

An Evaluation of a Family- and Community-based Intervention: Sihleng'imizi 'We Care for Families'

Dr. Jenita Chiba
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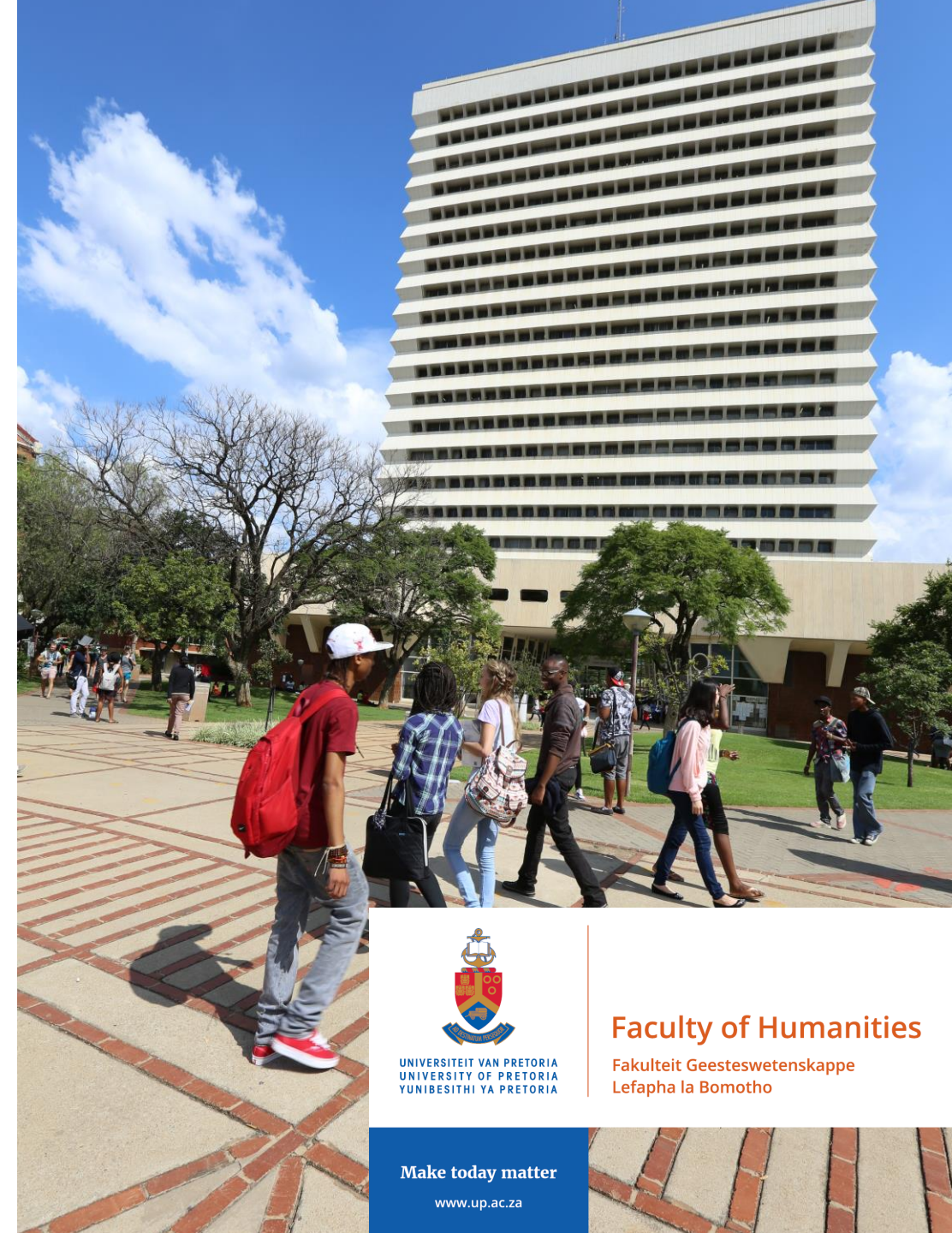
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Introduction

- South Africa has one of the largest cash transfer programmes for children and families in the global South – Child Support Grant (CSG).
- CSG has been found to have positive outcomes in improving child and family wellbeing
- However, it does not address the psychosocial challenges of children and caregivers.
- Challenges are complex and multidimensional, and cash transfers alone cannot address all aspects of children's wellbeing.
- Growing research in different countries, such as Columbia, Mexico, Niger, Brazil and South Africa suggest positive child wellbeing outcomes, when social protection programmes are integrated with a positive parenting intervention – cash plus interventions
- In SA, limited evidence exists for the feasibility of family interventions – not well documented.



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METHOD

- Qualitative intervention research design
- The design followed Rothman and Thomas' (1994) stages in intervention research:
 - i. Problem analysis and project planning;
 - ii. Information gathering and synthesis;
 - iii. Design;
 - iv. Early development and *pilot testing*;
 - v. *Evaluation* and advanced development; and
 - vi. Dissemination

My PhD study formed part of a larger CSDA study and my PhD study focused specifically on the Pilot Testing and Evaluation of the Sihleng'imizi Family Programme.

- Study (CSDA) began with an analysis of the problems facing CSG children and families which was published as a research report (Patel *et al.*, 2017).
- This culminated in the design of the family-strengthening programme and pilot testing



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- Study site: Doornkop, Soweto – among the poorest formal areas in Johannesburg and a high uptake of the CSG (80% households)
- Recruitment of participants for the programme (research participants):
 - Children and families who were CSG recipients,
 - Children who were in Grade R and Grade 1,
 - Lived close to the venue where the sessions were held,
 - Recruited from 2 local schools.
- The school considered all children and families in the two grades:
 - those families selected was because they presented with specific social, learning, health, and or behavioural challenges.
- Semi-structured research instruments to collect data from caregivers, teachers and social workers:
 - baseline (prior to the intervention) and endpoint (directly after termination of the intervention)
 - Additionally, endpoint interviews were conducted with teachers and social workers.
- The data provided information about the changes observed within families after attending the programme, and included what they found helpful about the programme.



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An adaption of the SAFE Children Family Intervention - designed for poor urban families in Chicago, USA (Schools and Families Education (SAFE) Children, 2014).

- it contains some of the key programme components relevant to disadvantaged and poor families living in difficult circumstances in South Africa
- thus chosen as the basis on which to create a new, culturally relevant, appropriate and locally adapted programme.

- Adaptation of the programme included linguistic aspects, delivery modes, material's content, and delivery procedures – 6 month process.
- Incorporated, where appropriate, materials from the South African Sinovuyo Caring Families Programme (Doubt, Tsoanyane, Lachman, Ward & Cluver, 2015a)
- Field testing of the material and training of social workers and supervisors were also conducted - online discussions and consultations.



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Sihleng'imizi Design Features

This is a group-based family programme. The **WHOLE** family is invited.



Group size is approximately 25 participants; 4 – 6 families take part in a group.



Selection of participants via school.



Selection criteria:
ID child is in grade R or grade 1;
receives a CSG.

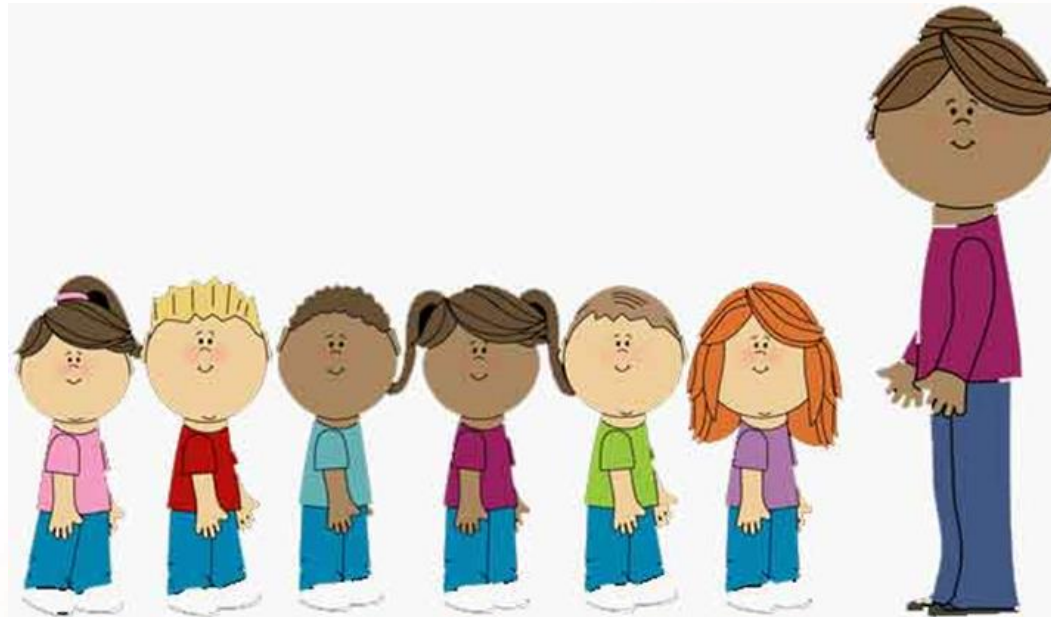


The programme is a weekly 2 hour group, ran for 12 sessions.

Parts of the programme include everyone, some parts split adults and children.

Participants get a family workbook, available in 3 languages.

12



English
IsiZulu
SeSotho

- Sihleng'imizi is a psychosocial educational intervention - draws on the social development approach to promote child wellbeing.
- The programme provides support, knowledge and skills to parents/caregivers and families
- A synthesis of three theories provides the programme's theoretical framework:
 - the developmental-ecological risk theory,
 - systems theory, and
 - the psycho-educational approach to family intervention.
- Programme addresses risk factors that compromise child wellbeing at individual, family, school, and community levels.
- Families' strengths, capabilities and assets, as well as their agency to achieve their hopes and dreams, are emphasised in the programme.
- By combining cash and care interventions, Sihleng'imizi attempts to overcome the divide between the economic and the psychosocial aspects of child wellbeing.
- Incorporates other principles of developmental social work practice, such as beneficiaries' participation and active engagement in interventions, including combining micro, mezzo, and macro level practice as set out in the social development practice model (Patel, 2015).



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- Sihleng'imizi objectives:
The intervention is designed to impact positively on:

1. Child functioning at school
2. Parenting skills
3. Child-family relations
4. Caregiver's optimal use of material and non-material resources
5. Family social networks
6. Financial management skills

Sihleng'imizi aim:

- To improve child well-being outcomes for children living in families receiving a CSG (via social interventions).

FINDINGS

DIMENSION 1: Family and Child-Caregiver Relations

Family Cohesion and Bonding

Zaki: ...yes I play with this small one, Koketso. We play football, we play skipping and jumping rope...before we didn't have time.

Lucy: ...sometimes if I am not doing anything, I take a ball and go play with them outside...I didn't have enough time [before the programme].

- greater awareness of bonding activities, such as playing with their children – and the value of giving time for this.
- understand the value of playing with their children and how this contributes to the emotional bonding they share with them.
- It is also understood that caregivers, such as the Sihleng'imizi caregivers, who live in strained socioeconomic contexts may have fewer resources and limited time and energy to engage with their children as a result of the social, emotional and economic stressors they face



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Parenting Skills in discipline

- At baseline, six caregivers indicated that they made use of harsh discipline methods with their children: hitting, shouting
- However, at endpoint, nine caregivers reported that they now make use of alternative discipline techniques they learned during the Sihleng'imizi family programme.
- All caregivers stated that they now specifically make use of the '5-minute cool down' technique and 'calm-down box'
- Reinforced where caregivers had to enact a role play during the session.
- Their homework activity gave participants the opportunity to practice the skills at home.
- This reinforced the use of the technique, and participants' confidence in applying it - such skills take time to master.



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DIMENSION 2: Social and Community Connectedness

- The baseline data - mixed experiences and feelings regarding community trust and safety
 - Two of the caregivers had very good relations with their neighbours and fully trusted them.
- Psychosocial support, and caregivers' networks had improved at baseline.
- An integral part of the Sihleng'imizi family programme was pairing up caregivers - the Sihleng'imizi buddy system.
- All caregivers spoke positively of their experiences and engagements with their buddy.

Nancy: It has changed a lot because where I have problems that I can't talk about to my parents, I can chat to her [referring to her buddy], and she will advise me. And if she has a problem as well, she comes to me.

Zaki: I would ask them, like today, I didn't understand the programme and I asked them to explain it for me, what was being said in the session and they would tell me, 'Zaki it is 1, 2 and 3'



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DIMENSION 3: Caregiver Engagement in Children's Education

- Seemed to instil in parents and caregivers an appreciation of the value and significance of attending school meetings, and specifically the importance of building relationships with their children's teachers.

Siba: Most of the time, I did not go to the school...all that I was doing was taking him in and fetching...[I realise now] it is very important because you have to know the teacher, and the progress of your child in class, and to attend meetings when they are called. You must have a relationship with the teacher to know how your child is doing.

- Facilitating homework with children
- At both baseline and endpoint: caregivers noted all children enjoyed going to school and were performing satisfactorily. All passed their grade at the end of the academic year, and were proceeding to the next grade.



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DIMENSION 4: Financial Literacy

- At baseline, none of the caregivers spoke of doing a monthly family budget.
- When caregivers were asked about their savings knowledge at the end of the intervention, all spoke of being mindful of putting a budget together.
- Seven caregivers indicated that they had an improved understanding of various ways to save money.
- Elaborating on this, some of the caregivers spoke of being able to differentiate between wants, needs and obligations



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Discussion of Lessons Learnt

Potential to improve outcomes of cash plus family strengthening interventions

- The intervention proved to be beneficial in all its domains: more than half indicated significant changes between baseline and endpoint:
- First, all participants reported using alternative techniques to discipline children, and in managing their behaviour
 - decreased shouting and beating of children,
 - improved communication, such as speaking less harshly to their children.
 - caregivers using alternative positive parenting techniques
- Second, the Sihleng'imizi buddy system proved to be effective in increasing peer support:
 - All participants valued the opportunity to build new relations with a member of the group - psychosocial support, building of a friendship network reinforcing new learning, and strengthening participants' sense of connectedness to each other and others in the community.

- Third, the development of caregivers' financial capabilities proved to be beneficial:
 - improved knowledge and skills in budgeting, savings, and financial management at the end of the intervention.
- Finally, other beneficial Sihleng'imizi programme components were related activities to promote family cohesion – skills learnt were applied at home, thereby reinforcing understanding and practise of the skill.
- Engagement in children's schooling improved for a third of the children in the pilot programme. Where caregivers reported high levels of engagement with their children's schooling at baseline, changes could not be attributed to the intervention.
- Supervision of children, use of community resources, and feelings of trust in the community and neighbours appeared to have been strengthened to a lesser degree - either had sound knowledge and strategies to begin with, or they did not yet have the opportunity to demonstrate implementing the knowledge



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- This might be due to the short-term nature of the intervention; a follow-up over a longer period may be required. In addition, community safety conditions remained unchanged, which affected trust levels.
- Overall, the Sihleng'imizi family intervention complemented the CSG in important ways to mitigate risks associated with compromised child wellbeing, such as harsh parenting practices, inadequate knowledge and skills of financial management, and social support.
- In these three specific domains, the CSG plus a family strengthening programme appeared to have the potential for success.
- There were no changes in the families' socioeconomic conditions, as all participants continued to live in poverty with limited employment opportunities. - the grants are not sufficient to lift these families out of poverty.
- All the children and their families in the pilot programme therefore continued to experience significant material risks to their wellbeing. Nonetheless, the Sihleng'imizi programme could go some ways towards minimising some risks associated with the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Patel *et al.*, 2017).



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Thank You

Questions and
Comments

Contact Details

Jenita Chiba
University of Pretoria
Jenita.chiba@up.ac.za