

In brief: A profile of children living in South Africa, using the National Income Dynamics Study

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This Children Count brief provides an overview of the situation of children in South Africa, drawing on data from the first wave of the National Income Dynamics Study. NIDS is a national panel survey, and the fieldwork for the first wave was done in 2008. Households and individuals covered in the first wave will be tracked every two years. This will allow researchers to follow the progress of the child panel over time and place, and thereby describe the dynamics of child poverty rather than present a static profile. The data from the first wave serves as a baseline.

There are over 18 million children under 18 years in South Africa. This brief provides a baseline profile of where these children live, who they live with, their standard of living and levels of poverty. More information about NIDS is provided on the back page.

Demography and population distribution

Children are disproportionately found in the former homelands, which were systematically under-developed during apartheid and remain under-resourced nearly two decades later. This means that many children grow up in places with poor road infrastructure, inadequate municipal services, and without easy access to schools and clinics.

Parents, orphaning and care arrangements

Nearly a quarter of all children do not have either of their parents living with them. Some of these children are orphans, but 8 out of 10 have at least one living parent who stays elsewhere. Most of these children – whether orphaned or not – are cared for by relatives.

Housing and living environments

Children's living environments are worse, on average, than adults'. This is partly due to relatively poor municipal service provision in areas where many children are concentrated. Households with children are considerably larger, on average, than those without children, and many children – over 5 million – live in overcrowded households.

Income poverty and social grants

Like other indicators of deprivation, child income poverty is most severe in the former homeland areas. Children living in informal settlements are similarly poor to those living in rural areas. Social grants are a very important source of income for poor households, and 70% of children live in households that receive at least one social grant. The child support grant is the largest grant in terms of beneficiary numbers. But it also has a much smaller cash value than the other grants, and as a result has less of an impact on the poverty headcount (the number of children below a defined poverty line). Although not intended for children, adult grants have a greater impact on child poverty levels than the child support grant.



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Spatial distribution of the child population

- There are approximately 13 million households in South Africa, accommodating a population of 49 million people. Children, who make up nearly 40% of the population, live in over half of all households (57%), while the remaining households have adult members only.
- Adult-only and mixed-generation households are differently distributed. In comparison to the adult population, children are disproportionately represented in rural households. 42% of all children live in rural areas which have traditional authorities (the former homelands), compared with only 27% of adults. Conversely 53% of adults but only 41% of children live in urban formal areas.

Rural households carry a large burden of care for children, many of whom have parents living elsewhere. While half of all urban households are mixed generation and include children, a much larger three quarters of rural households include children.

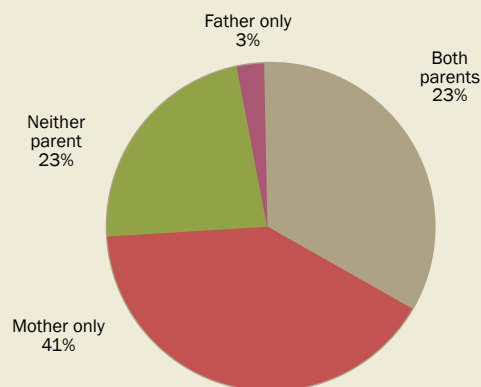
It is important to understand where children live as this can assist with planning and targeting services. The fact that children are disproportionately present in rural households means that many children grow up in places with poor service infrastructure and without easy access to schools and clinics.

Parental co-residence and care arrangements

Some poverty alleviation programmes acknowledge and cater for the fact that many children do not live with their biological parents. For instance, the child support grant explicitly allows for a child's primary caregiver (not necessarily the parent) to apply for the grant. And grant beneficiaries are in turn entitled to school fee exemptions and hospital fee waivers.

Children in South Africa often grow up with relatives – while parents migrate to places of employment opportunity, for example. There has been little change in the extent to which children live apart from their parents.

Fig.1 Children's co-residence with their biological parents



Source: NIDS Wave 1, own calculations

Although many children live with just one of their biological parents (in most cases their mother), this does not necessarily mean that they have only one adult caring for them. The vast majority (86%) of children live in households where there are two or more co-resident adults.

Nearly a quarter of all children live with neither of their biological parents, although 72% of these children have a living mother and 83% have at least one living parent. In other words labour migration and other factors influence parental absence, as well as orphaning.

The number of orphans has increased significantly in the last decade, and the number of children who have lost their mothers is expected to continue rising as a result of HIV/AIDS (ASSA2008). In 2008, approximately 3.3 million children had lost their fathers and 1.5 million children had lost their mothers. The vast majority of children who are maternally orphaned (who have lost their mothers) are in the care of family members, mostly grandparents.

Living environments and access to services

Households that include children are, on the whole, larger than those without children. The average household size nationally is around 3.6 members per household. But households that include children have 5.3 members on average. The standard 40m² dwelling provided by the government's housing subsidy would not adequately accommodate a household of this size.

If we compare the living conditions of children and adults, we find that significantly more children than adults live in traditional housing, in overcrowded conditions, and without access to basic services.

There are numerous health and safety implications associated with overcrowding and poor or absent basic services. Many children still do not have access to the minimum recommended level of service for water and sanitation. This means that children's health may be compromised simply as a result of inadequate service delivery.

Where piped water is not available, children are often responsible for collecting water, which can be both time consuming and dangerous, and result in their arriving late for school.

Fig.2 Level of housing and services for adults and children

Housing / service level	Adults	Children
Traditional dwelling	12%	19%
Overcrowding at home	16%	27%
Without water on site	26%	37%
Without adequate sanitation	40%	54%
Without electricity	17%	22%

Source: NIDS Wave 1, own calculations

Income poverty and social grants

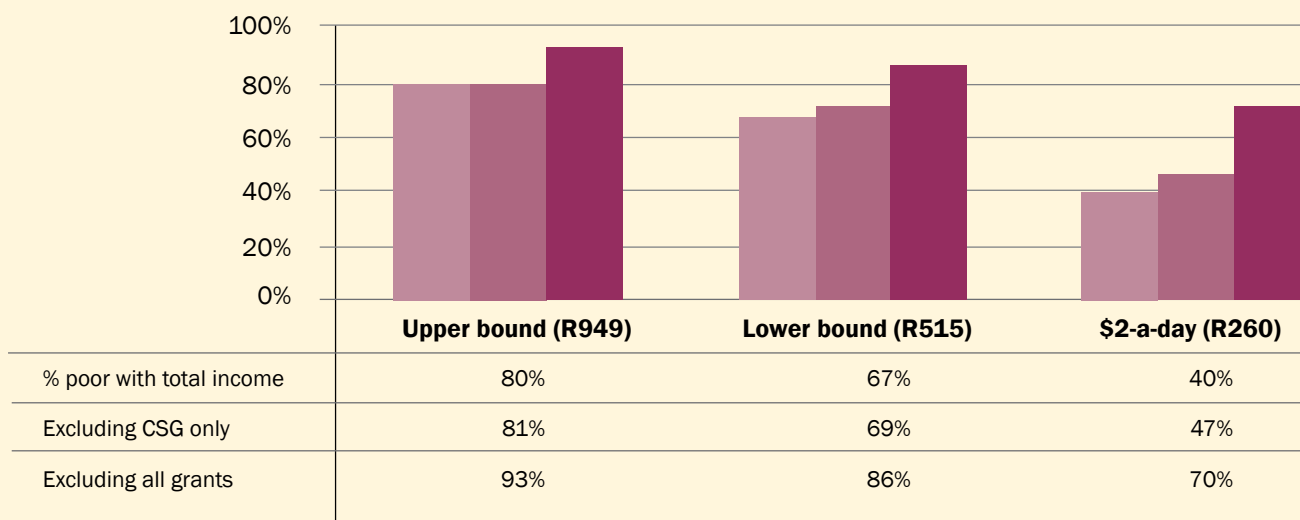
We have already seen that children are not evenly distributed geographically across the country. Child poverty is also unevenly distributed, and is most severe in the former homeland areas. Using an upper bound poverty line equivalent to R949 per capita in 2008, 61% of children in formal urban areas were living in poverty, compared with 95% of children in rural former homelands, 92% in 'rural formal' (commercial) farming areas and 91% in urban informal areas.

In terms of income inequality, South Africa is amongst the most unequal countries in the world (with a Gini coefficient of 0.7). Levels of inequality are similarly high within the child population, although children tend to be concentrated in poorer households. Leibbrandt et al (2010) found that while 70% of the poorest

households had one or more children present, only 32% of the wealthiest households included children.

Social grants are a very important source of income for poor households. As many as 70% of children live in households that receive at least one social grant. The main social grant for children is the child support grant (CSG), which is a means-tested poverty alleviation grant paid to children's caregivers. An estimated 10.4 million children were eligible for this grant in 2008, of whom around 81% were receiving it. Though large numbers of children receive this grant, the child support grant has a much smaller cash value than the other grants, and as a result has less of an impact on the poverty headcount (the number of children below a defined poverty line).

Fig.3 The impact of existing grants on child poverty rates, using three poverty lines



Source: NIDS Wave 1, own calculations

The National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS)

NIDS is a large and ongoing study initiated by the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development, located in the Presidency's National Planning Commission. The first two waves of the survey have been undertaken by the Southern African Labour & Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town.

NIDS is a longitudinal panel study, which means that the individuals included in the baseline survey became a panel, and future waves of the survey attempt to return to exactly those people, even if they have moved. NIDS is unique in that it is the first true national panel study to be undertaken in South Africa.

The baseline or first wave was a nationally representative sample of 7 300 households, with 28 000 individuals. Of these, just over 11 000 were children under 18 years. The first survey was conducted in 2008, and subsequent waves are undertaken every two years.

NIDS contains a large amount of information about the circumstances of children living in South Africa, and offers new opportunities for exploring the dynamics of child poverty. For instance, it provides relatively good income and expenditure data for child-focused poverty analysis; it provides opportunities for monitoring educational and health outcomes for children; it records plausible data on grant uptake, previously unavailable in national surveys; and because it uses a broad definition of the household (including non-resident members and those who stay in the household less than four days a week), it enables analysis of changing household composition and mobility.

A great strength of NIDS is its design as a panel. Children identified in the first wave are being tracked over time in subsequent waves, so that it will be possible to follow the progress of the NIDS child panel over time and place. This will allow researchers to unpick the complex trajectories of South African children as they move beyond childhood and into adulthood, and thereby describe the dynamics of child poverty rather than present a static profile.

This information can be used by policy makers to address not only the present day challenges faced by children but also to promote better outcomes in the future.

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