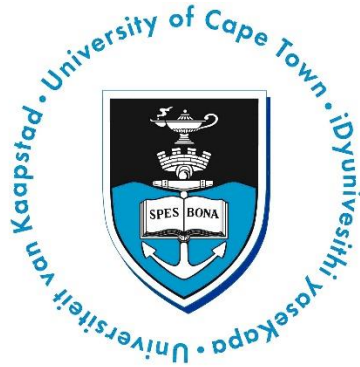


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Minor Dissertation Final Report

A Welfare Deservingness Approach to The COVID-19 Grant: An Exploration of the Social and Economic Experiences of Unemployed Youth in South Africa.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Plagiarism Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	1
1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	4
1.4 RESEARCH TOPIC	4
1.5 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
1.6 MAIN OBJECTIVES	5
1.7 MAIN ASSUMPTIONS	6
1.8 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS	6
1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	6
1.10 CONCLUSION	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 INTRODUCTION	8
2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	8
2.2.1 Contextualization: A global exploration of social assistance	8
2.2.1.1 Europe	9
2.2.1.2 Africa	9
2.2.2 The role of social assistance programs in South Africa	10
2.2.2.1 The COVID-19 SRD grant	10
2.2.3 The crisis of youth unemployment in South Africa	12
2.2.3.1 The root causes of youth unemployment	12
2.2.3.2 How youth unemployment impacts communities	14
2.2.3.3 Proposed interventions to combat youth unemployment	14
2.2.4 The influence of social grants on the livelihoods of people	14
2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	16
2.3.1 Welfare Deservingness Theory	18

2.3.2 The Capabilities Approach	19
2.3.3 Interplay between frameworks	20
2.4 POLICY AND LEGISLATION	21
2.4.1 The National Youth Policy	21
2.5 CONCLUSION	21
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	
3.1 INTRODUCTION	23
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	23
3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING	23
3.3.1 Study Population	23
3.3.2 Sampling Technique	25
3.3.3 Sampling Procedure	25
3.4 DATA COLLECTION	25
3.4.1 Data Collection Method: Semi-structured detailed Interviews	25
3.4.2 Data Collection Instrument	25
3.4.3 Data Recording	25
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS	26
3.6 DATA VERIFICATION	26
3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	27
3.8 REFLEXIVITY	28
3.9 CONCLUSION	28
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	
4.1 INTRODUCTION	30
4.2 PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	30
4.3 FRAMEWORK FOR THE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	31
4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	33
4.4.1 Experiences of the COVID-19 grant administration	33
4.4.1.1 Application and approval processes	34
4.4.1.2 Payment rollout experiences	36
4.4.2 COVID-19 grant management	38

4.4.3 The lived experiences of COVID-19 grant recipients	41
4.4.3.1 Social experiences	41
4.4.3.2 Economic experiences	42
4.4.4 Unemployed Youth in a post-pandemic society	46
4.4.4.1 The grant’s impact on experiences of unemployment	46
4.4.4.2 Perceptions of unemployment pre- and post-pandemic	48
4.4.5 The impact of COVID-19 on experiences of distress	49
4.4.5.1 The emotional experiences	49
4.4.6 Socially protective measures for young South Africans	51
4.5 CONCLUSION	53
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
5.1 INTRODUCTION	54
5.2 MAIN CONCLUSIONS	54
5.2.1 Unemployment and the challenge of COVID-19 grant distributions are hinderances	54
to social and economic freedoms	56
5.2.2 A new outlook on welfare deservingness	56
5.3 MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS	57
5.3.1 Improve youth-based initiatives: Learnership and Internship programs	57
5.3.2 Implement a basic income grant	58
5.4 CONCLUSION	59
REFERENCES	61
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX ONE: INFORMED CONSENT FORM	72
APPENDIX TWO: LETTER OF PERMISSION	73
APPENDIX THREE: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	74
LIST OF TABLES	
Table 1: Participant demographic profile	30
Table 2: Framework of analysis	31

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ABSTRACT

For the longest time, South African youth have not been prioritized in social protection policies (Barford, Coutts, & Sahai, 2021). However, given the current socioeconomic deprivations, it can be argued that young people meet the criteria of neediness required to be considered for a permanent welfare policy. The primary objective of this study was to use a welfare deservingness approach to the COVID-19 grant to explore the social and economic experiences of unemployed youth in South Africa. This study used an explorative qualitative research design to gain insight into the attitudes and perceptions that unemployed youth have about receiving the COVID-19 grant. Information was also collected to understand the influence that receiving the COVID-19 relief grant has on the social experiences and economic participation of the youth. Additionally, the purpose of the study was to gauge youth perspectives about continued support in the form of a possible basic income grant. In-depth individual qualitative interviews were conducted with 16 participants who were aged between 21 to 35 years old: at an average age of 25. A subjective or purposive sampling method was used to inform the data collection process, this is a non-probability sampling technique which is useful for gathering qualitative information from a particular population of participants. The study's findings revealed that youth are desperate for paying job opportunities that can ensure financial stability. Although many of the participants thought the R350 grant money helped in the ways that it could, they also expressed how little this income was in the post-pandemic society. Participants conveyed that the COVID-19 grant does little to alleviate the psychological distress that they feel in response to the dire unemployment crisis. Also, young people expressed their frustrations with the payment delays and system failures associated with the grant. A new comprehensive social protection policy that includes the youth is the recommendation of this study. Based on the findings, this study concluded that young people are struggling to attain certain freedoms, despite the assistance of the COVID-19 grant. Resultantly, it is also recommended that a multidisciplinary approach to welfare deservingness be considered for the youth of South Africa, one which addresses the high unemployment crisis affecting the youth.

Keywords: *COVID-19 grant, Unemployment, Youth, Experiences, Economic Participation*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Unemployment rates were high before the COVID-19 pandemic and have only worsened since. The youth were amongst the most vulnerable individuals during this time, and it is proving difficult for them to access permanent employment opportunities as a result (Baldry et al., 2019). The governments implementation of the COVID-19 social relief of distress (SRD) grant has aimed to assist people who have been affected by the socioeconomic destruction caused by the pandemic. As a result, recipients of this grant have had an opportunity to receive extra income to help with the socioeconomic rebuilding process. Although various studies have been conducted about social grants in South Africa, there's a gap in research because there are few that exist to qualify these findings. Consequently, this study aims to provide this missing insight by understanding the perceptions of unemployed youth who receive the COVID-19 grant.

The first chapter presents the background of this study which examines the influence of receiving the COVID-19 grant on the social experiences and economic participation of unemployed youth in South Africa. A detailed outline of the statement of the problem to conceptualize the rationale and the significance of the study is discussed. This discussion is followed by an outline of the main research questions and the objectives of the study. Thereafter a description of the main assumptions, clarification of terms, and the ethical considerations of this study are provided.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

According to Statistics South Africa, unemployment rose from 32.7% in the final quarter of 2022 to 32.9% within the first three months of 2023 (Gumbi, 2023). The rise in unemployment rates has created an economy wherein young people struggle to transition into the labour market. The youth is disproportionately affected by the lack of job opportunities and efforts for socioeconomic integration (Baldry et al., 2019). An example of the unemployment problem is the hundreds and thousands of qualified young doctors confronted with joblessness in South Africa (Majavu, 2023). The state of unemployment in the medical field has even gone so far as to inspire a movement, "Higher our doctors." The resistance that the youth experience when attempting to transition into the workforce is increasing their lack of confidence and motivation (De Lannoy et al., 2020).

Persistent and rapidly rising rates of unemployment have presented a significant challenge for the welfare system and its government which are charged to protect the health, financial needs, and well-being of its citizens (Barr, 2020). High unemployment increases the risk of poverty and is a major contributing factor to inequality. This has detrimental implications for the lives of people, their families, and the communities in which they live (Saunders, 2002). Some detriments include mental health struggles, physical illnesses, reduced income, and possible lifelong joblessness. Furthermore, the issue of unemployment is one that influences more than the economic development of a country. It is an issue that also impacts the livelihoods of people (De Lannoy et al., 2020). The lack of employment opportunities that is a result of high saturation within job markets affects the mental health and general well-being of people. O'Campo et al. (2015) make the argument that the loss of income and opportunities linked to unemployment lead to deprivation which is the cause of poverty and other social ills. Amartya Sen substantiates this point by using a capabilities deprivation framework that asserts poverty as being the deficiency of freedoms characterized by a lack of access and loss of options that are necessary to live a quality life (Xaba, 2016).

Recently, the government announced the implementation of a new Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant, better known as the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) grant, targeted at working-age individuals between the age of 18 to 59 who are unemployed and unable to access other forms of social assistance (Evans, 2021). Although the COVID-19 grant is a financial support system, SRD grants are meant as a temporary provision of assistance that can take the form of either food parcels or cash transfers. A grant such as this one is supposed to be provided for a period of three months, however, can be extended for another three (Zembe-Mkabile, Ramokolo, & Doherty, 2020). Yet, the new SRD grant has been paid out for a period of two years now, with the first payments issued in May 2020, and has further been extended into 2023 which will be its third year. Since the State of the Nation Address (SONA) was given by President Cyril Ramaphosa in February 2023, the SRD grant will be further extended into March 2024 (Mokhoali, 2023).

The continuous extension of this grant has brought to question whether it is perhaps more beneficial to the livelihoods of SRD grant recipients for the government to implement it on a more permanent basis (Zembe-Mkabile, Ramokolo, & Doherty, 2020). Motivated by the belief that a more permanent solution will be helpful, the COVID-19 (C-19) People's Coalition together with numerous South African citizens has mobilized in favour of the SRD grant being a bridge for a more permanent financial support solution in the form of a universal basic income

grant (UBIG) that will guarantee the continued support of all vulnerable groups (Evans, 2021; Patrick, 2023). By enforcing the #PayTheGrants campaign, many have continued to champion a more permanent solution with higher payouts (Evans, 2021). With this campaign, the C-19 People's Coalition aims to hold the government accountable for its implementation of the new SRD grant and it also calls on the state to act according to the needs of the people; needs that can only be made clear through the voices of the people themselves. It is important to qualify the findings of social assistance programs because gathering the voices and experiences of people in the qualitative scene not only helps to guide and improve social policies but also aids in exploring the human experience which is a valued part of development (Watkins, 2012).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the experiences of citizens who receive social grants such as the child support grant (CSG). In gauging the influence of receiving social grants on the livelihoods of people, these studies covered areas such as economic participation, and the impact on poverty, inequality, health, and nutrition (Satumba, Bayat, & Mohamed, 2017). Given the current #PayTheGrant campaign and the call for the UBIG, it is informative to assess what influence (if any) that youth who are about to transition into the work environment feel that the grant has had on their capacity to participate in the economy and be socially included.

In a country plagued by high unemployment and poverty rates, there is a need for social protection initiatives that cover most of the population. As such, many previously disadvantaged people such as those with disabilities and in low-income households with dependents that they cannot care for without support have social assistance which includes the CSG and the disability. Youth are not recognized as disadvantaged because they are *born free*, so many policies do not explore the needs of young people today. Although South African youth are not recognized as a previously disadvantaged collective, the current socio-economic climate calls for young people to be supported financially by their government. The young people in the country are experiencing extreme levels of poverty and unemployment, yet there are no social grants available for them unless they fall into one of the already existing social protection categories (Altman et al., 2014). With the youth bulge, more than half of the young people in South Africa are either *Not in Education, Employment, or Training* (NEET) youth, unemployed graduates, or unemployed dropouts. Even before COVID-19 worsened the socioeconomic atmosphere of South Africa, the youth were at risk of falling into unemployment and had become a vulnerable group in society (Taljaard, 2008). Despite this, the youth still have limited to no access to social assistance.

Able-bodied youth who are unemployed and of working age only have the new grant system as a form of social assistance from the government. Whilst young people in formal employment can receive an unemployment insurance fund if they become unemployed. However, this is only accessible to a small number of young people. South Africa might be headed towards a system of universal income to prevent further ramifications caused by poverty and low income, and this new system will be inclusive of the country's youth population. The depth of deprivation faced by the youth becomes an obstacle to their ability to access opportunities (Altman et al., 2014). The government's ongoing attempt to provide youth with initiatives to guide and support them in attaining qualifications and skills needed for job acquisition are important, however, there's also room for social protection policies to be created that aim at supporting the youth (Altman et al., 2014). Though the universal basic income grant (UBIG) policy would be directed at the unemployed citizens of South Africa and not boldly focused on the youth, young people will still benefit. Social grants act as means of financial support that can help to ensure income security and access to essential services. So, providing youth with a helping hand in this way may steer them toward better opportunities.

1.3 RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The data collected from this qualitative research study aims to inform policy and improve the livelihood of youth in South Africa by conveying their experiences of receiving social support in the form of the COVID-19 grant. Furthermore, by highlighting the use of the grant money and addressing the influence this has had on the youth. Gathering in-depth information on youth perceptions of the new SRD grant will help to guide the decision-making processes about a possible basic income grant. Especially in this social climate where movements such as the C-19 People's coalition are calling on the government to consider a more permanent replacement for the COVID-19 grant. Information from this study can be helpful in bringing forward the human experiences which are pivotal in policy creation. As such, it can be a motivating study in ensuring that youth are included in social protection initiatives. This study will also guide the government on possible ways to implement the proposed basic income grant in a manner that is helpful to people.

1.4 RESEARCH TOPIC

A Welfare Deservingness Approach to the COVID-19 grant: An exploration of social and economic experiences of unemployed youth in South Africa.

1.5 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the perceptions and attitudes of unemployed working-age youth on the influence that receiving the COVID-19 grant has on their social experiences and economic participation?
More specifically:

Social Experiences

- Does receiving the COVID-19 grant affect youth social experiences? If so, in what ways?
- How does the youth manage the grant income?
- Does the COVID-19 grant assist in reducing the distress caused by the pandemic?
- What are the youth's attitudes about receiving the grant?
- What are the youth's perceptions of the grant's capacity to facilitate their social inclusion?
- What are the youth's perspectives about receiving a possible basic income grant?

Economic participation

- Does receiving the grant motivate the youth towards economic participation?
- In what ways does receiving the COVID-19 grant influence the economic experiences of the youth?
- In what ways does the COVID-19 grant influence the employment aspirations of youth?
- In what ways would the permanent implementation of a basic income grant be helpful (if at all) in motivating youth participation?

1.6 MAIN OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are:

- To understand the attitudes and perceptions that unemployed working-age youth have about receiving the COVID-19 grant
- To understand the influence that receiving the COVID-19 relief grant has on the livelihoods (experiences) of unemployed working-age youth
- To determine the ways in which receiving the COVID-19 grant may influence the social inclusion and economic participation of unemployed youth
- To gauge youth attitudes about the ways in which continued support in the form of a possible basic income grant may or may not affect their social opportunities and economic aspirations for the future

1.7 MAIN ASSUMPTIONS

The aim of this research is to understand the perceived influence of receiving the COVID-19 SRD grant on the living standards and economic participation of unemployed working-age youth in South Africa. As such, this study assumes that the findings will provide an understanding of the influence of receiving the grant on livelihoods and initiate a stance about a possible basic income grant.

1.8 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Youth: In correspondence with the National Youth Act of 1996 the term *youth* is directed toward individuals who are aged between 14 and 35 years (Makiwane & Kwizera, 2009).

Working-Age: This refers to individuals who are employable or permitted to enter the workforce. In South Africa, people are legally accepted to enter the labour market from the age of 15 (Makiwane & Kwizera, 2009). For this research study, only working-age youth who are 21 to 35 years old have been included.

Unemployment: The expansive definition of unemployment refers to a group of people aged 15 to 64 years old who are either waiting to start work somewhere, searching, feeling discouraged while searching or people who have been unsuccessful at finding work altogether (Baskaran, Bhorat, & Kohler, 2020). This definition also includes people who are without work but are not looking for any and those who do not have active businesses.

Economic Participation: When people can contribute to the taxes and economic growth of a nation by providing legal services for a monthly income (Saunders, 2002).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Creswell (2014) identifies various ethical considerations that every researcher must consider when conducting research.

Avoidance of harm: A researcher must avoid causing harm of any kind to their participants. Even within a qualitative setting where there is a possibility of emotional harm, it must be avoided (Creswell, 2014). The researcher did this by ensuring that a safe space is provided for the participants, one where embarrassment and shame are kept at bay. Additionally, the participants and their experiences were treated sensitively and respectfully.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation: Clear information was provided about the nature and significance of this research. This was to ensure that all participants had an

understanding of the premise of this study so that they could provide knowledgeable permission for participation (Creswell, 2014). The researcher provided each participant with a consent form that outlined their autonomy. When participation is voluntary it means that participants are made aware of all the possible benefits and harm that can come from the research process. It also means that participants have complete control and aren't being forced to start, stop, or continue with the research against their will. Both aspects were prioritized in this study.

Privacy, Anonymity, and Confidentiality: A researcher must be sensitive to the various ways in which the participants' privacy can be violated during the process (Creswell, 2014). Throughout this study, the researcher upheld the responsibility to remain impartial and sensitive to the identities and privacy of all participants. Furthermore, the findings from this study will address all participants using pseudonyms to ensure that their real names and stories are concealed and protected.

Debriefing Participants: Participants must be granted an opportunity to reflect on their experiences not only during the interview but also after. It is a researcher's responsibility to create these opportunities because doing so is useful in minimizing the participants' emotional harm (Creswell, 2014). The participants were briefed before and after each interview to ensure their comfortability in the process, and their understanding of the research.

Publication of findings: The researcher ensured that the research report is written clearly and objectively while maintaining the ethical consideration of confidentiality.

1.10 CONCLUSION

The first chapter of this report introduces the statement of the problem which is youth unemployment in South Africa, especially during the pandemic. It conceptualizes the COVID-19 grant support and conveys the significance of the study. The chapter also introduces the research topic. It then presents the main questions and the objective of this research which is to understand the perspectives of unemployed working-age youth on what influence receiving the COVID-19 SRD grant may have on their living standards and economic participation. The main research assumptions are conveyed. Additionally, the terms of this research which are youth, unemployment, working age, economic participation, living standards, and social inclusion are clarified. Lastly, the ethical considerations are also clarified. Subsequent chapters provide a review of literature, the interplay between frameworks, findings of the study, and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter shows a review of the literature on youth unemployment and the influences that grants have on the lives and economic participation of unemployed working-age youth in South Africa. First, a global exploration of social assistance is discussed for contextualization. The second part of this review will present a brief outline of the role of social assistance programs in South Africa, with a focus on the COVID-19 SRD grant. Followed by a section that discusses the crisis of youth unemployment and the influence of social grants on the livelihoods of people. The second part of this chapter addresses the theoretical frameworks that will inform this research, specifically: The Deservingness theory and the Capabilities framework. Conversely, the third part will provide an overview of the policies and legislation linked to this research. Lastly, the final part concludes the main points of the literature review.

2.2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.2.1 Contextualization: A global exploration of social assistance

International approaches to social assistance influence policies and grant programs in the Global South (Sakala, Noyoo, & Mabundza-Dlamini, 2022). So, in order to explore, understand, and answer and question related to social protection systems in a national context, it is beneficial to consider the global space. Global standards recognize the term “social security” which has become interchangeable with concepts of social protection and assistance (Vonk & Olivier, 2019). According to the human fundamental rights intentions that are recognized worldwide, all people should have access to adequate living standards. This right is acknowledged in bulletins such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESR), as pertaining to shared (universal) government interests (Vonk & Olivier, 2019). The global standard for social security is supposed to provide assistance and constitute a significant component of protection to ensure human dignity for people all over the world. Many countries such as Germany and South Africa have established social protection measures as per UDHR and ICESR standards. Globally, social assistance programmes are tax-funded and act as anti-poverty strategies; aiming to relieve social deprivation. Assistance programmes are meant to support people to receive the basic human rights that can be caused by social and economic lack. For example, social protection should provide access to food, water, and sanitation. While some countries,

particularly those in the Global North, have found ways to implement effective social assistance and regulations. Other countries, particularly those in the Global South, struggle to implement well-written policies targeted at issues of social security.

2.2.1.1 Europe

European programmes have played a significant role in social assistance and have a longstanding input toward income support of citizens in need (Vonk & Olivier, 2019). For example, Germany is known for its development and implementation of robust social assistance structures that address and protect the social needs of its citizens. In Germany, unemployed citizens receive basic support to maintain a dignified quality of life (Thiman, 1996). European governments recognize the right to social assistance for citizens with no safety-nets or resources. Following the global standards supported by the UDHR and ICESR, Europe ensures that people who are socioeconomically deprived, have inadequate supplies, and battle to fund basic needs receive the benefits of social assistance. Social protective measures are taken seriously to fight against poverty and social exclusion. Guided by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, social assistance plans are upheld to give people the minimal income support needed to access goods and services (Vonk & Olivier, 2019). This is a novel approach to protecting the dignity and rights of European citizens in all stages of life.

2.2.1.2 Africa

Traditionally, African countries have no significant history of inclusive public income support systems (Vonk & Olivier, 2019). Social assistance programs in African countries are as recent. Nowadays, more African governments are providing social assistance to vulnerable, deprived, and poor groups of people (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2019). Though this provision and its coverage are still limited, the amount of support for social assistance initiatives is rapidly increasing. For instance, in South Africa, social assistance has become a significant component of policy creation to address vulnerability, social exclusion, and injustices. Scholars, policy creators, and researchers among other change agents across Africa need to understand that European traditions and policy approaches are not effective blueprints for African systems. It is imperative for the Global South to focus on custom and local issues when creating social assistance plans. Moreover, countries in Africa such as South Africa and Zimbabwe should also follow policies that are intentionally created for their unique socioeconomic climates. When global social security systems are imposed onto underdeveloped or developing countries, which refers to the majority of African countries, it

is a set up for unsuccessful programmes (Vonk & Olivier, 2019). The responsibility of effective and well-implemented social assistance plans in Africa lies with African governments.

2.2.2 The role of social assistance programs in South Africa

By global comparison, South Africa spends more on social assistance than most other countries in Africa (World Bank, 2021). Yet, assistance is not available for a large group of working-age youth. According to the policy brief provided by the World Bank (2021), unemployment benefits are only available to people who are affiliated with one providing services in the formal sector. This further cement the lack of coverage that unemployed youth have been given in the form of social protection. Without social assistance, many young unemployed people who do not have any work experience are left susceptible to socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Poverty and inequality cause pockets of deep deprivation which remain the most pressing concerns for the socio-economic development of the country, alongside the issue of unemployment and low economic participation (World Bank, 2021). In response to this, social support systems are a crucial response to the country's vulnerabilities. According to Turok & Visagie (2021), government grants provide a financial safety net to protect the dignity of people who live in poor communities and mitigate the impact of unemployment on livelihoods. Without the support of grants, people will be without safety nets.

Ultimately, the social effects of unemployment continue to emphasize the need for welfare state intervention in the form of policy creation and the establishment of effective strategies for provision (Barr, 2020). As such, demands for the government to provide adequate social welfare schemes to mitigate unemployment, poverty, and inequality have increased over time. The availability of social grants has long signified government attempts to usher people out of poverty and into freedom through means of financial support (Xaba, 2016). Therefore, government aid in the form of social assistance has been instrumental and it has made strides in its goal of poverty reduction and improving the lives of people (South African Medical Research Council [SAMRC], 2022). For the most part, social protection schemes have been instrumental in promoting the betterment of the livelihoods of beneficiaries by permitting them access to some level of social security (International Labour Office [ILO], 2021).

2.2.2.1 The COVID-19 SRD grant

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, government contributions to welfare by means of social grants were somewhat effective and helpful strategies for combating poverty because they helped individuals to meet their basic needs (Coetzee, 2013). For most poor households, financial

assistance from social welfare programs is the main source of stable and reoccurring income (Grinspun, 2016). The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) has the responsibility to distribute monthly cash transfers to viable grant recipients; these include, but aren't limited to, grants for child maintenance, and social relief (Wiid, 2011). The social assistance system in South Africa is well-conceptualized and developed because it makes a great effort to reach its targeted population of vulnerable groups and provide the financial subsidies necessary for them to attain their basic needs (Van der Berg, Siebrits, & Lekezwa, 2010). Prior to the lockdown period, an estimated 17 million South African citizens relied on social grants for their household income, security, and food (SAMRC, 2022). South Africa has a variety of social security grants among which are the CSG and the disability grant (Winchester, King, & Rishworth, 2021).

Between 2003 and 2018, the percentage of South African citizens receiving at least one social grant increased by 13.5% (Winchester, King, & Rishworth, 2021). At present, due to the increasing financial disparities caused by COVID-19 pressures within the country and the rapid decline in job opportunities, a larger and growing number of citizens depend on social assistance to maintain their livelihoods (Winchester, King, & Rishworth, 2021). Monetary provisions in the form of government social assistance have been known to promote individual capacity and encourage productivity in households (Coetzee, 2013). As such, the South African government announced an increase in the amount payable for numerous SASSA grants (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2021). Recently, the government has also introduced a COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant through SASSA which targets unemployed residents who are not already covered by other grant systems (Winchester, King, & Rishworth, 2021).

Notably, the pandemic has exposed the significant gaps and inequalities in the social protection efficiency of many countries around the world (ILO, 2021). According to the World Social Protection Report of 2020 to 2022, a close estimate of 46.9% of the world's population experienced effective coverage for at least one social protection benefit, whereas the remaining population of 53.1% of people is unsupported (ILO, 2021). As of 2020, the rates of social support in Europe and Central Asia are reported to be at 83.9% compared to those in Africa which are at 17.4% (ILO, 2021). Although progress has been made in providing government assistance over the years, it has been insufficient during COVID-19 (SAMRC, 2022).

2.2.3 The crisis of youth unemployment in South Africa

Youth unemployment is a concern that stretches across every part of the world, it is especially high in developing countries (United Nations, 2020). According to statistics provided by the International Labour Organisation, the global youth NEET rate was 22.2% which means that one in five young people isn't acquiring any work, training, or education (United Nations, 2020). This is alarming because NEET youth are most susceptible to experiencing social and economic exclusion. Although a vast majority of South African citizens believe that it is better to have some sort of employment than have no job at all, the number of people who are unemployed has continued to increase over time (Moosa & Patel, 2020). With unemployment on the rise in South Africa, many young people are either abandoning job-seeking altogether or struggling to transition from education into the job market (Ardington, Case, Menendez, Bärnighausen, Lam, & Leibbrandt, 2016). In the third quarter of 2021, the official national unemployment rate was 34.9%, this increased to 35.3% in the fourth quarter of the same year (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA], 2022). It became the highest rate of unemployment since 2008 (StatsSA, 2022). Of the unemployed population in South Africa, the youth make up 44.3% of NEET individuals who fall between the ages of 15 to 34 years old (Political Analysis South Africa [PASA], 2022). Youth unemployment is a rising national crisis and a huge concern for the stability of the country. According to research by Ardington et al. (2016), much of the crisis of youth unemployment is reflected by spatial inequalities that originate from the apartheid era. Suggesting that youth who are living in disadvantaged areas have a higher possibility of either becoming discouraged in their search for work or not receiving work while searching (Ardington et al., 2016; SARDRU, 2013). Furthermore, the Siyakha youth assets study reveals that efforts that focus on assisting youth to transition from education into the labour market help to build the confidence that young people need to thrive (Baldry et al., 2019). Subsequently, youth who receive government aid are less likely to be idle and more likely to be enthusiastic in their quest for employment. There is an indirect association between social protection and the desire to participate in education and employment, this suggests a need for a permanent grant solution to be created and targeted at unemployed youth (Evans, 2021).

2.2.3.1 The root causes of youth unemployment

The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI) program has been established to end youth unemployment (Republic of South Africa, 2024). The PYEI has the intention to give youth access to learning and earning opportunities through platforms such as *SAYouth.mobi*. However, despite the government efforts to change the course of youth unemployment, there's still a huge gap in job security for South African youth (Jubane, 2020). According to Jubane

(2020), the root causes of youth unemployment can include substandard learning and educational systems resulting in insufficient skills to integrate into the economy, increased government debt, barriers to job-seeking (no money for transport and so on), and poor policy implementations.

Insufficient skills for economic integration

A mismatch in structural skills that most jobs are looking for can keep the youth from finding well-paying and high value jobs. Structural unemployment happens when young people do not meet the criteria or have the skills that employers are attracted to (Jubane, 2020). Attending a school that is deprived of important educational resources and tools can cause youth to fall behind early, contributing to the issue of skill insufficiency. A large portion of South African families still battle the disparities brought forward by apartheid history (Pasara & Dunga, 2022). So many youths are not privy to access what they need to thrive in the economy. Factors such as poor governance, institutional setbacks, and the rapid development of automation (4IR)—met with limited training—can keep the youth from finding employment.

Increased government debt

In 2020, the South African government reported a public debt of 68.8% which quickly rose to 71.1% by 2022 (South African Reserve Bank, 2024). When government is in debt, it limits the availability of funds needed to build skills development programs. A lack of fiscal resources hinders policymaking and implementation (Sesopetsa, 2020). Consequently, job creation ideas are affected and public policy monitoring is slowed.

Barriers to job-seeking

Job-seeking barriers affecting youth include lack of employment experience, limited academic qualifications, lack of information, no job opportunities, and disadvantaged upbringings (Department of Employment and Labour, n.d.). Youth in South Africa are desperate for permanent employment but many lack experience. When applying for jobs, employers look for individuals with years of experience and qualifications that many youth do not have. Though learnerships, internships, and apprenticeship programs are available, the information on how to obtain these and where to look is lacking. This brings us to the next point: Lack of information. There is limited information about where youth can find employment and how to prepare themselves for it. Getting this information can help to alleviate barriers to job-seeking. Also, the lack of job opportunities is a major roadblock in finding employment. Businesses and

organisations are saturated by an influx of qualified people, that no active positions seem to be advertised for the benefit of youth. Lastly, disadvantaged backgrounds can stand in the way of employment security. Someone who cannot afford a smartphone, internet, access to computer labs, and knowledge from libraries is more likely to battle unemployment than someone who has access to resources. Barriers to job-seeking prevent the youth from advancing in the workforce or even getting their foot into the door of employment.

Poor policy implementation

Adding to these barriers is the country's poor policy implementation. Failure to follow through with policies leads to the exclusion of people who the policies were created for (Jubane, 2020). In South Africa, a huge reason why implementation is unsuccessful is corruption (Cele, 2023). Even when the money to implement social policies is available, corruption keeps it from being used for the intended agenda. Corruption is the reason many African citizens are still living in poverty today. It is strengthening the lack of trust in South African leadership and increasing lack of accountability (Sesopetsa, 2020).

2.2.3.2 How youth unemployment impacts communities

Youth unemployment does not just impact the individual, it also permeates communities. When the youth – who are the bedrock of society and its future leaders – face job insecurity, a ripple effect is created. It intensifies community suffering by reinforcing poor households, crime, substance abuse, and other reckless behaviours (Ngcaweni, 2016; Sepeng, 2024). Poor households or poverty is further cemented by the lack of economic participation of unemployed youths. In 2011, unemployment contributed 39.8% to the creation of poor households in South Africa (Ngcaweni, 2016). Furthermore, unemployment is recognized as the main contributing factor to poverty. The desperation that comes from income insecurity can lead to crime and promiscuous behaviours, which have poor outcomes for the development of broader communities.

2.2.3.3 Proposed interventions to combat youth unemployment

Since a lack of skills can influence whether or not the youth receive employment, educational interventions can benefit young people. Higher learning institutions need to provide curriculum information that is targeted at supporting the youth in developing necessary skills for economic integration. For instance, all university faculties should offer the same high-quality value of education so young people can get jobs or create them using their skills. Youths in humanities

should be equipped with adequate knowledge to know how to be active contributors in philanthropic, humanitarian, and social initiatives.

Additionally, young people should be empowered with options for employment when they obtain degrees. For example, a list of viable organizations should be suggested to help the youth know where to start searching for employment related to their qualification. Educational institutions can work together with companies, nonprofit organizations, and other possible employers to create job opportunities for qualifying youth. For example, an organization can share their requirements for future employees with learning institution, so youth are challenged to meet that criterion in promise for future employment. This way, the responsibility to end unemployment is shared among South African citizens.

Also, the youth need more training programs and jobs to be created. For the youth who lack skills to find jobs it's essential for intervention measures to be put in place to give them an opportunity to develop. Imagine youth who want to work but missed out on getting further education after high school, not having a chance to upskill through government funded initiatives keeps them stuck. Most times having a high school certificate weakens the possibility of employment. However, if the government focuses on providing courses and opportunities to develop market skills, the youth are empowered. These initiatives should be hands-on so the youth are actively prepared for the responsibilities that come after the program.

Seeing as government debt and fiscal mismanagement are at the root of youth unemployment, there needs to be changes made to the budgeting approach. Not just that but the government needs to be held accountable for fiscal misuse, especially pertaining to the issues that continue to disadvantage the country. More research needs to be done on how government accountability and proper policy implementation can be ensured.

Youth can also consider volunteering to build work experience. There are internships available for the youth to develop knowledge and skills around their areas of interest. It is usually best to start from "the bottom" and work upward into the employment scene. Also, career exposés and interview preparation sessions should be offered in various communities. These should be facilitated by leaders with a vested interest in seeing youth employment increase. It is also important for communities in disadvantaged areas to offer computer labs and internet access targeted at helping youth learn. There needs to be more effort in meeting the needs of people who have difficulties securing employment.

Without any of these proposed interventions in play, there is a need to ensure that social protection systems such as the COVID-19 grant and the future UBIG initiative are bridging the gap. Also, youths should be included as a priority group during socioeconomic policy and implementation forums.

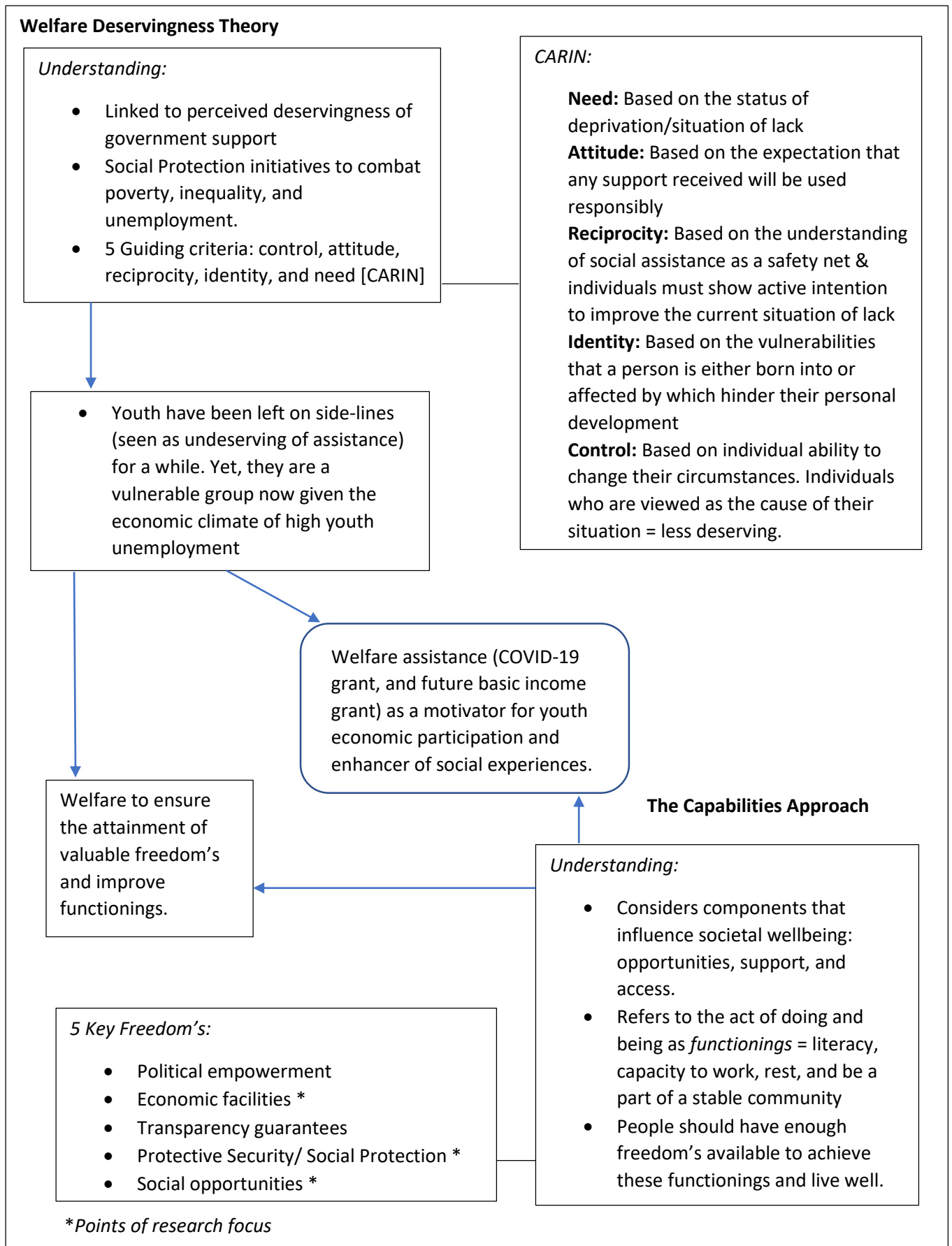
2.2.4 The influence of social grants on the livelihoods of people

There is a stigma connected to joblessness that can be regarded as a critical and persistent stressor that affects individual self-esteem by increasing psychological distress (O'Campo et al., 2015). Consequently, social grants are meant as a form of social relief that can help to ease the pressures of the people who receive them. According to a study conducted by Chitiga et al. (2014), the impact of social assistance is dependent on how recipients use the money. Since cash transfers are interchangeable the biggest concern is that recipients use the money on nonessential items, resulting in a minimal influence on the livelihoods of people. Although the country's social assistance programs are well-targeted and help to reduce poverty and motivate the socioeconomic welfare of vulnerable individuals living in rural areas, an analysis by Samtumba, Bayat, & Mohamed (2017) conveys that people who report grants as effective forms of assistance usually have other sources of income. Although grant money is helpful, it is more influential when used as a supportive income instead of a primary income (Samtumba et al., 2017). Additionally, social grant advocates argue that, in the process of searching for employment, cash transfers help people by providing extra income to assist them with whatever might be needed during the application and interview processes which thereby increases the chances of economic participation (SALDRU, 2013).

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the theoretical frameworks used as lens through which the perceptions of unemployed youth on the influence of grants on their living standards and motivation to participate economically. This study focuses on the welfare deservingness theory by Van Oorschot (2000) and the capabilities approach by Amartya Sen (1999).

Diagram 1: The Interplay Between Frameworks



2.3.1 Welfare Deservingness Theory

Based on previous work done by Cook (1979) and De Swaan (1988), the welfare deservingness theory which was further developed by Van Oorschot (2000) asserts that the distribution of welfare resources is dependent on the perceived deservingness of individuals (Van Oorschot et al., 2017). The issue of how and to whom to allocate welfare resources has been a longstanding theme that runs back decades (Laenen et al., 2019). For instance, welfare conversations have been continuous within the South African system, since apartheid times when the allocation of social grants was racially motivated and available to some groups and not others (Chitiga et al., 2014). Since then, social systems have evolved and have become significant strategies for fighting poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

The welfare deservingness theory argues that social protection systems are now guided by five criteria which are used to justify what constitutes adequate welfare allocation within welfare states (Laenen et al., 2019). It also asserts that the government must consider these criteria when creating and implementing policy. The five standards for welfare distribution are control, attitude, reciprocity, identity, and need which are also known as CARIN criteria (Laenen et al., 2019). These criteria suggest that the ongoing provision of social assistance is dependent on individual characteristics that possible recipients have which meet the CARIN criteria. Gielens et al. (2019) elaborate on this by stating that need refers to the assessment of individual welfare deservingness based on their situation of lack. For example, people who are unemployed and without safety nets have higher neediness compared to those who have some sort of income or savings account (Gielens et al., 2019). Whereas the criterion of control focuses on the level of power that a person has over their situation of lack. For instance, people who are seen as contributors to their own neediness are less likely to be considered for social support (Van Oorschot et al., 2017). Ultimately, people who are unemployed because they've resigned are more likely to blame for their situation than those who were laid off or struggle to find employment due to an existing economic crisis. Alternatively, the criterion of identity suggests deservingness based on ethnicity, nationality, or kinship (Gielens et al., 2019). For example, people who are impacted by the perpetual inequality and oppressive structures cemented during apartheid are valued as more deserving of welfare than those who benefit from the system. Additionally, the criterion of reciprocity asserts the idea that people who put in the effort to get out of their situation are more deserving of welfare assistance than those who do not (Van Oorschot et al., 2017). Lastly, the argument of attitude is that recipients of social assistance need to use their funding responsibly in a way that shows gratitude and willingness to develop

and make their own income (Gielens et al., 2019). If implemented correctly and to serve the social development agenda, these criteria could be significant in ensuring a positive transition in the developmental agenda of the world and the national agenda.

2.3.2 The Capabilities Approach

This approach is a fundamental drive for many fields of work, more specifically in welfare economics and development studies (Xaba, 2016). Amartya Sen's capabilities framework is popularly used to assess and evaluate individual and collective well-being. It is often used to inform policies that are directed toward positive social transformation. The capabilities approach considers the components that influence the well-being of people in society, and it supports the theoretical underpinnings of the human development index (Vecchio & Martens (2021). A significant argument made within this framework is that people optimize the opportunities given to them and use these to participate in activities and developmental processes that they seek to be a part of. Sen (1999) refers to this as the act of doing and being in which opportunities and the use of them are acknowledged as life's functionings because an individual's participation is what will improve their standard of living. A few examples of these functionings are literacy, one's capacity to work, rest and be a part of a stable community.

According to Sen (1999), people should have enough freedom and access to resources for them to be able to decide for themselves the quality of life that they want to live. As such, human development within this framework is highly associated with the availability of freedoms and opportunities needed for people to excel and live the lives that they envision. The capabilities approach conveys five significant freedoms for development which are political empowerment, economic facilities, transparency guarantees, social protection, and social opportunities (Schokkaert, 2008). Three of the five freedoms will be used as a lens through which to explore the qualitative inquiry of this study, particularly protective security, social opportunities, and economic facilities. Moreover, the freedom of protective security mainly refers to fixed institutional arrangements such as government assistance that help people enhance their livelihoods, these exist in the form of social relief or income supplements (Schokkaert, 2008; Sen, 1999). Whereas economic facilities refer to the availability of a well-functioning and open labour market that is not oversaturated and has enough job opportunities for young people to enter well-paying environments. Given the high unemployment and NEET rates, already this freedom is not being guaranteed. Whist social opportunities comprise the access that people have to quality healthcare, education, and other social services (Xaba, 2016). This study has

the objective to understand the influence of grants on the freedoms and opportunities of youth. As such the use of the capabilities approach will allow for an in-depth final analysis of these experiences.

2.3.3 Interplay Between Frameworks

The nexus between welfare deservingness and capabilities is one that should be examined with the objective of expanding social protection initiatives, especially to support young people in today's economy. With this objective in mind, and based on the diagram provided, the following section will provide a brief outline of the interplay between the above-mentioned theories.

Human capabilities are the focus of development and the implementation of diverse social assistance strategies for South African youth can go a long way in promoting the overall socio-economic integration of young people. Social protection strategies offer a mechanism that may be able to substantially enhance many people's capabilities but the majority of youth have difficulty accessing grant provisions. Mostly because there are very few programs that cater to the youth. The South African social protection system only covers those who are affected by historical inequalities or vulnerabilities that are deemed worthy of support. For instance, the disability grant and the CSG. The system for social assistance does not have any youth grants which are directed at young people who do not qualify for other grants. Consequent to the ideology of deservingness that has guided the welfare system for many years, young people were never viewed as deserving of state provision and support. Unless this provision is linked to existing grants or connected to educational pursuits (in the form of bursaries). Yet, given the current socioeconomic climate of an increased youth population and a low employment capacity, many young people are faced with an inescapable challenge. Subsequently, social support in the form of grants can help to usher in their development. Social support has always been known to be a motivating factor for its recipients to build agency in their lives because it is a safety net that aids in supporting people to at least live at a certain level of dignity. So, if youth are provided with consistent and targeted support, it might encourage economic participation and enhance their social experiences.

The oversaturation and limited job opportunities that exist in today's system serve to hinder the ability of youth to transition into the working force and to integrate into society as functional and contributing individuals. As such, it can be argued that the youth has hit a capacity of need

that warrants a new social welfare approach that considers their deservingness and the influence of welfare support on their potential to access the freedoms that they desire.

2.4 POLICY AND LEGISLATION

2.4.1 The National Youth Policy

The National Youth Policy (NYP) [2020-2030] was developed with the objective to create strategies to ensure that Youth is included on various socioeconomic levels – more specifically in education, employment, and health (DWYPD, 2020). It is alarming that more than half of the country's youth population is experiencing income poverty, and young black people are affected by a range of deprivations (Baldry et al., 2019). There are various challenges that are experienced by South African youth, some of which include limited networks and a lack of socioeconomic support. These challenges contribute to the range of complex ways in which the youth are kept isolated from the economic freedom that they are trying to attain. As such, one of the primary objectives of the NYP (2020-2030) is to create opportunities for youth and to make freedoms available to them that are needed to enhance their development and usher them into economic participation (DWYPD, 2020). Perhaps one way for this mandate to be fulfilled is to provide youth with an extensive grant policy that is focused on supporting their social opportunities and motivating them into economic participation. Since the working-age youth makes up more than 35% of the country's population, the NYP (2020-2030) addresses the need for policies that have a youth-centred approach and gives insight into how this is the best way to revive and reconstruct the economy. Moreover, there is a section within the youth policy that outlines the government's intention to introduce a basic universal income grant targeted at unemployed youth (DWYPD, 2020). This would act as a more focused, permanent, and well-planned extension of the COVID-19 relief grant. It will also be directed at youth who are experiencing transitional issues.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The second chapter provided insight into different literature about social protection and its importance in development. This chapter also gives insight into the frameworks of deservingness and capabilities. Subsequently, allowing for an analysis of the influence that certain freedoms and the availability of opportunities can have on the livelihoods of young people. By using the welfare deservingness theory and the capabilities approach the researcher will better understand the perspectives of unemployed youth about the influence of the COVID-19 grant on their experiences and gauge what a permanent solution that is inclusive of the

youth's social support would look like. This literature review also provided an overview of some policy and legislation that is connected to youth and social protection in South Africa.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodological approach which is used in this research. It will also convey the research design, the population, and the sampling process that was used. The data collection and analysis methods are then presented, followed by an explanation of the data verification and limitations of this study. Lastly, the chapter includes a section on reflexivity, followed by a brief conclusion.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

An exploratory qualitative research design was used for this research. This is an approach that focuses on the subjective realities experienced by participants, thereafter, it ascribes meaning to society (Hammersley, 2013). The researcher's position is to interpret the information provided by the participants and translate this into workable recommendations and strategies that can inform policy (Hammersley, 2013). This design is an inductive approach to research that helps to guide the formation of new theories and themes. Although prior research may exist, this approach enables the researcher to use new interpretations to establish a new point of analysis rather than building on an old one (Creswell, 2014). By providing a qualitative platform for participants to share the researcher could receive an insider point of view on the influence of the new grant on the lives of people (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Using semi-structured and in-depth interviews, this research aided in empowering participants to share their views about the COVID-19 grant and the possible implementation of a more permanent basic income grant. This gave way to people-centred findings about the youth and social grants, rather than just statistical information.

3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.3.1 Study Population

A study population refers to a targeted group of individuals from whom a sample is drawn that will participate in a study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The study population in this study are South African young people aged between 21 to 35 who are unemployed and receiving the COVID-19 SRD grant. This study focused on communities of people from a range of provinces in South Africa, particularly participants from the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal, and Mpumalanga. A high number of individuals who are receiving any social grant are predominantly Black, specifically African and Coloured people (Department of Social

Development [DSD], 2021). The racial demographic for this study is made up of all African participants.

3.3.2 Sampling Technique

Since this study was qualitative in nature, a purposive sampling technique was used. Also known as subjective sampling, purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is used to gather qualitative information from a particular population of participants (Hammersley, 2013). Purposive sampling is most applicable in qualitative research because it satisfies the goal of collecting rich and in-depth information about a phenomenon. It's also a method used to find participants who are relevant to the topic (Suri, 2011).

For the purpose of this study, a purposive sample of 16 young people was selected. A few participants were also attained through snowballing; where previous participants shared the researchers details with others. It can be challenging to network with a community of people who receive the grant and do not share the same geographic location. For this reason, the researcher telephonically interviewed a collective of unemployed youth that receive the COVID-19 grant originating from different provinces.

3.3.3 Sampling Procedure

A letter of permission and assistance to find participants was shared with multiple people. Among the people to respond was a lecturer from the University of Mpumalanga who agreed to share the study with fellow students who had families receiving the grant. Her students reached out to family members who are unemployed, receive the COVID-19 grant, and are currently at home. Thereafter, many participants contacted the researcher confirming their interest in telling their story and sharing their perspectives. Other contacts came through responses from people on WhatsApp who either knew or were individuals willing to participate and met the criteria of being unemployed and COVID-19 grant recipients. Participants who were eager contacted the researcher for the telephonic interviews to commence. The researcher also permitted the participants from the study to share information about it with anyone else who could add value and additional insight. So, more people went on to be included in the sample.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 Data Collection Method: Semi-structured detailed Interviews

This study used in-depth one-on-one interviews for data collection, and these were conducted telephonically. Qualitative research uses in-depth interviews to gather substantial descriptions of the experiences of the people who are interviewed. Pilot interviews were not conducted. However, the researcher thoroughly examined the functionality of the recording application to pre-test audibility before the interviews began. In this study, audio quality was assessed by recording a brief conversation between the researcher and a peer who consented to be recorded for pre-testing purposes. Additionally, the researcher recorded herself and played it back. One-on-one interviews were conducted with a small sample of interviewees and were approximately 45 minutes each. During the interviews, the researcher gave participants an opportunity to express themselves. The interviews were conducted in English, but all of the participants were given the flexibility to respond to questions in their native tongue whenever it was preferred or necessary. The aim was to understand the perspectives of individuals; therefore, the researcher fostered an interactive and flexible atmosphere to allow for the collection of detailed information (Hofisi & Mago, 2014). For qualitative inquiry, it is best to conduct one-on-one interviews to gather rich knowledge on a topic (Creswell, 2014). As such, the researcher facilitated those interviews for this study.

3.4.2 Data Collection Instrument

As mentioned before, one-on-one interviews were conducted telephonically. This study used a semi-structured interview schedule, which consists of open-ended questions with the objective to retrieve detailed and personal information from the participants (Creswell, 2014).

3.4.3 Data Recording

The interviews were recorded for a clearer transcription process (Creswell, 2014). Each interview was recorded using a pre-installed voice recorder application. Although the researcher jotted down notes during the interviews, the recording was in place to minimize distractions and unnecessary interruptions, while gathering accurate information to report on the findings (Hofisi & Mago, 2014). Recording as well as taking notes is a better way in which the researcher can form a clearer interpretation of the topic being studied. The recordings were then transcribed by the researcher conveying the conversations and interviews between multiple participants on different Word documents. Once the transcription process was completed, the information was used to inform the data analysis process. This was done along

with pre-existing knowledge from the literature review and theoretical frameworks to enhance methodological rigor.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis process plays a significant role in structuring and ascribing meaning to information once it has been collected. This study uses the steps for data analysis which are proposed by Tesch (1990) for guidance. After data collection, the transcription process and reading all the transcripts are the first step of the data analysis process (Tesch, 1990). The underlying information was then written in the margins to simplify the data into categories, and subcategories were highlighted in different colours – in the second step. Thirdly, the researcher grouped the categories and sub-categories into viable themes and topics that appear throughout the transcripts (Tesch, 1990). The first three steps were repeated for all the transcripts and information that was retrieved. In the fourth step, the researcher coded the information from the data collected into appropriate groups of meaning (Tesch, 1990). The themes that emerged were then used to identify any new themes to form the foundation for the findings of this report. In the fifth step, the researcher gained an informed insight into the participants' experiences and used descriptive words from the transcripts to further develop an analysis of the data. In the sixth step, abbreviations could have been used to specify each category – so the researcher can identify the codes in alphabetical order (Tesch, 1990). However, this step was not crucial for examining the data in this study. The seventh step involves the clear presentation of findings that are included in the document (Tesch, 1990). Here, the researcher assembled the data collected into more concise themes, categories, and subcategories for analysis. These were saved in a separate document to help make the process of analysis go smoother. Lastly, the researcher had a chance to cross-reference the data to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Tesch, 1990).

3.6 DATA VERIFICATION

According to Patton & Cochran (2002), the objective of data verification is to assess the trustworthiness of the information collected and represented in the research findings. Data Verification refers to the assessment of qualitative data which considers the importance of data validity and reliability (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). It is important for researchers to adhere to this assessment to ensure that all findings which are represented in this report are based on satisfying the aim of the research, instead of upholding the biases of the researcher (Patton & Cochran, 2002). Qualitative studies are only useful if they are deemed credible, transferable,

dependable, and confirmable (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). As such, credibility refers to the researcher's confidence in the truth of the data, this verifies the compatibility between attributed and constructed realities – meaning, it checks the relationship between perceived discourses and the lived discourses (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In this study, the researcher used recordings and informed transcriptions as a tool to accomplish the credibility of material findings. Triangulation was also used as a data verification tool. This refers to the process of validating findings through multiple sources and literature (Ashour, 2018). Triangulation allowed the researcher to find similarities (themes) and differences between this study and others to enhance research credibility. Both the recordings and interview transcripts are saved on a secure hard drive – for security purposes. The transferability of information depends on the similarities in themes found within the transcripts. Intercoder reliability is a major part of transferability which involves the use of multiple data samples and literature to analyse the findings of this study to reduce researcher bias and enhance methodological rigor (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Themes from this study suggest that the experiences of each participant are subjective, and thus cannot easily be generalized to other people or populations. Whereas dependability refers to data stability over time (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Since credibility is shown through an analysis of perceived discourses and lived discourses, there is no need to prove dependability. Additionally, the researcher underwent an ethical approval process where the study intentions and methods were proposed and approved before the sampling process could begin. The ethical considerations that guide the interviews and findings of this study are informed consent or continuous voluntary participation, confidentiality, avoidance of harm, privacy, and debriefing the participants. Ethical considerations ensure that consent procedures are upheld for a credible, reliable, and valid study. Lastly, confirmability refers to the use of raw materials to report findings in such a way that the findings are free from researcher bias and reflect the study objectives (Patton & Cochran, 2002). This was done by upholding the ethical considerations and being aware of the reflexivity points.

3.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are several aspects that contributed to the limitations of this study. Some of which included language; a few participants expressed themselves better in their native African languages which lengthened the interview and transcription processes. Furthermore, qualitative research is not generalizable. So, each participant's account must be considered throughout the study to gather in-depth, collective information. Another limitation is that the COVID-19 grant is still a temporary grant, although three years in. Even though there are talks of a permanent

solution, it has not yet been made official and many participants were not even aware of it. Ultimately, the UBIG is not guaranteed yet, so that made it difficult to draw definitive conclusion. Additionally, telephonic interviews come with a fair share of inconveniences. In this study, one interview had a sound problem in the beginning only to find it was because the participant had EarPods on. Once we discovered the cause, the problem was resolved. Researcher bias is another limitation of the study, whereby the researcher brings personal views and ideas into the study that might influence its outcome (Šimundić, 2013). Understanding the potential for researcher bias allowed the researcher to be introspective and avoid imposing personal attitudes. As such, the researcher was able to conduct interviews respectfully, and critically assess the findings from participant accounts alone. Hopefully, the findings from this study can play a significant role in shaping alternative solutions for a possible, youth-inclusive, universal income grant.

3.8 REFLEXIVITY

Being a young person who has the privilege of being employed while simultaneously pursuing her studies, the topic of social protection is one of many research interests of mine. My circle of friends and network of people are diverse, consequently, I've engaged in conversations with young people who have been exposed to deep socioeconomic vulnerabilities that make government financial aid their primary form of relief. To have the opportunity to gauge the perspectives of less privileged young people on the influence and experiences of grants, specifically the COVID-19 grant, and the way in which it affects their livelihood is a significant part of my growth as a student and a person. I also think it is important to understand what the implications of such a grant are on the lives of youth to support a more permanent solution for the people who need it. Nowadays, the pressure on young people to transition from education to employment is higher because there are very few opportunities that usher young people into the job market. More especially during the pandemic when some people lost their jobs and needed the relief of the grant to get them through, it would be interesting to understand whether the grant helps people at all, and to understand what the youth would recommend.

3.9 CONCLUSION

The methodology section of this proposal discussed the qualitative research design, the study population, together with the sampling technique, and the procedure. The data collection process and the measures used that were used were also explained. Additionally, a summary of the data recording process was provided. This is followed by a discussion of the data analysis

steps which are outlined in the Tesch (1990) framework of analysis. Moreover, data verification processes and study limitations were outlined. Finally, the researcher reflected on their expectations of the benefits of the study, the researcher's personal biases, and some of the challenges that will need to be overcome for the research to be successful.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The information collected from 16 unemployed South African youth who have experience as recipients of the COVID-19 grant has been analysed and is presented in this chapter. Additionally, this chapter presents the demographic profile of the participants; followed by a framework for the discussion of findings. The insight from the interviews is then presented in the discussion of findings.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

VARIABLE		NUMBER	PERCENT
Average age		25	
Race	African	16	100%
Gender	Male	8	50%
	Female	8	50%
Highest level of education	Grade 11	2	12.5%
	Matric	8	50%
	Tertiary	6	37.5%
Actively seeking employment	Yes	14	87.5%
	No	2	12.5%
Employment Status	Unemployed	16	100%
Province	Eastern Cape	4	25%
	Western Cape	2	12.5%
	KwaZulu Natal	5	31.25%
	Mpumalanga	5	31.25%
SAMPL SIZE = 16			

Table 1 above presents the demographic profile of 16 participants who are unemployed and receive the COVID-19 SRD grant. In a group of participants aged between 21 to 35, the average age in this study is 25. All the participants within this study also identify as Black, Africans; with half being females and the other half being males. In the category of education, fifty percent of the participants have obtained Matric certificate, compared to the thirty seven percent who have gone to tertiary and have gotten some form of Diploma or Degree. Very few, about twelve percent of the participants to be exact, have reported to only have studied up until grade 11. Since all the participants are unemployed, I was curious to know how many are

actively seeking employment. The results show that eighty seven percent of the participants are actively looking for work. This majority of people shared that they have been filling out and submitting application forms for job opportunities every chance they get. Yet, twelve percent of the participants appeared to be unmotivated and tired of being rejected in the past, so they've decided to take a break from seeking employment for now. With this knowledge, let's explore the socioeconomic experiences of receiving the COVID-19 SRD grant as told by the participants in this study.

4.3 FRAMEWORK FOR THE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Theme	Category	Subcategory
Experiences of the COVID-19 grant administration	The application and approval processes	Participant experiences of the application process
		Experiences of the system once approved
	The payment rollout	Experiences of going to the post-office to receive payment
		Experiences of the cash transfer (or EFT) as payment
		Barriers to receiving the grant
COVID-19 grant management	The use of grant by recipients	Spending on needs: Toiletries and groceries
		Spending on wants: Fast food and social gatherings
		Spending on close relative
		Transport and other necessities
		Saving or splurging
The experiences of COVID-19 grant recipients	Social experiences	The influence of receiving the grant on independence
		Life choices
	Economic experiences	Does the grant influence accessibility to resources in any way?

		Does the grant influence one's motivation to participate economically?
Unemployed Youth in a post-pandemic society	The grant's impact on the experience of unemployment	How is being unemployed in the post-pandemic society?
		Does the grant help to ease any pressures that youth are experiencing during this time?
	Perceptions of unemployment pre- and post-COVID-19 grant	Is the experience of unemployment better or worse now? Is trying to find work easier or more difficult now?
The impact of the COVID-19 relief grant on distress	The emotional experiences	Lived experiences, and freedoms
		Does the <i>social relief of distress grant</i> relieve distress?
		Experiences of mental health since receiving the grant: positive or negative
Thoughts on socially protective measures	A possible universal income grant	Support
		Oppose
	Proper training programs	Desire for permanent employability

Table 2 shows a framework of analysis to help guide the discussion of findings. In this study, 16 semi-structured telephonic interviews were conducted wherein participants shared their experiences of receiving the COVID-19 SRD grant. The findings seek to explore the following main themes: the administrative experiences of the COVID-19 grant, grant management, the social and economic experiences of receiving the grant, and the perspectives of unemployed youth in a post-pandemic society. The study will also report on additional themes such as the impact of the grant on distress and the attitudes concerning the possible implementation of socially protective measures that are youth inclusive. Building on the information collected and presented within the demographic profile section, the following discussion will expand on the experiences that participants have had from receiving the COVID-19 grant.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The participant demographic table serves as a guide for the discussion of findings. During data collection, the participants expressed their experiences of receiving the COVID-19 relief grant. The discussion of findings will explore these experiences, and highlight the major insight shared during the interview process.

4.4.1 Experiences of the COVID-19 grant administration

4.4.1.1 Application and approval processes

The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) is responsible for the administration and distribution of grants in the country (Kelly & GroundUp Information, 2017). Even with the COVID-19 grant, citizens who met the criteria to receive the grant applied for it through the SASSA system which was provided in the form of a website with a direct link to the digital application page. The participants reported having no issues with the application process on the SASSA website, stating that for the most part the process of requesting to receive the grant was straightforward. Applying to receive the grant was made simpler by the step-by-step layout that directed the participants on what to do and how to do it. The application page provided clear and concise information, along with the questions that guided the participants during process. Things like, “Do you receive an allowance?” and “Is your household income below this threshold?” were questions that allowed the participants freedom to be honest about their financial situations in hopes to receive the grant by the end of the process. Questions about whether participants have access to additional income in the form of allowances or savings, and so on, made it a smooth system for them to get through the application process. Applying was simple because the SASSA website has a clear layout and prompts applicants every step of the way until the end of the process. The application process is a stage of administration that the participants for this study noticed and were eager to share about.

Registering was good because the system was easy to follow step-by-step. (Participant one, 25)

I mean, you just went on the page and it shows you exactly what to do and where you can go to fill out the digital form. For me, applying wasn't something to complain about at all, it was good and fast. (Participant six, 21)

Signing up first was not so hard because the questions pointed you to the information that needs to be submitted and such things. (Participant twelve, 30)

In contrast the waiting period after the application process was the beginning of the participants' frustrations. For many, waiting for their application status to change went on longer than expected. The approval was pending for weeks after the participants had applied. It can take up to 90 days for SASSA to review applications and it's normal to not get a response within the first week after applying (Samuels, 2023). However, the participants weren't aware that it can take that long to get a response about whether the applications were successful or declined, and this made them anxiously keep checking their SASSA status. Each time the status came up, it would reflect as "pending" which caused even more of an upset.

Yeah, the waiting is long after you apply. I had to wait more than two months for acceptance... I started receiving it in September and I applied for it in May. Worse, you must still wait longer to be approved to get the money. The whole thing just starts to cause stress. You go from being excited to just 'wow' stress mode. (Participant seven, 24)

I can't tell you how many times I went back to look at that status hey. It even got to a place where I forgot I applied. It wasn't until I got the SMS saying my application status has been updated or whatever, that I was like 'ooh, I applied.' Then, went to go check again. (Participant eleven, 26)

On a serious note, when I had submitted the application form it was pending for so long, I just thought nothing would happen. That's just how long I had to wait to find out if I would get the money or not. (Participant fourteen, 23)

The application being on the pending status for so long left many feeling discouraged and doubtful about receiving the grant. This waiting period just means that the application has not been approved yet, so people are expected to wait. Off the back of this, many participants felt even more upset to find that their applications would move from "pending" to "declined" for reasons that do not necessarily make sense to them. When people apply to receive the COVID-19 SRD grant, SASSA conducts an investigation to verify the information shared during the application process. Here, departments such as Home Affairs and others are used to validate the information that individuals have shared before the application status can change (Samuels, 2023). Rejections usually happen when SASSA finds that applicants are receiving an income or do not meet the criteria to receive the grant. Applications are also rejected if applicants are receiving other forms of grant protection because that would mean they no longer qualify for social relief. However, these strict terms have been the focal point of frustration for many

participants. In this study, the participants have reported that SASSA's investigation seemingly picks up even the smallest amounts of money that enters their bank accounts. Any money that participants get from family members to help with their needs can be picked up as secondary income by SASSA, even if this money does not come in regularly. After this rejection, and if the reasons provided by SASSA don't reflect the participants' reality, then they need to appeal for the application to be reconsidered. Another process of just waiting to hear back from SASSA, which could have the same outcome.

The frustration of the process after applying has causes real upset among the participants, and it seems to be a genuine pain point. Some participants have even felt as though the irritation caused by the back and forth of appealing, getting money, then being rejected again at some point was not worth the hassle. A significant number of participants even said that once they were approved and started receiving the grant, the process would need to happen on frequent occasions. The processes of approval and reappealing are due to the government continuously wanting people to reapply when changes have been made to the system and to check if people still have accurate information on the system (Damons, 2021). Even so, participants have battled with the administrative process after approval and have conveyed their uneasiness about it. Participants shared that waiting for the money to reflect in their bank accounts is one of the most stressful barriers to receiving the COVID-19 grant. This period of waiting is worsened by the anxiety that they may experience another rejection that they will have to appeal. Waiting for months on end for the money has proven upsetting to participants, and it seems to be an undeniable point of frustration.

The system isn't always working well so the money can be delayed, like now I'm still waiting for maybe two, three months for other money. (Participant four, 21)

To be honest, the only way to get the money is to keep telling SASSA when what they've detected is wrong. I appeal over again if I have to because I want the money and if I stop appealing the three fifty will stop also. But I've wanted to just give up, I can't. (Participant nine, 21)

Imagine the upset of waiting over a month to get rejected for a reason that isn't even true. The first time I got rejected it was because the system thought I had more money than I said. That thing is annoying, and you must appeal and appeal until you get approved again. That's the thing, it can decline at any month. (Participant ten, 29)

Sometimes my sister will send me money, and maybe that shows to SASSA as an income. But it isn't, so in that case when I get rejected, I must go again and appeal. It's really stressful. (Participant fifteen, 33)

Once approved, participants reiterated that government implementation of the social relief grant is a frustration worth pointing out. Having great and well-written policies but failing in the implementation of these policies seems to be a theme in South Africa. With the COVID-19 grant, people have problems accessing the financial support that the government claims to give (Damons, 2021). The participants who were not immediately approved, were often rejected based on reasons that do not correspond with their socioeconomic situation.

The gaps in policy implementation are creating more barriers for the youth (Barford, Coutts, & Sahai, 202). At no point should someone who is unemployed be rejected for reasons of supposed employment, when there should be documentation saying otherwise. The lack of interdepartmental communication and efficiency is affecting the stop and starts of the grant distribution process. Though the agenda for the COVID-19 grant is clear and well-expressed, the implementation of the grant seems to be a huge challenge for the government. Also, it is a massive frustration for those who are waiting, monthly, to hear about their application and receive income but are met with system challenges instead. Going through the approval and appeal processes is concerning and upsetting to participants. It's a less than ideal situation to be in, on top of their desperation for adequate socioeconomic support. Administrative issues associated with the SRD grant, however, have extended beyond the approval process into payment system.

4.4.1.2 Payment rollout experiences

Before participants had the opportunity to sign up for an electronic cash transfer, they would have to walk or drive to nearby post offices to claim their COVID-19 grant money (Letsatsi, 2021). Using this method, participants would be alerted once the R350 was ready to be collected, and they would physically have to go to a post office with their identification documents to collect the funds. The physical payment rollout appears to have been quite helpful to many participants as they were able to interact with a person of authority or part of the administration if there were any issues with the COVID-19 payments. Having immediate access to a government employee made it easier to resolve issues, and the participants were (more often the not) able to collect their SRD grants without much hassle. Even though walking or driving to the post office would take time and more effort than using the electronic funds

transfer (EFT) system, a couple of participants said it helped to have human interaction when collecting the money rather than having to figure the system out on their own.

I preferred the older system of collecting the money from the post office because it meant getting it more regularly. Now, we have to pray that the money reflects in our cards and we have no one to ask if it doesn't. (Participant six, 21)

I don't know if it's the system or what, but there are months where it won't show at all. Or the application will be turned back for many reasons like maybe SASSA sees an added income come into your bank and such things. A lot of the reasons don't even make sense, but then if you still want to get the transfer you must say why the system got things wrong and basically reapply for a clean slate. (Participant ten, 29)

Nothing gives me more stress than this system, I think at first it was a good idea to move the money to banks from SASSA but now all of these problems are too much. To me, maybe it would be better to go back to the time when the money was at the post office and people could get it there. At least in that time the workers there would know how to solve the issues. (Participant fourteen, 23)

Seemingly, the level of assistance that participants received during the application process dwindles over time. If participants are not being rejected, then they are dealing with the crisis of money not reflecting into their accounts at all. The COVID-19 grant is supposed to be a helping hand for people who are financially and socially struggling in the aftermath of the pandemic. Yet, payment rollouts have made it difficult for the participants to trust in this support and to stand by it (Damons, 2021). The turnaround time to receive payments after the approval process is supposed to be seven days (Samuels, 2023). However, there have been instances when participants wait long periods without getting paid. If anything, most of the participants have felt that the government needs to do more to ensure a more rigorous payment plan. Participants keep experiencing roadblocks when it comes to accessing this grant. People are frustrated about the payment system, conveying that the number of times they receive the money is inconsistent, which makes it hard to trust the system. Payments are supposed to occur monthly, but participants can go months without knowing whether the payment will reflect in their accounts or not. The worst part is that they don't know how to plan for this.

Sometimes the status will be fine, but the three fifty won't come through. When such things happen all you can do is sit and wait or just keep moving on with your life. When

the money starts coming in again, maybe it will come as a lump sum or maybe it will just be that three fifty for one month; you just don't know. (Participant three, 24)

There was a time when I waited long to for my share to be paid, I'd say at least three months. Then, when SASSA started paying again, that money was all put in at once. Yoh, that was a great time [laughs]. But it's not happened again. (Participant eleven, 26)

Now I'm really used to the delays. I think, if I get the three fifty rands in the month, great. And if I don't, it is what it is, you know? (Participant sixteen, 25)

The only upside to the delays that participant experience during payouts is that sometimes the money will come in as an accumulated sum of all the months they have had to wait. This means that they end up receiving an accumulated sum of money that is inclusive of all the months that were missed. Inconsistent payments have left participants feeling unsupported during this post-pandemic period. Many have even resorted to disregarding the grant as a form of aid because of the barriers, delays, and inconsistencies. Administrative struggles and payment issues seem to be the most anxiety provoking part of this experience. With the lingering effects of the pandemic, together with the rising inflation rates, it is no surprise that frustrations with the government and its post-pandemic plan are increasing among citizens (Mokhoali, 2023). The inconsistencies of the rollout make it difficult for participants to plan around the money that the government sends them which impacts their experiences of receiving the grant.

4.4.2 COVID-19 grant management

Income for social relief of distress is important to help disadvantaged people access the freedoms and necessities that they have been stripped or deprived of (Sen 1999; Pikoli 2021). In this case, the COVID-19 SRD grant money is intended to relieve the financial burden that many people experienced while adhering to the protocols implemented at the peak of the pandemic. During the COVID-19 period, some people went from having jobs to joblessness and have not managed to get back into the work environment since. Mostly created for participants without income or means of survival, the COVID-19 grant set the scene as the first social distress relief grant to include the youth. Also, it is the first relief grant to continue over its intended expiration period. The fact that people are still receiving the COVID-19 grant long past its term shows that the need for socioeconomic relief is still persistent today. By understanding how the participants in this study use their grant money, these findings provide insight into some of the reasons why people need this income. It also highlights the experiences

that participants have had with the relief grant to see whether the system is beneficial to its recipients as well as set the stage for assessing welfare deservingness moving forward.

For the most part, the participants in this study seem to use the income grant money responsibly. A rapid assessment conducted by the Department of Social Development to assess the implementation and utilisation of the COVID-19 SRD grant reported that the majority of people who receive the grant use it to purchase necessities which includes items such as food (DSD, 2021). The evidence found from the former mentioned assessment was supported within this study with the findings conveying that participants mainly use the grant money for groceries, toiletries, transport, printing, and when it is possible; they save it. When the participants were asked to elaborate on some of the expenditures afforded by the COVID-19 grant, participants provided a range of responses suggesting that they can buy basic items that can help them get through the month. Even with this positive feedback, however, participants were clear that the three hundred and fifty rand (R350) received from the COVID-19 SRD grant is not enough to buy everything they need in a month. Some participants went as far as highlighting that the R350 doesn't last for more than a week or two because of how expensive things are and how miniscule the grant support is.

Now that I get the grant I can add to the home in some way, and I couldn't before because I didn't have anything making me money. (Participant three, 24)

It's like pocket money. I don't have to get anything extra from my mother now, the money from the 350 helps to make sure that I still have some money for myself to take care of the things that I need... (Participant five, 22)

I'll use it on small things, think about Colgate and other needs. It's not really even enough to buy takeaways after buying the small things, so yeah. It's just really on things I need to care for myself, nothing else. (Participant fourteen, 23)

Some of the things I get is data, airtime, and more things. I think I use it positively actually. Last time I could get ten kg mealie mealie. Truly speaking it helps more than not having anything. (Participant fifteen, 33).

It is clear from the responses above that as little as the money may be, it makes a noticeable difference for participants who can use it on what they need. The participants also shared that the COVID-19 grant means you have to choose which of your needs to sacrifice, and the income makes it difficult to decide what to spend it on. For example, if you need nine items

of food you may need to only get three or four because the money runs out after that. While many participants spend the grant money on their needs, there are a hand full that seem to spend it on what they want. Those who focus their expenditure on the things that they want rather than necessities do so because they are supported at home in some way, so they do not have to panic for needs.

I can't really say what I buy with the three fifty, but the last one I got I probably bought like a takeaway and got my hair cut. Yeah, I think it was that. (Participant four, 21)

I'm blessed because my grandma always just doesn't want me to stress about getting stuff for the house or anything. She says I'm still young and I can use the money for myself. So, I will use it on maybe meeting my friends but that doesn't happen a lot. (Participant six, 21)

People who spent their relief grant income on necessities tend to have a sacred view of money as something to be cherished and spent with the future in mind. These participants made up the majority, and often came up from difficult backgrounds and some were people who received other forms of grant support years prior to the pandemic. At some point, the participants that fall into the needs category all communicated their focus was on providing for themselves what they could not receive from their families. Contrastingly, the participants who reported using their share of the grant on wants explained that the income did not come in consistently enough for them to plan to spend it on valuable things. Essentially, their needs were provided for by caregivers so when the income did reflect the participants could spend it as freely as they desired to. Furthermore, the average age of participants who spend the income more on wants compared to needs falls in the lower end of the 20's, with a majority of this sample being between the ages of 21 and 24. Both groups of participants, those who spend on needs and the ones who spend on wants, feel strongly about the fact that the money is not sufficient income for anyone to meet their daily requirements; let alone to grow dependent on it. The participants all conveyed that the small amount from the COVID-19 grant caused them to feel as though they could not spend the income on big things because of how limiting it is.

The social relief grant falls below the poverty line which is approximately R624 per month (Patrick, 2023). Therefore, it is not sufficient for people to spend money on rebuilding from the impact of the pandemic stress. This is the sentiment shared by the participants, especially the group of participants who communicated to have spent their share of the COVID-19 grant on the things that they want as opposed to their needs. For multiple reasons, it seems that

participants intend to use their income well or in ways that support their emotional wellness. For those who cannot spend on their needs, alternative ways have been found that work for the betterment of their lives. The point of the COVID-19 grant is to ease the pressure, whether social or economic, caused by the lockdown period and turmoil experienced during the pandemic but the amount received is not enough to make that a liveable reality (Mokhoali, 2023). The pressures pretty much still dominate the youth, and the COVID-19 grant money feels to them as just a little bit of pocket money. Besides the insufficiency of the COVID-19 grant income, there have also been numerous concerns about the transfer of payments by SASSA.

4.4.3 The lived experiences of COVID-19 grant recipients

4.4.3.1 Social experiences

Empowerment and increasing human capital are at the forefront of grant support systems, so government funding has the aim of providing support to ensure people have access to freedoms which they might not have had outside of social protection assistance (The World Bank, 2023). The social experiences of participants who receive the SRD grant are an important determinant of whether the grant is helping people with accessing the social freedoms that they desire. Social protection has been known to help people with necessities and to add to their ability to make beneficial life choices. For example, the most widely used welfare grant in South Africa is the child support grant, and many recipients or guardians of children who receive this grant use it for household supplies (Satumba et al., 2017). Similarly, most of the participants for the COVID-19 grant conveyed that they spend most of the income on things that they need rather than on splurging. Participants said they either used the money to help with groceries, buy toiletries, or get transport to be able to access places. Also, many of the participants shared that receiving the grant helps them to feel socially integrated and involved because they no longer have to ask for the most basic things from caregivers.

Despite the reported delay and grant distribution issues, the COVID-19 grant provides many youths with additional financial support that makes it easier for them to contribute toward attaining their basic needs. Furthermore, the participants clarified that even though the grant can be advantageous in an array of ways, it has not left a significant footprint in their social experiences; with many stating that the grant contribution is too little to make a lasting difference. The COVID-19 social relief grant might not be much, but it does its part to help people with the little extra income that they need to navigate the current social and economic

climate. It is not sufficient money to have complete influence over what people choose to do or the social activities that they participate in.

Getting the three-fifty is nice to me because I haven't gotten anything like it before, it's my first time, so I enjoy being someone who gets the money. It helps me with things, and it's not the same as nothing. If you ask me do I want three-fifty or nothing, I will always say three-fifty, you know? I feel like I can do more things with it. (Participant two, 32)

It's good to get the three hundred fifty, but it's really no making a big change in how I choose to do things. (Participant seven, 24)

Yeah, I can get myself some things now that I couldn't get before... like I have sunscreen now and that's so expensive so I got some of that when the money was sent for the third or second time I think. (Participant sixteen, 25)

The COVID-19 grant helps participants care for their basic needs which makes it a good temporary solution to a bigger problem of unemployment. Perhaps, it may even be time to consider a more permanent social assistance initiative that considers the plight that youth are facing in today's oversaturated economic atmosphere. The COVID-19 grant has just further exposed the deep issue of unemployment together with the damages caused by the pandemic. It has highlighted that youths could use more support when it comes to access and meeting needs on a wider scale. The social grant may continue to be extended, but it still functions as a temporary relief system with no major social influence on the lives of participants.

4.4.3.2 Economic experiences

Much like accessing social freedoms, access to economic ease is something that the COVID-19 grant should help participants attain. During the pandemic, many families had to adjust to unfamiliar lives with some people losing jobs and resources to sustain their livelihoods; people's lives were disrupted (Alvarez-Iglesias et al., 2021). Consequently, people had to face a new reality were little to no income at all as the financial streams that came into various household stopped flowing. The lockdown period during the pandemic facilitated an environment that allowed for people's financial and economic freedoms to be threatened. Families with single-headed households where multiple people depend on one person's income suffered severe repercussions of these financial constraints. People could no longer send money to support loved ones because they were battling the personal need for income after losing

work. Communities, at large, were negatively affected the health crisis as it put a strain on their economic accessibility and experiences. In this study, the participants shared personal accounts of this period, and provided insight into the impact that COVID-19 had on their lives.

At home we were fine before the pandemic came. We weren't rich or anything but we could get by, then when the pandemic started things became very tough for us. The family really went through the worst time losing two aunts and having to now use the money coming in to pay for things such like funerals, so we were using more money and we don't even have much. It just felt like things were getting worse and worse at that time, it was just stressful and hard really. (Participant eight, 23)

Yeah, that lockdown time period was a lot. Honestly, my sister lost her job and her money was the one that supported the kids and myself a lot. Suddenly she was now at home with us, and we had to just hope for support from other family. It wasn't easy for sure. (Participant ten, 29)

The stories and experiences of participants losing family and financial support are painful. The COVID-19 era was truly one that tested each participant's resilience and economic standing. Unfortunately, those who had jobs that could not be carried over into the online space such as home cleaners, nannies, and in-house caretakers were faced with the challenge of making ends meet. In this study, participants felt the brunt of the negative socioeconomic shift that caused their families to move from having just enough to barely surviving. However, the proposal of the COVID-19 grant during this time offered the needed hope that participants were desperate for. The grant support came as a true relief in a time when things seemed to be falling apart for many households and families. At the time, the money meant more because participants did not have to leave the house for anything; in adherence to the COVID-19 lockdown rules. So, majority of the money was spent on stocking up on necessities, and saving what was possible. The world was a standstill so there was less pressure to assess or notice how limited the income was.

Seemingly, the COVID-19 grant has done some good in assisting participants to gain access to the resources they need in their quest for economic participation. As things have opened up and the world has started moving again, eighty seven percent of the participants in this study reported to be motivated to find jobs and reintegrate into the economy. In this group of participants, there were also testimonies of using some of the COVID-19 income to facilitate economic participation by paying for traveling arrangements, internet cafes, and printing

services during the job searching process. From this, it shows that the SRD grant is playing its part in relieving some of the pressure that youth are feeling amidst the unemployment crisis and in the post-pandemic society. When asked to talk about how motivated they feel to participate in the economy as well as to shed some insight into their experience of their current unemployment situation, here's what the participant's had to say:

Getting the money reminds me to get up and go because three hundred and fifty rands can't fix not having a job. I would rather work than to sit at home depressed, waiting for the grant money, hoping I'll find something soon. (Participant two, 32)

I think I pressure myself to find a job because I want to live a different way to what my family has been. I don't want to suffer or stress. I want to travel and see the rest of this world too so the pressure is from me. I also want my own things. I know if I can do well and get money the way I want, I can live the life of my own dreams. (Participant nine, 21)

I think it does push me to find work because the transfer doesn't always show on my side so it just reminds me that even though I've applied for the grant, it's not really my own money to get. (Participant eleven, 26)

Yes, when I don't get the money when I expect to on that month, it makes me feel, what can I say, a bit annoyed... But it goes to show me that I can't just think because I'm getting the grant that I don't need to move my feet and get a job. So it motivates me in that sense. (Participant twelve, 30)

Both the insufficient income and its inconsistencies makes participants want to get employed to hopefully reach a more stable financial and economic situation. The participants have stated their desire to make their own money at some point in life, which is evidence of the greater drive that the youth have in this country. Even so, the socioeconomic conditions that keep youth stuck in joblessness and depression can be disheartening. Many young people are confronted with the choice of staying at home or hustling to survive. There is no longer a clear-cut direction in which getting a degree or two secures your position in the economic world, and that is hugely concerning. Today, young people go out to study and return to their homes with their qualifications hanging in frames with absolutely no prospects of employment to show for it. In this study, a majority of the participants are unemployed Matric national certificate holders. This is shortly followed up by the thirty seven percent who have Tertiary qualifications either in the form of degrees or diplomas, and they hold the same fate of not having any job offers or

opportunities. It is alarming to think that education, which used to be a gateway for employment, is now losing that value.

Though the COVID-19 grant helps to build individual morale and forces participants to engage with their economic realities, so they can find ways to confront complacency, this may not be enough. Perhaps it is not sufficient to motivate youth economically, but not have the results to show for that motivation. Young people need to be enlightened and presented with new economic opportunities, otherwise this is merely a song and dance going nowhere. It seems a cycle of social protection to cover larger issues is beginning to form. The only way to stop this ongoing cycle is by introducing reasons why being economically motivated pays off. For instance, let us see more job seeking youth actually get the jobs they are applying for. Clearly the youth in this study have the resilience and desire to want to be more than a statistic when it comes to youth unemployment in South Africa. Maybe there is a need for government to facilitate these discussions while using youth-inclusive social protection measures as steppingstones toward a better future, rather than unmanifested promises. From the study, it seems many of the young people are trying their best to come up on top but are struggling to manage the circumstances that they are facing. Issues that are caused by inequality, lack of proper grant implementation, payment delays, unemployment, corruption, and more socioeconomic deprivations.

Many participants shared their desire to either study further or find employment long before COVID-19 regulations. However, financial constraints and lack of opportunity kept them from achieving this goal. Although the COVID-19 grant is a great plan, it is not receiving the physical grant money that motivates young people, but the dire need to be socially and economically active. The COVID-19 grant is just that final reminder of a longing that has always been there. Young people are motivated to make their own income because they want to have their “own things” and get themselves along with their families out of desperate situations. The issue of the rising unemployment rate makes it seem as though youth are not actively seeking employment. Yet, most of the youth are motivated to make something out of themselves that empowers them beyond what they were brought into. It is not just about the social support grants for these participants, if they had opportunities available to make more money, a significant number of them would grab hold. All the above perspectives have one thing in common: Youth want to thrive but lack the accessibility, finances, and socioeconomic support to do so. Moreso in the post-pandemic society.

4.4.4 Unemployed Youth in a post-pandemic society

4.4.4.1 The grant's impact on experiences of unemployment

Before the COVID-19 crisis, South African had already been experiencing an imbalanced employment system marked by deep inequality, and the unemployment crisis has only worsened after the pandemic (Posel, Oyenubi, & Kollamparambil, 2021). SASSA documented that more than sixty percent (60%), which is the majority, of COVID-19 grant applicants were young South Africans; this corresponds significantly to the youth unemployment rate of sixty three percent, and rising (Pillay, 2022). The increase in unemployment rates combined with the COVID-19 disruptions has resulted in people either getting laid off or battling to find employment. This has been the reality for most of the participants in this study. Consider the story told earlier by Participant ten (29) about how her sister, the primary source of income at the time, was retrenched because of COVID-19. Of the millions of jobs that were lost during the pandemic, very few were reinstated (Karrim, 2020; Kohler et al., 2021). A significant number of jobs that were lost during COVID-19 didn't come back after for various reasons such as budget cuts, and resource limitations. This only made the unemployment situation in the post-pandemic economy even more chaotic. It is as though the world recovered from the pandemic, but to a totally more unequal economy.

Due to the current economic state, it is no surprise that most of the participants are dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them in the post-pandemic society. Moreover, receiving R350 does not substitute for the economic freedoms that participants would receive with permanent employment. One of the leading frustrations when it comes to the post-pandemic society is the lack of access that seems to have rapidly risen with the pandemic. People are facing dire socioeconomic situations and are still longing for opportunities to help them live better and freer lives, and receiving the grant has not made the experience of unemployment any better than it is. If anything, receiving the grant increases the feeling of shame and guilt about the participants' current unemployment situation.

Some days it's fine, but on others it's hard because I'm not doing anything so life can be boring. I have a lot of free time and I don't know how to use it sometimes. But I'm just waiting and applying for work. (Participant three, 24)

Ja, I won't lie... I feel like... not good 'cause only grownups get this money. Unemployed grownups get this money 'cause you won't get the money when you are still seventeen years, down. So, once you get the money, I feel like you're a grownup

who should be doing stuff not receiving the three hundred and fifty. (Participant seven, 24)

Really, not doing anything and being at home is not ideal. My parents have been providing for me for twenty-six years now, it makes me feel embarrassed, that's why I just want to get a job for myself. Getting three hundred and fifty rand isn't enough to make me think I don't need to move, I still need to think about my next steps and do them, you know? (Participant eleven, 26)

The feeling of “embarrassment” seems to be the leading consensus between participants about post-pandemic joblessness. This feeling has not deterred the youth from applying for the SRD grant which requires that applicants have no additional income or financial allowances to qualify for the grant. However, this criterion is just as exclusionary as the lack of jobs available to the youth (Damons, 2021). Absolutely no one who has basic needs and requires freedoms, can live on R350 alone: “The three hundred and fifty does not even last two weeks...” (Participant five, 22). Participants are desperate for more sustainable means of income, that's why many of the participants are putting in the effort to search for job opportunities in the hope to liberate themselves. Furthermore, people need employment opportunities more than they are chasing grant funds. Even though the support does help in its own way, more permanent solutions are needed.

If there could be a way to provide participants with employment or training opportunities, then that would be a more significant socioeconomic shift. The amount that participants are currently receiving from the grant is not sufficient for them to live. Moreover, the stress of job searching and trying to hustle in a constrained economy is stifling the youth's passions and financial pursuits in the process. Therefore, the criteria of having no income should be changed, and a new measure should probably be considered. Perhaps the grant should cater for anyone, employed or unemployed, who is earning below three thousand rands (R3000) monthly. At least this would convey the understanding that people need more to survive in the economy without well-paying jobs. I am aware that the social relief grant has an intentional mandate in place already, but this is just a recommended consideration. The government can help people overcome issues of social distress and economic stagnation by thinking outside of the box, and without having people to lose their sense of financial agency.

4.4.4.2 Perceptions of unemployment pre- and post-pandemic

The pandemic has disproportionately affected young adults, women, and lower-income households making it difficult for people to maintain a positive outlook during these post-pandemic times (World Economic Forum, 2020). As part of the affected group, the youth have struggled to uphold an optimistic attitude about the country's economic and employment situation. Many participants have shared their frustration with the current economy. Stating that the uncertainty of employment, even after attaining work experience and education, is saddening. Unemployment has been rampant for many years now, and it has destabilized the economic functioning of South Africa. Citizens were unhappy about the unemployment rate before the pandemic, and it only intensified during and after the COVID-19 restrictions were removed (Karrim, 2020).

During the pandemic, the world came to a standstill which negatively impacted educational institutions and economic systems. The global inflections show that almost thirty eight percent (38%) of youth who were employed before the pandemic lost their jobs during the crisis, and twenty five percent of this group were aged between 18 to 24, whilst thirteen percent are documented to be between 25 to 29 years old (World Economic Forum, 2020). Young people who experienced joblessness before and after the pandemic have been displeased and often discouraged by this situation. Additionally, even though the majority of the participants in this study are actively seeking employment, it has not been easy for them to remain optimistic about their future prospects. As expressed in the thoughts shared by participant five (22):

I know I'm young still but I'm afraid that I won't get work and I'll be the only person of my mother's boys to sit at home without purpose. I wish I knew what I wanted to do now or what's going to happen. Also, because the grant will end it's like am I going to go back to asking for everything? I just worry about that too.

The same plight of joblessness that was unacceptable before the pandemic is unacceptable after. Young people are under pressure to find jobs but are unable to secure positions, and this is irrespective of their level of education. In South Africa, rate of joblessness for graduates is concerning, with the younger 15 to 24-year-olds at forty percent and young adults who are aged between 20 to 35 years represented at fifteen percent (Statistics SA, 2021). Yet, youths are desperate for opportunities to thrive because the alternative is sitting back and watching the years pass them by. The high labour market saturation that inhibits the young people of this country from accessing the economic freedom to work is the cause for collective anxiety and

frustration. Perhaps the unemployment crisis has been a pandemic all along, and maybe “*I know I’m young still but I’m afraid that I won’t get work*” is a sentiment that speaks to the failures of the current economy.

4.4.5 The impact of COVID-19 on experiences of distress

4.4.5.1 The emotional experiences

The effects of the pandemic on mental health have been notably negative, there has been a decline in mental wellness country-wide since March 2020 (Gittings et al., 2021). Young people have grown anxious about the employment situation and their fears were heightened because of the economic impact that COVID-19 has had on the job market in South Africa. Further stagnation and economic tension were created when the country went into a 21-day lockdown period about three years ago, and South Africa is still to recover from that (Pillay, 2023). The anxieties and distress caused by the unemployment crisis as well as not feeling financially supported have not been eased by the COVID-19 grant. Participants reported that the lack of employment opportunity in the country causes them the most stress, embarrassment, fear, and sadness. Some even reported feeling despondent, ashamed, and lost at points in their lives.

The three hundred and fifty rand doesn’t even last two weeks, so it really makes you think, ‘Man, how am I supposed to live like this? How can I at least get myself a job?’ Then, you apply for stuff and realize that the theme of this country is degreed people with no chances to work. It’s sad really. You see that if you find work you are one of the lucky ones. (Participant five, 22)

I’d say it does feel embarrassing... sometimes people who know about me getting the three fifty be making jokes like you know how people react to things like this... They can say ‘Oh you are receiving money for people who don’t do anything,’ like, there are some things like that which they say that can be offensive sometimes. But some other people they do understand, especially those friends who aren’t judgmental and know the situation. (Participant eight, 23)

Truly, I’m always wondering if this is it for me. I’m just so scared to spend my days struggling for things or hoping for the government to save me. (Participant fifteen, 33)

The multitude of concerns and difficulties facing the youth add to distress, making it difficult for participants to trust the SRD grant a safety net. Additional challenges brought on by the

pandemic have led to compounding psychological distress as participants are concerned for their futures. However, despite these frustrations and fears, there are participants who articulated hope and emotional resilience by highlighting how the grant helps them cope with despondency. Though it still does not completely alleviate any of the anxiety, it seems receiving the COVID-19 grant makes participants feel less hopeless. Having the extra R350 helps participants feel some sense of self-reliance that they would not have experienced otherwise. Now, participants can go to the shops, take transport to places, and even contribute to other personal needs. The grant money seems to reduce the feeling of being a burden to the caregivers and family members. By providing an option for participants to independently cater for some of their smallest needs such as purchasing data, airtime, or toiletries. Even with persistent emotional and financial challenges, the COVID-19 grant does continue to be an anchor of encouragement in the current socioeconomic climate. Many participants shared that the idea of getting some extra help each month does improve optimism in their lives.

It does give me some hope for independence, that's something I can say it emotionally helps with. (Participant four, 21)

I want to say, I feel less guilty about moving around because I can move without asking for more from my mother. (Participant five, 22)

I can't think of the better feeling of being able to get more data... I don't know if that's an answer for this question but it eases social stress like that. I can stay connected to people and check for responses from the places I apply for work using the data I buy with the money. (Participant six, 21)

Sometimes I do feel scared about the grant stopping, but we've also been waiting for it to end for so long that now I don't feel the fear as much. (Participant eleven, 26)

It has a positive impact in my life. Truly speaking it has because, for me if I was not receiving it, I was not going to be able to buy those toiletries and pads and those things. So it helps to live through the weeks. (Participant fifteen, 33)

It is noteworthy that the COVID-19 grant does do some good in the lives of participants, and this does not go unappreciated or underpraised. Though participants express their gratitude for having received the grant, there are still underlying issues that the money cannot eliminate or fully address. For example, the issue of unemployment or lack of opportunity persists. Receiving the COVID-19 grant seems to expose the vulnerabilities and insecurities that impact

the lives of South African youth today. Considering a new mandate for welfare deservingness may be a solution for the multitude of challenges facing the youth today, but then again, money cannot take the place of proper skill development and education. So, something more permanent needs to be considered too. Psychological stress is caused by the uncertainty that young people feel about the grant as well as the anxiety they experience in relation to the not knowing if employment will ever be certain for them. Other causes of distress include the issues associated with the delays and inconsistencies of receiving the grant in a timely manner.

The psychological challenges that people have experienced post-pandemic have increased the frustrations that they were experiencing during the pandemic. COVID-19 intensified social isolation and emotional distress. Unfortunately, it seems as though the grant is doing little to ease these pre-existing pressures. The income received from the grant support is also insufficient for the participants to use on extensive things, and it does little to nothing to reduce psychological experiences of distress. Subsequently, participants have voiced their support for a more permanent helping hand in the form of a universal grant that includes the youth while the government works to implement more permanent solutions.

4.4.6 Socially protective measures for young South Africans

The South African government responded to the COVID-19 crisis and economic aftermath by introducing the COVID-19 social relief of distress grant to satisfy several specific agendas, including social protection of negatively affected livelihoods, growing future resilience, and increasing the country's capacity of recovery (Gronbach et al., 2022). However, due to the many shortcomings of the grant administration process, insufficient income, and the difficulty associated with receiving the money after approval; these agendas are not being satisfied. Participants have stated an interest in receiving a basic income grant especially if these issues can be addressed and rectified. When asked about their views on a possible universal income grant, the participants largely stood in favour of this implementation. More so, participants support this idea if the amount increases and the system functions effectively. Youth are still struggling without consistent financial support on the back of the pandemic, especially the those who have no alternative options. When questioned about a possible universal basic income grant, the participants from this study shared their excitement about the idea. However, this eagerness was also followed by the realization that a more effective policies or plans are needed to help establish a more stable socioeconomic footing. At the end of the day, the aim is not to encourage dependence on social protection nor to remain unemployed.

Maybe the money can support me by being more at least the price of food because groceries won't come out with three fifty. The current money is really to help with small things in the house but there's nothing I can do with it more than that. The permanent grant is a great idea if it just works better. Stop the system from declining, make sure everyone gets the money at the end of every month, even before the 15th of every month so people can plan for it, that would make it better. (Participant seven, 24)

To be honest neh, things are really expensive in the world now. I don't think any additional amount will be enough, but increasing it to eight hundred or one thousand rand will help. It still won't be enough for us to survive, but it will be more to help with the prices that are increasing. (Participant eight, 23)

I think a basic income would be good for people who are struggling. I mean, especially those who don't have support like I do from family. That money is at least more than the three fifty so people can get more out of it. (Participant thirteen, 21)

To be honest the only solution for a more better grant will be to make it at least a thousand rand so people can actually afford the basics without the pressure we feel now. (Participant fifteen, 33)

Supporting thoughts about the basic income grant hinge on the ability to improve what the R350 could not. The participants would need some assurances that their experience of receiving the grant would not be as inconsistent or faulty as the COVID-19 grant has been. A theme that seems to be repeated is that of the COVID-19 social relief grant not being a sufficient deterrent for social distress and economic pressures. Receiving the R350 also does not seem to stop the youth from feeling desperate in their search for employment or other money-making opportunities. What the youth need more than money is the opportunity to learn how to thrive on their own in the current socioeconomic atmosphere.

Most of the participants have shared their desire for the government to look beyond throwing “pocket money” at huge socioeconomic problems, and rather find better solutions for these issues. Even so, the money that is being provided does make a small, positive change in youths perspectives of the future. Essentially the consensus is that the money helps, but it does not substitute for the discussions around social distress and unemployment issues. The participants no longer want to struggle for opportunities, feel like burdens on family, and worry about how to make ends meet. The support for the universal income grant comes off the back of this desire; it is not because youth are lazy or lack the yearning to position themselves in society.

4.5 CONCLUSION

From a theoretical standpoint, CARIN criteria (control, attitude, reciprocity, identity, and need) alongside the grievances brought forward by young South Africans suggests that youth meet the requirements for welfare deservingness (Laenen et al., 2019). Youth have been left on the side-lines or seen as undeserving of assistance for a while. Yet, when looking at the rate of youth unemployment, inefficient COVID-19 grant implementations, and the barriers to access, South African youth are a vulnerable group. The vulnerabilities facing the youth are obstacles to receiving socioeconomic freedoms as described by Sen (1999).

In this chapter, the findings of this study are presented. The themes deal with the experiences that participants had receiving the COVID-19 grant, these were assessed to understand what youth feel about the current support system to hopefully find out how this can be improved by gaining insight on the current influence that it has on the lives of people who are receiving it. It is important to take the perspectives of each participant into account when considering the creation of any youth-inclusive policies in the future. This chapter explored the experiences, attitudes, and management of the COVID-19 grant recipients. Most people who were interviewed pointed out ways in which the grant has been challenging to receive together some of the highlights of receiving it. The overwhelming response was that the grant payment rollout is not consistent, therefore making it difficult manage.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study had the primary objective to understand the perceptions and attitudes of unemployed youth who receive the COVID-19 grant. Through the lens of the welfare deservingness approach and capability framework, the study also to determine how young people feel about being considered for a possible basic income grant solution. Gathering youth perspectives provided insight participants' outlooks, and it showed a demand in the desire for socioeconomic opportunities, and further grant support. The data collection method of using semi-structured interviews helped to provide the participants with a safe space to share their experiences. The final chapter outlines the conclusions of the study based on the objectives and supporting theories used. It will also provide recommendations based on the findings of the study to help with future social relief policies, together with supporting the proposed universal income grant.

5.2 MAIN CONCLUSIONS

5.2.1 Unemployment and the challenge of COVID-19 grant distribution are hindrances to social and economic freedoms

Unemployment rates were high even before the pandemic. However, once the health crisis hit the nation, the rates of unemployment increased and disproportionately impacted people under the age of 35 years (Altman, 2022). People either lost jobs or struggled to find permanent employment. The youth accounts for an estimated 66% (or two-thirds) of the formal employment sector, and without taking care of young people the economy runs the risk of stalling (Altman, 2022). To avoid this, the socioeconomic measure of a social relief grant was put into action. South Africans who are unemployed after the pandemic have been offered a COVID-19 relief grant which is intended to help ease the socioeconomic pressures that befell most people during the pandemic (Altman, 2022). The youth is among those groups which have been helped by the support of R350 per month. Not only has this social relief intervention been implemented as a strategy to help people recover from COVID-19 detriments, but it is also supposed to act as a foundation for people to rebuild and grow. However, the participant experiences that are accounted for in this study show that a significant number of unemployed youths are not satisfied with the way the COVID-19 grant is being distributed or provided.

Payment processes take months before the participants can receive the money in their accounts, and this has left many feeling frustrated. The inconsistent dates of payment and rollout have made youths yearn for other means of self-efficacy. Though that can be seen as a good thing in that it keeps the youth looking for solutions for their own financial situations rather than seeking them from the government, it is also very disruptive.

Young people are still caught in the same cycle of distress and worry that was intensified during the pandemic, so the grant could do more to help. People who were approved for the grant applied with the hopes that the financial support would at least be a certain form of monthly income that participants could rely on. Yet, many participants have been met with disappointment seeing as the distribution of this grant has not been as consistent as the government pitched that it would be. A significant number of participants reported this inconsistency as frustrating, and inconvenient because they are unable to plan for the money in ways that they'd hope to. For funds that are meant to help people, the COVID-19 delays are keeping people from attaining some of the freedoms that an additional income can offer them. It is as though the expectation is for people to inevitably find their own way of surviving and thriving under the dire circumstances of high unemployment and a challenging post-pandemic economy. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that the COVID-19 grant system works efficiently enough for citizens to use it for what it has been intended for (Altman, 2022). People should not be waiting months on end without knowing whether or not the payment will reflect in their accounts. A social relief grant is supposed to help with post-pandemic recovery and ease the pressures caused by it, yet it is not doing that for people at the moment.

The freedoms argued by Sen (1999) of economic facilities, social security, and social opportunities are being hindered by the issue of unemployment and the inconsistent effort shown by the government to help people recover from COVID-19 detriments. From the findings, one can conclude that the current post-pandemic protection plan is not working as well as the more mature grant programs are. Due to inconsistencies, delays, and the smallness of the amount received, the Youth cannot use the R350 from the COVID-19 grant to access socioeconomic security, facilities, and opportunities as the government intended. Perhaps, the recovery plan needs to be revisited and revised so that creative and robust strategies can be created to make a better system.

5.2.2 A new outlook on welfare deservingness

Findings from a study issued by the national Department of Social Development [DSD] (2023) discovered that seventy percent (70%) of the applicants for the COVID-19 grant were below 34 years old; this is the youth. Most participants, much like in this study, also turn out to be majority Black Africans (DSD, 2023). The youth are highly impacted by the unfavourable state of today's economy, so it is time to look for new solutions that consider the impact of the unemployment crisis together with that of the pandemic on the lives of people. One cannot take away from the fact: unemployment is an issue that existed before the pandemic, it is a crisis that has served to intensify over the years and has been worsened by the health crisis (Mbovane, 2023). The welfare accreditations that were used prior to the pandemic might need to be reworked because most of the working population (being the youth) are facing a socioeconomic crisis. The fact that the social relief of distress grant is the first youth-inclusive social protection attempt at addressing the issue of unemployment is troubling.

Subsequently, the COVID-19 grant is an attempt to put a bandage over an issue that has needed government intervention for years prior to the pandemic, and now that this temporary solution has been provided it has opened a new conversation about the possible need for further intervention in the form of a basic income grant. There is a pressing issue on the horizon of youth who need support in response to the current socioeconomic climate. Even as the most affected individuals by the rapid unemployment rates, youth have not been the foundation of any policy for social protection, and it is about time that the narrative is shifted. In accordance with the five criteria for deservingness brought forward by Van Oorschot (2000) the youth especially those without jobs are deserving of social protection and aid.

Based on the status of deprivation or situation of lack caused by unemployment and the COVID-19 crisis, there is a need to consider new options for welfare in South Africa that include the youth in the agenda. Youth have conveyed that they are desperate for paying opportunities, and the state of the economy is keeping them from such pursuits. People are forced to seek out temporary ways of getting extra money and are constantly living on the edge of emotional unwellness trying to keep themselves above water. The welfare deservingness approach has the underlying principle that if vulnerable groups are eager and willing to change their situation and are responsible with the support they receive, then they are deserving of financial aid (Gielens et al., 2019).

The youth are conveying that they apply for the social relief of distress grant because their options and freedoms are limited, not because they want to use the government for support. Thus, the attitudes of the youth are to use the grant income for responsible things based on the understanding of social assistance as a safety net and does not replace the importance of active intention to improve the current situation of lack. From the demographic profile alone, the youth is participating in other pursuits to try and rectify or change their socioeconomic situation. The vulnerabilities that youth are faced with are outside of their control, and thus they should be considered for a welfare system that addresses that. Unemployment and the pandemic have only intensified the youth's vulnerabilities and made it more difficult for personal development to take place (Altman, 2022).

5.3 MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 Improve Youth-based Initiatives: Learnerships and Internships

The purpose of leadership and internship programs is to increase youth employability (Blom, 2019). As such, the participants from this study echoed the sentiment of the government looking into the creation and facilitation of significant opportunities to help equip the youth for employment. The issue in this country is not that there are uneducated or unmotivated young people, rather it is that the fire of those who are determined to succeed is snuffed out by the impossible socioeconomic standing that faces the youth today. There are no jobs and no space available for the youth to make their mark in society. Aside from using tools such as TikTok and social media platforms to try and make an income, there seem to be fewer opportunities for those who do not have the desire to work within the creative industry. Young people are getting their qualifications whether be it a tertiary degree, diploma, or national certificate, and are still struggling to make ends meet in this society. It is evident that there is a need for the government and other top players to facilitate programs for the youth to gain new skills beyond those received within an educational facility. It is time for leadership and internship programs to be encouraged, wherein the government and private entities can work together to place young people in more advantageous situations that use their determination to build the economy around them. The youth are hungry for the chance to make something big of themselves, and the nation is failing to provide opportunities to do so.

The national development plan has the agenda of increasing employment by 2030, with the objective of at least 60% of the working-age population receiving employment (Altman, 2022). However, the pandemic has interrupted this plan and derailed the employment and opportunity

trajectory up to 2050 (Altman, 2022). This means the youth together with other unemployed people are still going to struggle to find their feet in the labour market. While there is still an ongoing discussion on how to get the economic stability of the nation of South Africa back to health, it is clear that the government needs to consider other options for revival; one of which is coming up with a more effective social protection plan. The COVID-19 grant is a great start, and the shortfalls of that grant can be used to guide a more effective permanent solution aimed at helping the unemployed in their quest for employment.

5.3.2 Implement a Basic Income Grant

To echo the sentiment shared by the member of the socioeconomic rights institute, Alana Potter, the social relief of distress grant commonly known as the COVID-19 grant needs to be increased and used as a bridge for the basic income grant for all unemployed people (Pikoli, 2021). Rather than extend a temporary social relief grant into 2024, the government needs to look into a more permanent move to a basic income grant. The socioeconomic state of the nation is not going to recover anytime soon, and the implementation of a reasonable basic income grant can help people feel encouraged to continue finding personal solutions to the issue of unemployment. The basic income grant needs to be an amount above the poverty line or more. Seeing as the poverty line in South Africa is R585 per person per month, the government should aim for an output that is within the lower and upper poverty line ranges of at least R840 to R1268 (Atkins, 2021). No one can live on R1000 or less, so the argument of possible grant dependency does somewhat fall by the wayside. However, whether the country can afford to fund a permanent basic income plan is another question that requires new research. Introducing a basic income grant can be the government's way to assist people who are not earning a liveable wage to still receive human freedoms and to be able to get around and access their basic needs. To ensure the survival and recovery of people within an economy that struggled with unemployment issues way before COVID-19, it is imperative to introduce this new system.

Implement an integrated and multi-level policy design that prioritizes the young people of South Africa

Furthermore, youths across the board are not being prioritized in social protection policies, even though socioeconomic challenges are significantly stripping the youth of labour market opportunities that were historically available for people with degrees or certificates. Now, even with a degree, people are struggling to get and keep a job. Instead of having generalized social

policies that do not place the youth at the centre, the universal basic income policy should look at the implementation of a strategy that is youth focused. Perhaps the country needs a policy that connects various departments to provide a well-integrated policy which tackles issues of youth unemployment alongside with the need for welfare protection. A great example of this being Mexico's, *Jóvenes construyendo el futuro* programme; an initiative directed at young people building the future (Barford, Coutts, & Sahai, 2021). This program serves as a strategy to provide young people who are not employed or in any education or training with a grant. The *Jóvenes construyendo el futuro* (young people building the future) initiative is possible because the government recognised the need for a new system in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as issues of youth unemployment. As such, this initiative is a response to socioeconomic challenges that joins multiple ministries together to establish a different and multidisciplinary way of tackling these issues. Mexico's program for young people building the future connected the employment and social security agency with the education and culture, and the finance ministry to develop and implement a targeted post-pandemic policy (Barford, Coutts, & Sahai, 2021). Perhaps, South Africa could benefit from adopting the same outlook to policy creation. An outlook that considers the difficulties that exist today, which serve to perpetuate pockets of inequality and deprivation. Additionally, for the basic income grant to be more helpful and effective than the current COVID-19 grant the cost of living and poverty line need to be considered when determining the cash transfer amount (Mathebula et al., 2022). Social protection systems would be more effective if they considered the entirety of socioeconomic challenges which hinder people's access to basic freedoms and necessities. For example, the issues of unemployment, high costs of living, immense inequalities and poverty that plague the country's population must be considered when creating the basic income grant.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This study was done with the objective to understand the experiences of unemployed youth who receive the COVID-19 grant to ascertain the influence of extra support on their social experiences and economic participation. This study helped to identify the standpoints of multiple participants, and the challenges of receiving the grant were explored. These findings will hopefully add a qualitative perspective to the policymaking of a basic income grant in the future. Understanding the hindrances and benefits of receiving the COVID-19 grant is the beginning of revolutionizing the way it is distributed and considering a higher financial output. The current socioeconomic atmosphere of unemployment further aided by the detriments of the pandemic requires that action be taken to avoid a greater downfall.

Social protection might be the answer while the government and other change agents work on better solutions. Hopefully, many of the future initiative focus on upskilling and implementing learnership programs to empower the youth and integrate them into the economy. More research needs to be done on the topic of the COVID-19 grant. So, the basic income grant in South Africa can also be further explored and properly implemented. Additional research on these social protection agendas would be significantly helpful for fiscal sustainability. It would also have a significant effect on the future of unemployed youth in the country. Lastly, the research and findings from this study can provide insight into the needs of unemployed youth in a post-pandemic economy. This should inform the creation and improvement of youth-inclusive policies and welfare protection plans.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MASTERS
MINOR DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROJECT
2022/23

Informed Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE: A welfare deservingness approach to the COVID-19 grant: An exploration of social and economic experiences of unemployed youth in South Africa.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. The questions that you will be asked are part of a study that seeks to understand the influence that receiving the COVID-19 social relief grant has had on the social experiences and economic participation of unemployed youth in South Africa. This is to gauge whether there is a need for a new grant that includes youth and to unpack young people's attitudes around this possibility. This interview is also being conducted as part of my research project for my Masters degree in Social Development.

I _____ (your name) understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to participate in this study and that my participation is completely voluntary. I am also able to give my consent because the researcher has fully explained the following to me in a way that I understand:

1. I have been given enough information about this study, and all my questions have been answered.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. Therefore, I have not been forced (by anyone and in any way) to participate in this study. I am aware and understand that I have the freedom to answer any of the questions. I also have the right to decide not to answer and to withdraw from the study at any part of it.
3. I understand that the interview will be approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I know that this interview will be done telephonically to honour any possible discomfort caused by COVID-19 and to avoid the need to travel considering the fuel prices.
4. I understand and consent to the researcher recording the interview for transcription purposes. I understand that this interview will be transcribed, and all my identifying information will be removed before the data is stored.
5. Although I am aware that this study is for academic purposes, I consent to my interview being used within the study and any presentations, publications or data sharing which emanates from the study. Even so, I understand that at all parts of this process my identity will remain confidential.

Thank you for your participation.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX TWO: LETTER OF PERMISSION



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MASTERS MINOR DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROJECT 2022/2023

To Whom It Concerns

Official Request: Permission and assistance to connect with participants

The Social Development Masters program requires that students complete a research study within the second scholarly year. This program offers a variety of courses, in the first year, which includes Social Policy and Youth Development courses. Conducting research in these areas, especially concerning Youth, is paramount to the development and growth of our country. As students, we are required to link theory to practical issues or phenomena. For this reason, I have decided to explore the social and economic experiences of unemployed youth who receive the COVID-19 grant through a Welfare Deservingness lens. The title of this research study is: “A welfare deservingness approach to the COVID-19 grant: An exploration of social and economic experiences of unemployed youth in South Africa.” The criteria for participants is any youth aged between 21-35 years who receive the grant and are unemployed.

All research, that is conducted for the University of Cape Town is bound and guided by the University’s **Code of Ethics Involving Human Subjects**. As such, UCT together with myself (as the researcher) strongly define the boundaries of the study. The code of ethics ensures that all participants are protected together with the communities in which they reside. The interviews will be semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. These will be conducted telephonically unless the participants are willing to do in-person. All ethical considerations will be upheld. According to ethics, the identity of participants who participate in the study must be concealed and protected, thus ensuring that considerations of confidentiality and anonymity are upheld by all researchers; myself included. None of the data or information within this study will be made public to protect the integrity of all individuals that are involved. This study is for academic purposes only.

As a researcher, I will be closely supervised throughout the process to ensure that I uphold the code of ethics throughout the study. Once the research is complete, the final document will be submitted to the University. Lastly, the research has received ethical clearance and will prioritize the experiences of all participants.

Thank you for your assistance. Should there be any further questions or interests you can contact me, Inenceba Madangatye via this email: imadangatye@gmail.com or WhatsApp number: 0723577497.

Sincerely,

Inenceba Madangatye
Student and Researcher

APPENDIX THREE: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



University of Cape Town Department of Social Development

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE DURATION: 45MIN TO AN HOUR

PROJECT TITLE: A Welfare Deservingness Approach to the COVID-19 grant: An exploration of social and economic experiences of unemployed youth in South Africa.

Introduction:

Are you in a private place and okay to talk?

- Debrief about the study.
- Go over informed consent and the right to withdraw from the interview at any moment.
- The right to ask for clarity, if ever there's something that requires clarification.

General Demographic Information [building repour]

- If you don't mind me asking, how old are you?
- Which race group do you identify with?
- Tell me a bit about your education
 - What is your highest grade passed?
 - Did you attend tertiary?
 - If so, what did you study?
 - If not, what would you study if you chose to attend?
- Have you ever had a job?
 - If so, when last did you work?
- Are you currently seeking employment?
- Tell me a bit about your current household:
 - Where do you currently live?
 - Are you single, married, or in a cohabiting relationship?
 - Do you have any dependents?
 - If yes, how many?
 - How old?
- Let's reflect a bit on your childhood:
 - Where did you grow up? (province / community)
 - Who did you live with?
 - Who were you raised by?
 - If not parents, what was your relationship with your parents?
 - In what way (if at all) were they involved in raising you?

**Check-in point: Still good to continue?*

Experience of receiving the COVID-19 Grant

- How long have you been receiving the COVID-19 grant?
- How does receiving the grant help you to care for yourself?
 - In which ways does the grant meet your needs?
 - How would you describe your social life since receiving the grant?
 - Refer to your diet, home life, and ability to access things
 - Are there ways you wish the grant could support you more?
 - If any, what are some of the positive ways that the grant has impacted your life?
 - If any, what are some of the negative ways that the grant has impacted your life?

Grant management:

- What are your thoughts about the amount of money that you get for this grant?
 - Is it enough or could it be more?
 - Elaborate.
- How do you feel about being a COVID-19 grant recipient?
 - The application, approval, and recipient process.
- Do you have any other sources of income?
 - Example: family support etc.
- What are some of the things that you use your grant money on?
 - How do you decide this?
 - Would you say you use it more based on *needs* or *wants*? Elaborate.
 - Have you ever used the grant money for someone else's needs?
 - Elaborate.
 - Do you have primary control over how you spend your grant money?
 - Would you say that you use the grant money well?
- What difference would you say receiving the COVID-19 grant has made in your life?
 - What are some of the positive feelings, if any, do you attach to receiving the grant?
 - What are some of the negative feelings, if any, do you attach to receiving the grant?
- Does being a grant recipient influence any of your choices? Elaborate on whatever answer is given.

Guiding prompts:

- Social choices and experiences
- How much you can spend and what do you spend it on?
- The type of transport you can take
- The activities you can do
- Do people around you know that you receive the grant?
 - If yes, are there any stigmas or is there any sense of exclusion that you feel because of this?
 - Does this impact how you use the grant money at all?
 - If not, is it something that you're open about, or would you be free to talk about it?
 - How did you find out about the social relief grant?

**Check-in point: Still good to continue?*

Influence of receiving the COVID-19 Grant on social experiences.

- Is there anything (socially) that you can do now that you could not do before receiving the grant? If so, what?
- Do you receive the COVID-19 income monthly like you're supposed to?
 - What have some of your experiences receiving the grant been?
 - How does an additional income affect you?
 - Consider how you manage this income: to meet your needs (food clothing, transport) and to cater to your wants
 - Are there any challenges that you've experienced pertaining to receiving the grant?
 - Mention anything: Inconsistencies, the amount, and so on.
- What emotional impact, if any, has receiving the grant had on you?
- In which ways, if any, does receiving the grant support affect your social experiences?
 - How does it, if at all, affect your independence?
 - What are some of the things, if any, that you have access to and can do because of the grant?
 - Does receiving the grant make you feel any more or any less a part of society?
- Has the grant eased your social experiences in any way?
 - If so, how?
 - If not, elaborate.
- In what ways, if any, has the grant reduced the social and emotional distress caused by the pandemic?

**Check-in point: Still good to continue?*

Influence of receiving the COVID-19 Grant on economic participation

- What financial role do you play in your life?
 - How many people depend on you? Who and to what degree?
 - How many people are responsible for paying the bills where you live?
 - Who?
- Is there anyone who supports you financially other than the grant?
 - In which ways might you be a dependent?
- Is there any pressure (internally and externally) for you to start working?
 - If so, what sort of pressure?
 - Has receiving the distress grant helped in any way?
- Do you think the grant is helping your current unemployment situation?
 - Do you think receiving the grant influences your employment opportunities? Elaborate.
- Has the COVID-19 grant had any influence on your economic participation?
 - Has it contributed to your ability to search for work?
 - Has there ever been a time that you've used the grant money to fund something job-related?
 - Applications etc.
- In what ways has received the grant reduced the economic distress caused by the pandemic?
- Does receiving the grant motivate you to find employment in any way?
 - Elaborate.
- Are there ways in which your economic choices have been affected by receiving the grant? If so, what are they?

- Have you experienced any barriers accessing the grant? If so, how has this impacted you?
- Do you feel any anxiety at the thought that the grant might be discontinued? If so, why? If not, why not?

**Final check-in*

Attitudes toward the implementation of a more permanent grant that includes youth in the form of a basic income grant

- Now that you receive the COVID-19 grant could you see yourself without it?
Elaborate.
 - Would your independence be affected if you stopped receiving the grant? In what ways, if any?
 - Would losing the grant make you feel any more or any less a part of society?
 - Consider the impact, if any, on your sense of inclusion
 - Do you think the loss of the grant would influence your choices in any way?
 - In what ways would losing the grant affect you?
 - Socially, Economically, and financially
 - In what ways, other than money, can the youth be assisted with accessing employment and better social experiences?
 - What are some of the ways that could help you ease your transition into the workforce?
 - What are some of the things that could help you feel more socially included?
 - Whose responsibility do you think is it to help the youth feel more socially and economically included in South Africa?
 - What more do you think the government could do to support youth, from a social protection standpoint? Is there more? Is support needed?
 - Do you think a basic income grant is necessary for young people nowadays?
 - Elaborate.
 - How would a more permanent grant help you?
 - What would you change about the existing grant? If anything.
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Debrief

- Express gratitude for the time spent.
- Get thoughts about how the interview went from the participant's perspective.
- Ask if there are any additional questions before ending interview.
- Express that if any questions come to mind after the interview they can be messaged.