (Participant D).*

The sentiments above poignantly point to an environment of pockets of conflicts associated with secondary parenting.

### **Care Deficit Experienced by Grandchildren**

Grandparents lamented their incapability to offer requisite care due to inadequate resources amid their physical incapacity to effectively care for them.<sup>64</sup> Participants echoed that they did not have adequate energy to effectively offer caregiving as sometimes they felt they were required to be cared for. The finding is supported by the following verbatim sentiments:

*“The environment of secondary parenting is arduous to us ageing grandmothers. We cannot guarantee good quality care all the time as we face constant illnesses also” (Participant A).*

*“These children suffer in that we cannot offer them requisite care due to inadequate resources; nor do we have the energy and knowledge to show them their school assignments. We leave them to float or sink” (Participant C).*

Poignantly, the participants cried foul that secondary parenting was hurting them due to their age as well as due to a lack of resources.

## **DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

Although secondary parenting by grandparents is a global ubiquitous phenomenon and has a long-standing cultural tradition,<sup>65</sup> this author thinks that grandparents should be hailed for manifesting the value of humanity, or in the Southern African context, *Ubuntu* by filling in a very important care lacuna after their grandchildren have been abandoned or neglected by their biological parents; or are circumstantially rendered dysfunctional.<sup>66</sup> The phenomenon is also viewed by especially the traditional societies as a gesture of the older persons to contribute to the health of their societies. Unfortunately, its downside is a paucity of literature.<sup>67</sup> This is further supported by some studies that indicate that in South Africa, the care of grandchildren by their grandparents does not attract adequate government priority, while its documentation is at its nascent stages.<sup>68</sup> More so, not much literature in South Africa is in the public domain to establish the quality of care that secondary parenting disposes to the grandchildren.<sup>69</sup>

Scores of literature abound suggesting that family relatives, particularly the grandparents become “parents the second time around” not on their own volition, but circumstantially when the children’s parents suffer incapacitation or death due to eclectic reasons that include inter alia AIDS, road carnage; entrenchment of substance abuse; or being incarcerated.<sup>70</sup> However, an awareness that households headed by grandparents in South Africa are on an increasing trajectory as the pace of rural-

<sup>64</sup> Sogaga, “Challenges That Grandparents Face in Caring for Their Grandchildren in Mdlankomo Location, Libode.”

<sup>65</sup> Moon Choi, Ginny Sprang, and Jessica G Eslinger, “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Synthetic Review and Theoretical Model for Interventions,” *Family & Community Health* 39, no. 2 (2016): 120–28.

<sup>66</sup> Mwipikeni, “Ubuntu and the Modern Society.”

<sup>67</sup> Megan L Dolbin-MacNab and Lorienna A Yancura, “International Perspectives on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Contextual Considerations for Advancing Global Discourse,” *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 86, no. 1 (2018): 3–33.

<sup>68</sup> A. Williams and J.F. Nussbaum, “Intergenerational Communication across the Lifespan,” *Routledge Communication Series* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Sogaga, “Challenges That Grandparents Face in Caring for Their Grandchildren in Mdlankomo Location, Libode.”

<sup>70</sup> Gerrand, “Adoption of Abandoned Children in South Africa: Why Black Citizens Are Difficult to Recruit as Prospective Adopters.”

urban migration continues to take a huge toll makes it urgent to study and explore the adversity associated with secondary parenting.<sup>71</sup>

The findings established that secondary parenting presented an arduous and an uphill task to the older parents. Inter alia, this could be explained by the fact that many of them are in their sunset years, with the result that the tasks involved vexes in their social, physical, emotional and psychological well-being, thereby denying them to experience a spate of successful ageing.<sup>72</sup> This can also be explained by the gerontological supposition that ageing is an entropic disorder that is associated with illnesses of various kinds and bodily dysfunctionalities.<sup>73</sup> Studies by Sogaga in South Africa reflect that the ageing of the grandmothers, and negative behaviours by their grandchildren amid paucity of financial resources, perfidiously affect the welfare of the grandmothers.<sup>74</sup>

Further findings averred that the phenomenon of secondary parenting has a huge toll on the socio-economic welfare of older persons. Studies by Mugedyia in South Africa established that the care of children by grandmothers especially in their sunset years was mired with excruciating states of poverty, especially when the older persons had to single-handedly rely on their meagre old age pensions for both their upkeep and maintenance of their children.<sup>75</sup> This is because some of them have no access to their grandchildren's child welfare grant cards as some of their children's mothers disappear to oblivion with them.<sup>76</sup> Further, the older parents' engagement in secondary parenting was cumbersome and presented some psychosocial deficits in that it reduced time for self-care such as exercising and going for medical check-ups at the clinics, time for recreating themselves and socialising. This has exposed them to a state of loneliness which, at their age denies them the societal social capital; as well as is likely to trigger grandparents to change their lifestyles, relationships, and social roles.<sup>77</sup> This contention mirrors literature by Kang'ethe in South Africa suggesting that in an environment bereft of adequate resources, care of the grandchildren through secondary parenting was a process that was likely to drive the grandparents to accelerate their ageing and increased health deficits, or even facing death before their time.<sup>78</sup>

Study findings reflected that secondary parenting attracted different aspects of conflicts. These conflicts go either way, in one way involving children as the aggressor, or the grandparents. Studies by Moon and Eslinger in the USA confirmed that child abuse was common where the grandparent caregivers are substance misuse.<sup>79</sup> This also finds support in South Africa, where cases of some grandmothers misusing the child welfare grant money for alcohol abuse and other reasons, leaving the children hungry and desperate, have attracted documentation.<sup>80</sup> On the flip side of the coin, grandparents find themselves stressed by a broken relationship with their dysfunctional adult children, who neglected their children or were grossly irresponsible prompting the older parents to take the burden.<sup>81</sup> In the South African context, cases of such adult children running away with child welfare grants for their children have not been uncommon.<sup>82</sup> Further, studies by Mugedyia established that in South Africa, grandmothers raising grandchildren struggle to discipline them, with a probability of

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<sup>71</sup> Mugedyia, "Exploring Juvenile Delinquency Phenomenon in Grandparent Headed Families in Hill Crest, Alice Township, Eastern Cape."

<sup>72</sup> Mbulayi and Kang'ethe, "Social Constructions of Successful Ageing: The Case of Ruware Park in Marondera, Zimbabwe."

<sup>73</sup> Jotham Dhemba and Bennadate Dhemba, "Ageing and Care of Older Persons in Southern Africa: Lesotho and Zimbabwe Compared," *Social Work & Society* 13, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>74</sup> Sogaga, "Challenges That Grandparents Face in Caring for Their Grandchildren in Mdlankomo Location, Libode."

<sup>75</sup> Mugedyia, "Exploring Juvenile Delinquency Phenomenon in Grandparent Headed Families in Hill Crest, Alice Township, Eastern Cape."

<sup>76</sup> Gutura and Tanga, "'Income for the Whole Family': Exploring the Contribution of Social Grants to Rural Household Income in Ngqushwa Municipality, Eastern Cape Province of South Africa."

<sup>77</sup> Archana Singh and Nishi Misra, "Loneliness, Depression and Sociability in Old Age," *Industrial Psychiatry Journal* 18, no. 1 (2009): 51–55.

<sup>78</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>79</sup> Choi, Sprang, and Eslinger, "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Synthetic Review and Theoretical Model for Interventions."

<sup>80</sup> N Makhubu and B Ndenze, "Young Moms Abuse Grant System," *IOL News* 2 (2013).

<sup>81</sup> K Joyner, "Tackling Child Abuse and Neglect in South Africa," *South African Medical Journal* 106, no. 12 (December 1, 2016): 1159, <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2017.v106i12.12178>.

<sup>82</sup> Makhubu and Ndenze, "Young Moms Abuse Grant System."

them becoming juvenile delinquents.<sup>83</sup> This is corroborated by studies by Studies by Kang'ethe that revealed that some grandchildren confronted their grandmothers to give them social welfare grant money to spend of their own volition.<sup>84</sup> This took a serious dimension when the grandchildren took the matter to the officials of the Department of Social Development. This is a painstaking experience that hurts the dignity and integrity of the grandmothers.

Study findings reflected that the quality of secondary parenting was compromised by an environment of paucity of resources amid the state of the older person's health.<sup>85</sup> Scores of literature across many countries seem to agree that the exertion and stress associated with grandparents caring for their grandchildren exert stress which impacts the grandparents' state of health.<sup>86</sup> Studies by Lumsdaine & Vermeer in the USA further reinforce the above debate by establishing that the ageing of grandparents impacts negatively their health as well as their capacities to care for their grandchildren.<sup>87</sup> This also affects their coping and adjustment mechanisms requisite in caring as well as their ability to manage the physical and emotional demands of rearing grandchildren.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the day-to-day care of children, especially the very young ones is physically taxing and can lead to loss of sleep and exposure of the grandmothers to infections. The demands can increase especially if they coincide with the onset of physical aging.<sup>89</sup>

In a study conducted by Sogaga in South Africa on care deficits experienced by grandmothers in pursuit of secondary parenting, some children found themselves in an environment bereft of love, peace, and tranquillity.<sup>90</sup> This phenomenon is dire as it perfidiously affects the children's growth equilibrium.<sup>91</sup> This may have some negative outcomes of stunting the children while others face the challenge of developing cognitive challenges.<sup>92</sup>

### Social Work Implications

Social workers must strengthen their advocacy to the government and communities that secondary parenting, although filling a very important niche in society needs to be supported by viable programmes. Such programmes need to ensure that those older grandparents that take the task are supported by programmes, besides the foster care programmes that offer only a little money that cannot adequately support the care of the grandchildren. There should also be concerted advocacy for the younger generation to be responsible in raising their children. It is unfair for youngsters to produce children they cannot be able to bring up. The principle of Ubuntu also embraces responsibility and not being a burden to others.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, it is recommended that youngsters who by default become mothers prematurely should be ready to take their caring experience. Social workers should strengthen their advocacy skills to convince society to support older persons doing secondary parenting. They should also implore the government, NGOs, and private individuals to synergistically and corporately

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<sup>83</sup> Muggedya, "Exploring Juvenile Delinquency Phenomenon in Grandparent Headed Families in Hill Crest, Alice Township, Eastern Cape."

<sup>84</sup> Kang'ethe, "Violation of Human Rights of Older Persons in South Africa. The Case of Lavela Old Age Centre, Ntselamanzi, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa."

<sup>85</sup> Choi, Sprang, and Eslinger, "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: A Synthetic Review and Theoretical Model for Interventions."

<sup>86</sup> Jing Zhou et al., "The Impact of Caring for Grandchildren on Grandparents' Physical Health Outcomes: The Role of Intergenerational Support," *Research on Aging* 39, no. 5 (2017): 612–34.

<sup>87</sup> Robin L Lumsdaine and Stephanie J C Vermeer, "Retirement Timing of Women and the Role of Care Responsibilities for Grandchildren," *Demography* 52, no. 2 (2015): 433–54.

<sup>88</sup> Muggedya, "Exploring Juvenile Delinquency Phenomenon in Grandparent Headed Families in Hill Crest, Alice Township, Eastern Cape."

<sup>89</sup> Mbulayi and Kang'ethe, "Social Constructions of Successful Ageing: The Case of Ruware Park in Marondera, Zimbabwe."

<sup>90</sup> Sogaga, "Challenges That Grandparents Face in Caring for Their Grandchildren in Mdlankomo Location, Libode."

<sup>91</sup> A. Makuyana, S.P. Mbulayi, and S.M. Kangethe, "Psychosocial Deficits Underpinning Child Headed Households (CHHs) in Mabvuku and Tafara Suburbs of Harare, Zimbabwe," *Children and Youth Services Review* 115 (August 2020): 105093, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105093>.

<sup>92</sup> Kang'ethe and Makuyan, "Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Care Institutions: Exploring Their Possible Damage to Children in a Few Countries of the Developing World."

relook at the phenomenon of secondary parenting and institute programmes to assist in secondary parenting.

## CONCLUSION

Unequivocally, secondary parenting performs an important care niche for vulnerable children that needs to be appreciated. However, while done in an environment bereft of resources, amid conditions of aging and frailty, it imposes perfidious circumstances, especially on the aging grandparents. Since the practice is ubiquitous cutting across many countries and continents, governments and other social service organisations must raise awareness of its perfidious impacts, especially the aging grandparents. It takes away their human rights to enjoy some respite in their sunset years. It is therefore important that these grandparents are supported to cope with it by availing adequate resources amid additional community support.

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