

**Social Relief of Distress as an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity:  
the perceptions of social workers at the Department of Social Development,  
Johannesburg Metropolitan area.**

**A report on a study project presented to**

**The Department of Social Work**

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**For the degree Master of Arts (Social Work) by Coursework and Research Report**

**By**

**Mahadima Portia Sehlabane**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Mahadima Portia Sehlabane hereby declare that this research report is my own work and full acknowledgement has been given to the sources used. This research report has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination.

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Signature

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Date

“Freedom is meaningless if people cannot put food in their stomachs, if they can have no shelter, if illiteracy and disease continue to dog them.” – Nelson Mandela from an interview, Circa 1994.

**Nelson Mandela: 1918- 2013.**

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## **Abstract**

The first Millennium Development Goal on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is an acknowledgement that poverty and food shortages exist in many countries. A report by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 2008 indicates that there was an increase in the number of people who were subject to “chronic hunger” internationally between the years 1990 to 2007 (du Toit, 2011, p.1). The South African Constitution, 1996, highlights in section 27 that every citizen has the right to food, water and social assistance. However, there are still people who experience food shortages in their households even though the government provides social relief of distress to needy households. The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of social workers at the Department of Social Development (DSD), Johannesburg Metropolitan area, about the use of social relief of distress as an effective strategy to reduce food insecurity. The study was qualitative and exploratory in nature. A sample consisting of 8 participants and 2 key informants was selected using non-probability purposive sampling. The data was collected using face to face semi-structured interviews. With the permission of the participants, a tape recorder was used to capture the interviews. The collected data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The study revealed that the link between social relief of distress and the reduction of food insecurity is that social relief of distress reduces the vulnerability of poor households to food insecurity. Some of the views in the study revealed that the social relief of distress is effective in addressing food shortages while others questioned the sustainability of the programme. Furthermore, the study also revealed that the lack of partnerships between different state departments poses as a challenge. It is envisaged that the findings of the study will make a contribution to knowledge on social assistance and specifically how social relief of distress can effectively contribute towards the reduction of food insecurity. It is also hoped that the recommendations that emerged from the study will also be useful in guiding the policy makers when reviewing the social relief of distress programme.

**Keywords:** social relief of distress; effective; food insecurity; perceptions; social workers; Department of Social Development.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter introduces the study and covers the following: an overview of the statement of the problem, the theoretical framework, research questions, the aim and objectives of the study, a brief research design and methodology, definition of terms, the limitations of the study and also the organisation of the report.

### **1.2 Introduction**

Hart (2009) highlights that the high food prices in South Africa may have a negative impact on poor households, which may lead to food insecurity. He further adds that the ability of a household to remain food secure is dependent on the household's ability to devise strategies that will ensure that resources are available. However, the ability to secure resources can arguably be said to be determined by socio-economic factors. Bonti-Ankomah (2001) argues that socio-economic factors play an important role in determining food security or insecurity thereof. These socio-economic factors refer to issues such as poverty, employment rate, fuel and food prices. It is indeed evident that the South African economy is unstable and the fuel prices keep increasing. This in turn affects the food prices and one can only imagine the impact that this has on poor households and those who are unemployed for instance. Food insecurity is not only a problem in South Africa, but it is a worldwide problem. Webb, Coates, Frangillo, Rogers, Swindale and Bilinsky (2006) also argue that food insecurity is indeed a daily reality to many people all around the world.

According to du Toit (2011), the South African government reprioritised food security as one of the top priorities in the 2010/2011 financial year. The social relief of distress is one mechanism that the state is using to ensure food security. Thus, the study explored the perceptions of social workers about the use of social relief of distress programme to reduce food insecurity.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem and rationale for the study**

It is stated that “roughly 15 per cent of humanity (over one billion people) is considered hungry or malnourished, especially women” (McMichael & Schneider, 2011, p. 119). The second Millennium Development Goal on the eradication of poverty and hunger is one attempt to address the issue of hunger, poverty and food insecurity globally. Rosegrant and Cline (2003, p. 1917) highlight that “the ability of agriculture to support growing populations has been a concern for generations and continues to be on the high on the global policy agenda”. This points out that not only is agriculture regarded as an important source of food supply around the world but that it is also an important source of sustenance. Hart (2009) points out that food insecurity particularly in Southern Africa is a result of the global food price increases that occurred between the period 2006 and 2008. This period was characterised by household food shortages and thus making people dependent on the state for assistance.

The poverty profile of South Africa of 2012 by Statistics South Africa highlight that 26,3% of the population was living below the poverty line between 2008 and 2009 (Statistics South Africa, 2012a). Altman, Hart and Jacobs (2009) also highlight that South Africa as a country is food secure but this however is not what is happening at the household level as many are food insecure.

The Department of Social Development and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) are involved in rendering social security services designed to address poverty and food insecurity (Patel, 2005). Social grants and the social relief of distress are examples of these services. Social relief of distress is a form of social assistance that is aimed at assisting needy individuals and households by providing access to food by means of a food voucher, food parcel or cash-in-kind. Thus it can be said to be a mechanisms that is used to address food insecurity to individuals and households in need. It is provided for a period of three months but it can however be extended to six months depending on the circumstances and need of the particular individual and/or household (International Labour Organizations, 2011, p.7). In addition to addressing food insecurity, the social relief of distress also addresses the target of the first Millennium Development Goal which it to halve poverty by 2015 by providing food to those in need.

Triegaardt (2002) highlights that many of the poor households in South Africa rely on the state social grants as a means of income for their daily sustenance and these households are mostly African and women headed households. There are also people who still experience food shortages in their households even though the government provides social relief of distress to needy households. The short term nature of this assistance compromises its effectiveness as a sustainable strategy for reducing food insecurity. This can be attributed to resource limitations on the part of both the Department of Social Development and SASSA.

It is envisaged that the findings of the study will make a contribution to knowledge on social assistance and specifically how social relief of distress can effectively contribute towards the reduction of food insecurity. It is also hoped that the recommendations that emerged from the study will also be useful in guiding policy makers when reviewing the social relief of distress program.

#### **1.4 Theoretical framework for the study**

The study was informed by the social development approach. Social development can be defined as “a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development” (Midgley, 1995, p.25). Social development is a method of social welfare which is aimed at addressing social deficits in people’s lives and the larger society. Triegaardt (2002, p.329) highlights the objective of social welfare, which is “to promote the well-being of individuals, families and communities”. Thus, as a social welfare approach, it can be agreed that the objective of social development is to enhance the quality of life of individuals, families and society as a whole.

Social development also seeks to bring about socio-economic changes through the provision of social services, including social security. The ultimate aim of social development is to improve the quality of life of all people (Midgley, 1995). In this regard, social assistance is one of the strategies used to realise the objectives of social development. Thus social development

approach was relevant for this study as the provision of social relief of distress is aimed at improving food security and thus improving the standard of living and wellbeing of the people.

### **1.5 Research question**

Is the provision of social relief of distress an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity?

### **1.6 Primary aim**

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of social workers at the Department of Social Development about the effectiveness of providing social relief of distress in reducing food insecurity.

### **1.7 Objectives**

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore the views of social workers about the link between social relief of distress and the reduction of food insecurity.
- To establish the views of social workers on the perceived impact of the social relief of distress programme in improving access to food.
- To investigate challenges that are encountered in the provision of social relief of distress as a strategy in reducing food insecurity.

### **1.8 Brief overview of research design and methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative approach and it was exploratory in nature. The study population consisted of social workers employed by the Department of Social Development and key informants employed by SASSA. A sample consisting of 8 participants and 2 key informants was selected using non-probability purposive sampling. A semi-structured interview schedule with open ended questions was used to collect data with the participants. With the consent of the participants, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews. The collected data was analysed using thematic content analysis.

## **1.9 Definition of key concepts**

### ***Food security***

Food security can be defined as a state in which “people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2003, p.29). Food availability, sufficiency, accessibility at all times and the ability to meet one’s dietary preferences are the main characteristics of food security.

### ***Household food security***

Bonti-Ankomah (2001, p.2) defines household food security as “access by all households at all times to adequate safe and nutritious food for a healthy and productive life”. This implies that for households to be declared food secure, all the members residing in that household should have access to healthy food at all times.

### ***Food insecurity***

Food insecurity refers to “a limited access to food, as well as a limited ability to secure adequate food” (United States Department of Agriculture, cited in Labadarios, Davids, Mchiza & Weir-Smith, 2009, p.9). In addition to limited access to food, food insecurity also entails the inability to secure a source of food which is required to maintain life. Furthermore, the FAO (2003, p.29) highlights that “food insecurity exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food ...”. Therefore, one can be said to be food insecure when they are unable to get healthy food on a daily basis.

### ***Social relief of distress***

Social relief of distress is defined as “a temporary provision of assistance intended for persons in such dire material need that they are unable to meet their families’ most dire needs” (Department of Social Development, 2010, p. 2).

### **1.11 Organisation of report**

Chapter one introduced the research study by outlining the statement of the problem and its rationale. It also highlighted the research question, the study aim and objectives, the theoretical framework and provided a brief overview of the research design and methodology. It also provided definitions of some of the key concepts of the study.

Chapter two will focus on the literature review while chapter three discusses the methodology of the study. Chapter four will provide a presentation and analysis of findings and lastly, chapter five will present the summary of main findings, conclusion and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter reviews literature on food security food, food insecurity and social assistance in South Africa. It begins by providing both the global and the South African contexts. Issues of poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa are also highlighted. It further provides the definition of food security and food insecurity, including the factors associated with food insecurity and the implications thereof. It goes on to discuss the South African social security system, and in particular looking at the Social Relief of Distress programme. It also highlights the impact of the Social Relief of Distress in ensuring food security.

#### **2.2 Conceptualisation of food security policy from a global context**

The first of the eight Millennium Development Goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (United Nations, 2000). Du Toit (2011, p.1) draws attention to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) Report of 2008 which indicates that there was an increase in the number of people who were subject to “chronic hunger” internationally between the years 1990 to 2007. This indicates that poverty and hunger are global issues.

The Department of Agriculture (2002) highlights that South Africa’s food security policy is not only located within the national context but it is also located within the regional and international contexts. At the regional level, South Africa is part of the South African Development Community (SADC) countries which have a commitment to working together to achieve regional food security by targeting the national, household and individual levels. On the international level, South Africa has taken a pledge to support the World Summit Plan of Action which was part of the Rome Declaration on Food Security in 1996. Furthermore, South Africa has committed itself to “creating an enabling political, social and economic environment and to implementing policies to eradicate poverty” (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002, p.

12). However, of concern is the fact that regardless of the constitutional provisions, there are still many South African citizens that experience social exclusion, poverty, unemployment and food insecurity in their everyday lives.

### **2.3 Overview of the South African food security context**

As a democratic country, South Africa has a number of legislations that have been put in place to ensure that the rights of the citizens are not infringed upon and also as a means of ensuring that the government exercises its role of looking after its people. This is exercised through the creation of social policies for example. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the White Paper for Social Welfare of 1997, the Social Assistance Act (2004) and the South African Social Security Agency Act (2004) make up the main legislative instruments that are used to guide and regulate the provision of social security services in particular (Frye, 2008).

The right to access food in particular is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This is highlighted in section 27 (1) (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 13), where it is noted that “everyone has the right to health care, food, water and social security; ... including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, social assistance”. This means that social assistance, which is a form of social security, is a fundamental human right and every individual is eligible for such service if they are deemed unable to provide for themselves and their family. Thus, South Africa as a democratic state has an obligation to provide food to its citizens. This obligation can be met through legislations and policies that ensure that all citizens are enabled to meet their basic food needs. The provision of grants for example is another social policy measure that is used to realise this right (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002). Furthermore, this obligation is also in alignment with the first Millennium Development Goal’s target which is to halve poverty by 2015 (Jacobs, 2009). Therefore, evidently, providing sufficient food to its citizens is one of the priorities of the South African government.

The Department of Social Development together with its implementing agency, the South African Social Services Agency (SASSA), are highly involved with the provision and distribution of social security services. There are about 4 million unemployed citizens in South Africa, which make up an unemployment rate of 25.2% (Department of Social Development, 2010, p. 3). This reveals that there is high unemployment rate in the country. The International Labour Organization (2011) point out that South Africa is a country with one of the highest levels of income inequality. In addition, unemployment and poverty are higher among black people, and more especially women. Labadarios et al. (2009) highlight that many South Africans, mainly the Indians, Coloureds and Blacks were denied political rights and also excluded from participating in economic activity and this resulted in social exclusion. However, although the country has attained freedom, there are still groups of the South African population that are still marginalized and socially excluded. Thus, it can be said that although the country has attained political freedom, social and economic freedom is still elusive. Triegaardt (2002) argues that the elimination of apartheid did not do away with the inequalities that existed. She further highlights that poverty is in fact still widespread regardless of the country having had acquired political and economic freedom. This again speaks of the fact that the country still has a long way to go before it can achieve economic freedom for all as expected from a democratic state.

Like many other countries in the Southern African region, South Africa was affected by the global increase in food and fuel prices that occurred between the periods of 2006 and 2008 as already highlighted. This, according to Hart (2009), is what led to the current food insecurity situation in which many households are experiencing food crisis. This food crisis is characterised by food shortages which leave households and individuals vulnerable. According to the International Labour Organization (2011), the government increased the money distributed to the Social Relief of Distress programme from R13.6 million in November of 2008 to R57.2 million in January of 2009 following the recession that occurred at that time. This was a means of addressing the food shortages and thus doing away with food insecurity and poverty.

Ostergaard (1992) highlights that most people in households headed by women are amongst the poorest in third world countries. Female-headed households do not only have to deal with the issue of being amongst the poor but they also face the challenge of being excluded by social structures to enter into the work force (Hendriks, 2002). This however does not apply to all societies as most women are slowly entering into the work industry. It goes without saying that a considerable majority of women still face this problem of being unequally treated in societies. Triegaardt (2002) also supports this observation by saying that the poor African households that are mostly found in rural areas are indeed headed by women with children. She adds that these households are mainly dependent on social grants and remittances as a source of income.

Statistics South Africa (2003) revealed that about 35% of the total population of South Africa is vulnerable to food insecurity and that women, children and the elderly were the most vulnerable groups. This shows that food security and insecurity thereof have some gendered dimension to it. This draws attention to the fact that men and women are not equally vulnerable to food insecurity. However, Altman, Hart and Jacobs (2009) point out that there are gaps in relation to the gendered dimension of household food insecurity, thus there is limited understanding on gender relations and household food insecurity. Despite this, it is acknowledged that women indeed do play a major role in ensuring household food security along with other responsibilities.

## **2.4 Poverty, Unemployment and Inequality**

Frye (2008) notes that poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa have significantly increased. She adds that the HIV/AIDS pandemic increase the burden among vulnerable households and “threaten household disintegration and the demise of any forms of coping or survival strategies that had been employed before” (Frye, 2008, p. 12). These are some of the main issues that affect the South African population on a daily basis. Statistics South Africa (2012a, p.5) highlights that “during the period September 2008 to August 2009, approximately 26.3% of the population was living below the food poverty line (R305), while roughly 38.9% and 52.3% were living below the lower-bound poverty line (R416) and the upper-bound poverty

line (R577) respectively”. This supports the point that South Africa has increasing levels of mass poverty (Potgieter, 1998).

According to The Presidency (2008, cited in Van der Berg & Siebrits, 2010), poverty in South Africa is mainly caused by unemployment and/or the absence of earned income. Finn, Liebbrandt and Wegner (2011) add that the high level of poverty in South Africa is sustained by unemployment, in particularly, unemployment amongst the youth. Thus, it is highlighted that as a means of addressing this problem, more economic opportunities should be created to enhance self-reliance amongst those who are currently unemployed (The Presidency, 2008, p.16, cited in Van der Berg & Siebrits, 2010).

Van der Berg and Siebrits (2010) further add that employment growth since post 1994 has not been adequate to reduce unemployment and poverty. Poverty and inequality continue to be influenced by the disparities in distribution (Finn et al., 2011). The Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security (2002, p.25) also adds that poverty and inequality are entrenched in the labour market, “in part in low wages, and in part in very high rates of unemployment”. This shows that there is an interrelationship between poverty, unemployment and inequality. Although the connection is not a direct one and it is not clear as to which one leads to the other, it can be acknowledged that there is a connection between these three aspects.

#### **2.4.1 Poverty**

There is no single, agreed upon definition of poverty across the world. South Africa is no exception as it also has no universal definition. Regardless of this, poverty is said to be “a key development problem in social, economic and political terms” (Statistics South Africa, 2012a, p.3). This indicates that poverty has an impact on the social, economic and political levels. According to Frye (2008, p.14), poverty is “multifaceted, reflecting unmet needs and exclusions across complex and often mutually reinforcing dimensions”. The report of the Committee of Inquiry into a comprehensive social security system (2002) raised that poverty can be defined in either absolute or relative terms. However, a broad definition of poverty would entail defining it

as “the inability of individuals, households or entire communities to command sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable minimum standard of living” (Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security, 2002, p.15). Thus, the understanding of poverty comes down to the acknowledgement of the inability of individuals, families and communities to maintain a standard of living on a daily basis. This does not necessarily speak of the material aspects but more specifically addressing the basic human needs such as food.

South Africa is one of the countries where poverty has reached its peak (Frye, 2008). Labadarios et al. (2009) reveal that about 57% of the South Africa population are living below the poverty line. This is a large proportion of the population. Finn, et al. (2011) highlight that the black African population makes up 90 % of the poor people in South Africa due to the high number of the African black people, followed by the coloured people. They further add that although the Black African poverty seems to be declining with the national poverty lines, this is not the case for the coloured population. This means that the levels are high and needs to be addressed as the masses are affected.

In comparison with the wealthy households, poor households rely on government for income to sustain themselves as opposed to generating income from employment (Finn et al., 2011). According to Statistics South Africa (2012, p.54), females are more impoverished than males in South Africa, with a headcount of 58, 6 % as compared to 54,9 % for males. This again reveals the gender dimension of poverty. Frye (2008) draws attention to the troubling fact that unemployment is more prevalent among the youth, and the black African youths are the most affected by this. Yu (2013) notes that the high levels of unemployment amongst the youth contributes to social ills of the country and further affect the economy of the country at large. In addition to this, the issue of poverty leaves individuals (more especially the youth) even more vulnerable to social problems and “effectively trapping people and their dependants in a cycle of poverty” (Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security, 2002, p.16). From a holistic point of view, poverty can arguably be said to lead to many social ills like high teenage pregnancy, crime, food insecurity, etc.

## **2.4.2 Inequality and Unemployment**

Tregenna and Tsela (2008) highlight that South Africa ranks the highest in the world in terms of the high levels of inequality. This is so despite the fact that the country has a well-developed constitution that is meant to address social issues such as inequality. Inequality can be defined as “the unequal benefits or opportunities for individuals or groups within a society” (Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security, 2002, p.16). Briefly, it is about the unequal social and economic opportunities that individuals in society face and it can be related to, if not about, the issues around race, class, gender, age, etc.

Income and earnings inequality has said to have worsened post 1994, through out to the early 2000’s (Finn et al., 2011). Poverty within the country is linked with employment or lack thereof, in that it is affected by whether one receives an income and also the issue of the value of an income if it is received (Frye, 2008). This suggests that although the creation of employment opportunities would be an effective measure of addressing poverty, the jobs created should enable individuals to generate sufficient income to protect them and their families against the cycle of poverty. Doing away with contract and casual employment and creation of permanent employment for example can be a mechanism of addressing the issue of unstable source of income.

Despite the fact that migration of people from rural areas into cities has contributed towards high levels of inequality in the urban areas, it has however done the reverse in the rural areas (Finn et al, 2011). This is to say that there has been a significant decrease in inequality in rural areas at the expense of an increase in the urban areas. This has also resulted in an increase in what Hagen-Zanker, Morgan and Math (2011, p.15) refer to as “urbanisation of poverty”. This trend is however not a recent phenomenon as people have been long moving into cities in pursuit of better opportunities and experiencing poverty as a result in cases where one fails to secure employment.

## **2.5 Food (in)security in South Africa**

### **2.5.1 Food security**

In order to understand and conceptualize the meaning of the term food insecurity, it is essential to first unlock the meaning of food security. Like many other concepts such as poverty, food security is also a contested concept. South Africa does not have a scale of measurement for food security, which makes it even harder to have an agreed upon meaning of what food security is (Altman et al., 2009). Nevertheless, there are some accepted definitions of food security.

According to the FAO (2003, p. 29), food security “is said to exist when people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. This definition highlights the different elements of food security which are food availability and accessibility at all times, sufficient to meet the individual dietary preferences and also that it should ultimately result in a healthy life. This implies that not only should one have access to sufficient food, but that it should be food that meets their dietary requirements to enable them to live a healthy life on a sustainable basis.

Bonti-Ankomah (2001, p.2) thus defines household food security as “access by all households at all times to adequate safe and nutritious food for a healthy and productive life”. This definition is inclusive of all members within a household. Thus, food security is said to exist at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels (Hart, 2009). As such, we do not focus on individuals only when assessing food security, but we go beyond this to include the households, the country as a whole and the rest of the world. Hendriks (2002, p.51) highlight that household food security is determined by “the adequacy and sustainability of livelihoods”. Again, this indicates that the food supply should be enough (adequate) and this should be so on a continuous basis (sustainable).

It is highlighted that a household’s vulnerability to food insecurity increases when more of its resources are directed to food needs and leaving less for other basic needs (Bonti-Ankomah, 2001). As such, it can be said that it is essential that households receive income on an on-going basis to reduce their vulnerability to food shortages.

South Africa has been meeting the food needs of its population for the past twenty years according to the National Food Security Indicators. Thus, the country is said to be food secure at the national level; “it produces its main staple foods, exports its surplus food, and imports what it needs to meet its food requirements” (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002, p.20). In spite of this, Altman et al. (2009) highlight that food security at the national level is often confused with food accessibility and availability at the household levels. Although national food indicators for example might reveal that the country is doing well with regards to food security, this does not necessarily imply that individuals and households at grassroots levels are also food secure. Thus, South Africa as a country is food secure but large proportions of its households are food insecure. Hart (2009) also corroborates this by saying that the country’s national indicator of food security is not a reflection of households. Simply put, what happens at the national level does not trickle down to the people in dire need of food security. Hendriks (2002) indicate that millions of South African households and individuals continue to be food insecure regardless of South Africa having had achieved national food security.

Altman et al. (2009, p.7) highlight that “food security is multidimensional in nature and changes over time, making accurate measurement and policy targeting a challenge”. The complexity and nature of food security, including the lack of scale of measurement makes defining it uneasy. Based on what has been discussed, it is evident that there are huge disparities in the country’s food security indicators. Again it brings to mind the question of how a country can be nationally food secure yet individuals and households are food insecure.

## **2.5.2 Food insecurity**

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (cited in Labadarios et al., 2009, p.9) food insecurity can be understood as “implying a limited access to food, as well as a limited ability to secure adequate food”. This definition highlights that not only is food insecurity about limited access to food but it also entails the inability to secure a source of food which is required to maintain life. Similarly, the FAO (2003, p.29) state that “food insecurity exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food ...”. These definitions

underline the fact that not having access or the means to secure food on a daily basis is one of the primary causal factors of food insecurity.

Altman et al. (2009) note that a large proportion of hungry people are in the metropolitan areas and thus policies that focus on poverty, particularly targeting the rural areas will not necessarily reach the food insecure masses. They add that this can be accounted for by migration as many people are moving from the rural to the urban areas in search for better economic and educational opportunities as already highlighted. Van der Merwe (2011) supports this and adds that cities in South Africa are indeed experiencing large inflow of people from rural areas who seek better life opportunities. This, ultimately, result in an overflow of people in most cities.

The increase in the rate of people migrating into cities is accompanied also by an increase in social problems such as high crime rates, poverty and unemployment. According to Van der Merwe (2011, p.1), one of the major social and developmental challenges is “to ensure food security for all people in urban areas, especially inner cities”. With many people moving into the urban areas it means that there is population increase in cities, the competition for job opportunities is high and some individuals end up being unemployed due to lack of skills for example. Consequently, they are exposed to poverty and food insecurity as they do not have a stable source of income. However, on the other hand, Bonti-Ankomah (2001 p.16) maintains that “those most vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity are rural people and larger sized households and children”. This should not be taken to imply that people in urban areas are not vulnerable to poverty, but that they are rather considered to be less vulnerable. Nonetheless, the above literature shed light on the fact that there is indeed vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity both in the rural and urban areas that needs to be addressed.

A disadvantage that most people in urban areas face as opposed to their counterparts in the rural areas is the lack of land where they can produce their own food. Thus, “food security in the urban areas is largely dependent on money, which requires one to have a stable source of income to ensure food security (Van der Merwe, 2011, p.2). This implies that food security in the urban areas is determined by stable, financial income. However, it should be noted that it might not be as straight forward as we would like to think for people in the rural areas to produce food

through agriculture as they did in the past. This, for example, is affected by issues relating to climate change, modernisation, etc.

## **2.6 Factors associated with food insecurity**

Labadarios et al. (2009) also bring to light to the fact that although South Africa has made some political and economic advances pre 1994, the country continues to have poverty, unemployment and also high food and fuel prices which contribute to issues of food security or insecurity thereof. Food insecurity is multidimensional, meaning that it can be caused by multiple factors. Socio-economic factors like unemployment for instance can contribute towards food insecurity. Altman et al. (2009) however highlight that there is no distinct link between poverty, income and household food security. Nevertheless, this should not be taken to imply that there is no direct link between poverty, income and household food security. In fact, Bonti-Ankomah (2001) argues that poverty indeed has serious consequences for food security and as unemployment increases, it becomes hard for many households to sustain themselves as incomes are low and in other cases, absent. Thus, due to poverty and unemployment, many South African households are indeed food insecure. Overall, poverty, unemployment and food (in)security can be said to be interconnected. This further leaves room for the assumption that these factors do lead to food insecurity. Van der Merwe (2011) mentions that food prices are indeed a critical determinant of food security and that this is especially the case in urban areas as purchasing food is mostly the means of generating food in this context.

Food security was identified as a basic human need in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP, 1994) when outlining the strategic framework for action to achieve food security. The framework acknowledges that poverty and food insecurity are a legacy of the apartheid's socio-economic and political order (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002). Be it as it may, it has been twenty years into democracy, thus relevant state departments should take responsibility and action and the blame should be shifted away from apartheid. This is not to say that we discard the fact that apartheid has contributed to social issues such as poverty and unemployment, but that something should be done about it instead. According to the International Labour Organization (2011, p.2), "poverty and unemployment remain structurally

inter-linked". As a way forward, the social structures that perpetuate such issues should be challenged.

Altman et al. (2009, p.9) highlight that South Africa is indeed encountering a food insecurity problem at the household level, "the prime causes of which are widespread chronic poverty and unemployment". Bonti-Ankomah (2001) indicates that South Africa is also among the developing countries which have a bad record of poverty and inequalities. Thus, this makes it hard to have a clear, accurate estimate of the intensity of poverty and inequality with regards to food insecurity.

Hart (2009, p.365) adds that "the country experiences both chronic poverty and chronic food insecurity which can be accounted for by structural inequalities and income distribution". This is mainly due to the fact that many households, both in the rural and urban areas rely on purchased food. Thus they are highly dependent on paid employment and as indicated earlier, the country has a high unemployment rate. The higher the levels of unemployment are, the more the prevalence of poverty and household vulnerability to food insecurity. On the other hand, Altman et al. (2009, p.5) highlights that "about half of households who are often or always hungry are eligible but do not receive grants". This highlights that there are gaps which still need to be filled in pursuit of addressing food insecurity in the country.

## **2.7 Consequences of food insecurity**

Food insecurity does not only have a negative impact on households but it also affects the communities, societies and the country at large. The Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa (IFSS) report highlights that food insecurity in fact affects all levels of social and economic life (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002). Bonti-Ankomah (2001, p.2) highlights that "33% of the South African population is vulnerable to food insecurity. Furthermore, 22% of all children under the age of nine years are stunted due to chronic malnutrition". This shows that not only does food insecurity affect adults but that it has a negative effect on children as well. The percentages revealing vulnerability were from around the

period of 2000, and assuming that this has increased due to the recession that occurred in the years that followed, it is alarming that South Africa indeed has a food insecurity problem.

At the national level, it is said that food insecurity can result in “social costs as diverse as high policing, criminal and justice expenses, and low investor confidence, and its resulting loss of capital investments” (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002, p. 17). This indicates that not only does food insecurity affect the country on its own but it also has a potential of ruining its image at the international level which might negatively impact on investments and funding.

According to the General Household Food Survey (cited in Altman et al., 2009, p.11), 10.6% and 12.2% of adults and children were “sometimes or always hungry” in 2007 while National Food Consumption Survey (NFCS) indicated that 52% of households were experiencing hunger in 2005. Although the above indicators are not the same in that they have used different scales and levels of measurement and they were taken in different years, they both however highlight the existence of an escalating food crisis in the country.

At the household level, food insecurity can lead to extremely high levels of health and medical costs, high funeral expenses and low labour productivity. Women and children are mostly affected by food insecurity within the households. Household food insecurity can also be linked to slow educational and physical development in children (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002, p. 17). Again, indicating that the consequences are severe for children. Furthermore, food insecurity can result in anti-social behaviour in our societies and contribute to high rates of corruption and violent crimes in the country at large (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002). On the same note, it can be summarised that food insecurity can have a causal effect on social problems, including educational and physical developmental issues.

Bonti-Ankomah (2001, p.2) supports the observation that women and young children are the ones who usually have to bear the long term negative consequences of food insecurity as it affects their learning capacity and productivity in adult life. Kwashiorkor and marasmus are some of the well-known malnutrition related “protein- energy deficiencies” in young children that are also related to household food insecurity. Thus malnutrition, which is caused by lack of sufficient, nutritious food, is said to have negative health consequences. This shows that food

insecurity among these groups does not only affect their social life but that it also affects their lives on a long term basis, leaving them even more vulnerable to the cycle of food insecurity.

## **2.8 Addressing food insecurity**

According to the Department of Agriculture (2002)'s report on the Integrated Food Security Strategy, inadequate safety nets and weak disaster management systems are some of the factors that hinder South Africa's ability to achieve food security at the national level. Thus, the creation of policies and strategies that enable citizens to have access to food at all times is a step towards achieving food security not only at the national level, but also on the household and individual levels.

Policy makers argue that income supplements do not always reach the intended target, which are children. If we take for example the Child Support Grant, there are instances where it is alleged that the primary care giver of the child does not use the money for the benefit of the child but rather for their own personal benefit. South Africa is amongst countries which utilise feeding schemes in schools to address malnutrition in children (Bonti-Ankomah, 2001). However, this strategy can be said to be lacking, or rather insufficient as it only provides food to children when they are in schools.

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is one of the government initiatives which are used to combat poverty. This programme provides short term employment, experience and training to unemployed people and also provides them with access to further employment opportunities (Van der Berg & Siebrits, 2010). The problem regarding this programme however is the issue of sustainability and addressing high rates of unemployment. Although individuals are provided with training and further linked with employment opportunities, being involved in the programme does not always guarantee the individual with employment at the end of the programme. Of most critical importance is the issue around the aspect of permanent employment as well. In as much as it is important for unemployed people to get employment in order to generate an income, it is also crucial to ensure that this source of income is secured (permanent), sufficient and will be on an on-going basis so as to also compliment the sustainability of the programme. This in the long process will address the issue of poverty and unemployment, reduce

the number of individuals and households who are directly and indirectly dependent on social grants and also empower them to be independent and not rely on state social provisions.

It has also been suggested that the provision of land can assist in addressing the vulnerability to food insecurity. That is, “those who are able to work but unemployed” can be offered the opportunity to decrease their vulnerability to food insecurity through the provision of land since they are not legible to any social welfare programmes (Bonti-Ankomah, 2001, p. 14). The land provided can be used for agricultural cultivation which can be used both for personal sustenance and commercial purposes depending on how sizeable the land is.

The Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) was launched in 2000 and it comprises of different food security sub-programmes in South Africa. Its goal is to “eradicate hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity over 2015” (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002, p.13). Such sub-programmes entail programmes like Primary School Nutrition Programme, the National Nutrition and Social Development Programme (food banks and social relief of distress programme for example), (Bonti-Ankomah, 2001). The IFSS was introduced as a means of helping to achieve the first millennium developmental goal which is to half poverty between 2004 and 2014; “It aims to eradicate hunger and nutrition deficits among low-income households” (Jacobs, 2009, p. 420). This programme is aimed at addressing food insecurity and employing such a programme could be a way forward to eradicating poverty and hunger.

Rural households, particularly large households, are said to be more vulnerable to poverty than small-sized households and are also said to be more vulnerable to food insecurity, thus they “need to be targeted for poverty alleviation strategies and nutrition programmes” (Bonti-Ankomah, 2001, p.5). However, similar households in urban areas should not be excluded in such programmes. This is bearing in mind that a lot of people are migrating to the cities in pursuit of better opportunities. Thus, it is not always guaranteed that they will secure employment, which leaves them just as vulnerable as people in the rural areas.

Altman et al. (2009) highlight that there is indeed evidence that reveals that social grants have played an important role in promoting household food security. Thus, ensuring income security is an essential means of addressing food insecurity.

Van der Merwe (2011) suggests that one of the means of addressing food insecurity from the national level is to create economic conditions that would be in the favour of those who are experiencing food insecurity. An example in this case would be to increase and create new employment opportunities as this will secure income generation. This is important as many households that are already food insecure do not have the resources to produce sufficient food. As mentioned earlier, urban residents are more reliant on income as a means of survival and ensuring food security for themselves and their households as they have to purchase their food. Thus, it cannot not be emphasised enough that stable employment is thus required for ensuring food security for the longer run.

## **2.9 Social Security in South Africa**

As highlighted earlier, social security is a fundamental human right of every South African citizen who cannot provide for themself and their family. For the purpose of this research, social security will be defined as “a wide range of public and private measures that provide cash or in-kind benefits both, first, in the event of an individual’s earning power being permanently ceasing, being interrupted, never developing, or being exercised only at acceptable social cost and when such a person is unable to avoid poverty, and secondly in order to maintain children” (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997, cited in Patel, 2005 p. 125). According to this definition, social security is mainly meant to address lack of income which might result in individuals experiencing issues like poverty and food shortage and also for the sustenance of the children. Van der Berg and Siebrits (2010, p. 3) add that the social security system “provides protection against risks of income loss due to contingencies such as old age, unemployment, disability, or injuries sustained at work”. In South Africa, the two main social security programmes are social assistance, which is means-tested, and social insurance, which is meant to assist employees and their families when income generation is disrupted (Triegaardt,

2002). It is important to note that this research was focusing only on one form of social security, social assistance and in particular the social relief of distress programme.

The South African social security system is amongst the best social security systems in the world regardless of the fact that it is a middle income country. The social assistance aspect of the social security is well developed in accordance with the international standards (Van der Berg, Siebrits & Lekezwa, 2010). In fact, there is consensus between developed and developing countries about social security being significant for poverty reduction, the betterment of people's lives and also in addressing the "equitable" distribution of income in society (Patel, 2005, p.122). This shows that social security is recognised internationally as an important mechanism for addressing social issues that affect people in their everyday lives. In a global ranking of national social security systems, South Africa was ranked 64 out of the 172 countries, with Australia deemed to have the most well-designed social security system in the world (Patel, 2005). Bonti-Ankomah (2001, p.10), indicates that the South African social security system is said to be advanced "both in terms of coverage against contingencies and spending ratios" compared to other developing countries. Furthermore, Triegaardt (2002) notably highlights that social assistance is a programme that is mainly responsible for poverty alleviation in South Africa. The Department of Social Development (2010) argues that social security does not only strive to deal with poverty but that it also extends social inclusion of previously marginalized groups in society. This means that one of the purposes of social security includes catering for the groups that are socially marginalized.

Statistics South Africa's 2012 General Household Survey reveals that the percentage of individuals that benefitted from social grants have increased from 12,1% in 2002 to 29,6% in 2012. At the same time, the percentage of households that received at least one grant increased from 29, 9% to 43,6% (Statistics South Africa, 2012b, p.2). This further supports the fact that social security provisions play a major role in combating poverty. Overall, social welfare spending is the largest after health and education and it is considered as one of the three factors that will improve the social conditions of South Africans (Triegaardt, 2002). The Department of Social Development's Overview of South Africa's Social Security System report (2010) revealed that the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) was providing grants to over 15 million

beneficiaries and it also had the sore responsibility of ensuring that these grants were provided on legitimate basis. Furthermore, it was also highlighted that re-registration of grants is one of the mechanisms which the agency is using to address issues of fraud and corruption within the system. These statistics emphasise the impact and importance of the social assistance provisions in the lives of poor citizens in South Africa.

Frye (2008) draws attention to the fact that although the social security system in South Africa is acknowledged intentionally for its broad coverage as compared to other developing countries, there are many South Africans who are unemployed and still living in poverty as there is no specific coverage for the unemployed people. The problem with this, he adds, is that there is “no acknowledgement of the fact that more than a third of working age people are unemployed, or that the majority of employed people are paid such low wages as to constitute the working poor” (Frye, 2008, p.12). This again calls to question the issue of the need for social security coverage to those who are unemployed and living in poverty, more especially the youth.

## **2.10 Social Assistance**

The social security system consists of social assistance and social insurance, both of which are meant to “provide protection against risks of income loss due to various contingencies” (Van der Berg & Siebrits, 2010, p.14). Patel (2005, p.124) defines social assistance as “a range of benefits in cash or in kind intended to provide protection for the most needy in society”. One of the distinctive features of social assistance is that it is non-contributory and it is also means tested. This means that the recipients do not have to make any form of contribution towards social assistance as it is funded by the state and recipients are selected based on their neediness (income or ability to earn income therefore). Thus, not everyone is legible for social assistance.

Social assistance can be traced back to what is called “the era of mutual responsibility” in Potgieter (1998, p. 16). This was during the 15th century and individuals were expected to take care of themselves and their families. In cases where people were deemed poor and could not provide for themselves, churches took upon the role to assist and provide for those who could not support themselves and their families. At the later stage around the 16th century, the government took upon the role of providing for the poor masses through taxation. Following this, private

philanthropic organisations also got involved and offered some aid in the name of humanity for the poor. Both government and private sector increasingly became involved in welfare practices towards the 19th century (Potgieter, 1998).

Social assistance in South Africa is means tested and it is mainly provided to vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and the disabled. Van der Berg et al. (2010) highlight that the means test is important and required as it ensures that the funds and benefits are targeted to the most deserving people in society which are the vulnerable and less privileged. The means test can be seen as a mechanism of ensuring that social grants are well targeted and also as a means of addressing issues of corruption and fraud.

Frye (2008, p.27) highlights that the social assistance system in South Africa is the largest in the African continent and that “there are claims that the proportion of beneficiaries to the total population in South Africa is the highest in the world”. She further adds that social grants in particular play a significant role of providing income to individuals without employment and their families. This is so despite the fact that a lot of people do not want to be seen as ‘grant recipients’, thus dependent on the state provisions for survival (Frye, 2008). This issue can be related to stigmas that are associated with being a beneficiary of state social grants that go around in some communities. In terms of spending, the government expenditure on social grants has increased from R16 027 million (which is about 2.3 per cent of GDP) in 1998 to R71 161 million (which is 31 per cent of GDP) in 2009 (Van der Berg & Siebrits, 2010, p.6). This shows that since the attainment of democracy, the government has been prioritising the provision of social security which is a basic human right.

There is literature that corroborates the point that social grants (which are a form of social assistance) play a vital socio-economic role in the lives of poor South Africans. Van der Berg and Siebrits (2010) point out that within the past fifteen years social grants have significantly become the main source of income in poor households. They add that social grants contribute up to 50% of income in poor households. Most of such households are in the rural areas and are headed by the elderly. Finn, et al. (2011) highlight that the old grant in particular has been found to be the main source of income in poor households in rural areas. The same applies to the child support grant that is also provided by the government.

Van der Berg and Siebrits (2010) argue that although the provision of cash transfers (in the means of social grants) to the poor can arguably be said to be significant in the struggle against poverty, the effect of such depends highly on how the people use the money. This speaks about issues relating to how the money is spent and what it is spent on. So as much as individuals and/or households may be receiving a grant, its effectiveness in addressing poverty highly depends on the expenditure of each individual household.

While social grants are one of the social policy mechanisms which have been influential in the eradication of poverty, Finn et al. (2011) point out that this has not eradicated inequality. Furthermore, although the National Household Surveys for the past 15 years have indicated an increase in household income, this has not resulted in the decline in inequality in our country. The opposite has in fact occurred (Finn et al., 2011). That is, the levels of inequality have increased in the post-apartheid years. It is evident from such findings that there are still disparities that need to be addressed in our country.

### **2.10.1 Social relief of distress**

Social assistance includes the social relief of distress and social grants such as the old age pension, child support grant and the disability grants which will however not be the focus of this study. The social relief of distress compromises of food vouchers, food parcels and cash-in-kind which were introduced in 2002. It is provided on a monthly basis for a period of three months to individuals who are unable to meet the most basic needs for their families and themselves (International Labour Organizations, 2011, p. 7). However, the social relief of distress can be extended to six months under circumstances which are determined upon assessment. The people who are eligible for social relief of distress are the vulnerable and needy who are assessed by a means test. The value of the social relief of distressed is mostly based on need but does not exceed the value of the old age grant (Patel, 2005; Department of Social Development, 2010).

Social relief of distress is defined as “a temporary provision of assistance intended for persons in such dire material need that they are unable to meet their families’ most dire needs” (Department of Social Development, 2010, p. 2). In Frye (2008, p.31), social relief of distress is referred to as a grant that is provided for a very short period in circumstances where “a person finds

themselves in distressed circumstances”; these distressed circumstances refer to situations such as “death, institutionalization or illness of a breadwinner and external disasters”. Thus from this it can be understood that social relief of distress is a measure or an intervention that is put in place during the period in which income generation is interrupted. A distinct feature that can be picked up from the definition about social relief of distress is that it is temporary. Also, the fact that it is provided to individuals who are in dire need implies that it is means tested. The provision of the social relief of distress may vary as per the circumstance of each individual and/or household. It can either be provided in the form of cash-in-kind, food parcel or a food voucher (International Labour Organization, 2011). The food parcels are the most common and well known form of the social relief of distress amongst people.

There are numerous requirements that one should meet to qualify for the social relief of distress. However, not all of them will be highlighted as there are a number of them. The people who are eligible for the social relief of distress as outlined in the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004, should be South Africans or permanent citizens, those who are awaiting the outcome of their grant application, those who are certified medically unfit to work by a medical doctor, people who have been affected by a disaster, those who are deemed to be having insufficient means to sustain themselves and they should not be receiving any grant nor maintenance. In terms of the value, there is no standard amount for the social relief of distress. However, the value does not exceed the amount of the old age grant (Government Gazette, 2008, p. 32). These highlighted points form part of the requirements that make up the means test.

During the launch of the social relief of distress programme, the then Minister of Social Development Zola Skweyiya stated that social relief of distress is meant for the poorest of the poor in communities (Mail & Guardian, 2009). This means that although some individuals might be deemed poor, the element of relative poverty plays an important part in the final decision as to who gets the assistance. The challenge then becomes the issue of sustainability of this form of assistance. It is a temporary intervention that individuals receive while they are in distress. However, the bigger question is to what happens next once the assistance is terminated. This

points out to the fact that the individual might still be in distress after the term of the assistance has lapsed. Although we do not want to create dependency on the state, we need to acknowledge challenges and social ills that people are encountering at the grassroots level such as the lack of sufficient employment opportunities.

## **2.11 Challenges**

As highlighted already, South African unemployed individuals, unlike those who were previously employed, are not covered by the social security provisions. These individuals are expected to provide for themselves regardless of the high unemployment rate and lack of sufficient job opportunities in the country. Although some individuals who were previously employed are covered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), this provision is however not a sustainable source of income as it can be terminated once their benefits have been used up (Van der Berg, 2010). In the long run, they are also left vulnerable to poverty and its consequences should they not secure an alternative means of income.

The Department of Social Development (2010) also highlights that although social assistance provides coverage for children, the elderly and the disabled, the unemployed people are one vulnerable group which is not catered for by the South African social assistance provision. It further highlights that out of this unemployed group, a considerable part contains young people between the ages of 18 and 35 years old. Another shortcoming of the social relief of distress is in the fact that it is short term. This means that it is only provided for a minimal period of time (International Labour Organization, 2011). What seems to be problematic about this is that individuals who still do not have stable employment or a source of securing income after the time frame of the social relief of distress has lapsed are left vulnerable to food insecurity again. Thus, it can be said that the social security system of South Africa is “inadequate in addressing food security and ensuring that every citizen is able to meet their minimum dietary requirement to avoid malnutrition” (Bonti-Ankomah, 2001, p.11).

Hart (2009, p.372) observes that “emergency relief measures tend to focus more on transitory food insecurity and neglect chronic food insecurity, which detriment the poor more”. Alternatively, it would be preferable and effective to rather focus on the root causes of food insecurity and address them as opposed to focusing on the after effects. This is to say that we deal with the problem before it occurs, or address it at its earliest development as opposed to waiting for the problem to get out of hand before dealing with it. For example, provide employment opportunities for people as opposed to offering them social relief of distress when they have run out of employment or means of generating income.

The government, with some assistance of the private sector and NGOs, issued agricultural starter packs to some vulnerable communities in addition to the social relief of distress (International Labour Organization, 2011). This however is limited as it does not apply to all communities across the country. Thus, some of the poor communities are left vulnerable and this does not go well with the scope of the South African social security system.

## **2.12 Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature on food security and insecurity thereof and social assistance in South Africa. It provided both the global and South African contexts. As highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, issues of poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa were also highlighted. It further provided the definition of food security and food insecurity, including the factors associated with food insecurity and implications thereof. It also discussed the South African social security system, and in particular looking at the Social Relief of Distress programme. The following chapter will discuss the research design and methodology that were used in the study.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the steps that were followed in the research study. It provides an overview on the research design, the research participants, the sampling procedure, the research tools and the research instruments that were used, piloting of the study, data collection and data analysis. It further explains the ethical issues that were taken into consideration throughout the course of the study and discusses the strengths and limitations of the study.

### **3.2. Research design**

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of the social workers about social relief of distress as an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity. The study was based on the social workers' experiences and opinions which are the subjective truth. Thus the researcher chose the qualitative research design. As Padgett (2008, cited in Royse 2011, p. 261) notes, a qualitative research design is used when a researcher "wants to obtain the perspective of participants in their own words and actions and wishes to obtain a deep understanding and to write a rich description" on the matter being researched. de Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011) highlight another characteristic of a qualitative study as that of using the place where the participants experience the issues being researched to collect data. This was also the case in this research.

When a study seeks to generate new insights and information about a particular social phenomenon that is understudied, it can be regarded as exploratory in nature (Rubin & Babbie, 2001). Unlike other social assistance programmes like the old age grant and the child support grant, the social relief of distress programme is seldom researched. Thus the study was exploratory because it aimed to generate new insights and understanding about the effectiveness of this programme from the participants' perspective. Rubin and Babbie (2005) highlight that the

shortcoming of an exploratory study is that although it provides an understanding of the research question, it hardly ever answers the research question.

### **3.3. Study population**

The study population consisted of social workers from the Department of Social Development, Johannesburg Metropolitan area who had at least 3 years' experience and had worked with beneficiaries of social relief of distress. Out of a total population of about 300 social workers with three years' experience and above, 8 were sampled for the study. In addition, key informants were drawn from the SASSA office in central Johannesburg. This was done because SASSA officials work with the distribution of the social relief of distress and therefore they provided depth to the study. Out of a population of 41 officials, two key informants formed part of the study. The need to approach SASSA officials arose during data collection and it was also highly recommended by senior social workers in the study who advised that the SASSA officials would provide in-depth information.

### **3.4. Sampling**

A sample of 8 participants was selected using non-probability purposive sampling. The participants with the desired characteristics were approached and briefed about the research study, including its aim and objectives. Those who were available and willing to participate in the study were then asked to participate. Not all social workers have worked with beneficiaries of social relief of distress thus a non-probability purposive sampling method was employed to select the appropriate participants. When selecting the two key informants from SASSA, the researcher approached the supervisor at the central Johannesburg office and explained to him about the study and then asked for permission to conduct interviews with two of their employees as key informants. The supervisor agreed and then recommended two officials who agreed to participate upon being invited to participate in the study.

According to de Vos et al. (2011), advantages of non-probability sampling procedure are that it is convenient for gathering participants and it does not exclude anyone who wants to partake in the study. This was also the case in this research study as all the potential participants with the relevant information were invited to participate in the study. Babbie (2010) however points out that the shortcoming of this sampling procedure is that the researcher may not be able to generalise the findings obtained from the data. However, this cannot be viewed as an impediment in this case as the aim of the research was not to make generalisations but rather explore whether social relief of distress is viewed as an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity by social workers who engage with the beneficiaries of this programme.

Prior to conducting data collection, there were steps that had to be followed. The researcher asked permission from the Department of Social Development head office if the research can be conducted within their department. The department was provided with the research proposal entailing the details of the study. Upon receiving permission, the researcher also applied for ethics clearance from the university's ethic committee. These steps were all essential procedures of the research process and were required to also ensure the participants that all the right steps were followed. It was after these steps that the potential participants were approached.

### **3.5. Research instrumentation**

A semi- structured interview schedule was used to collect data. Bryman (2008) highlights that a semi-structured interview schedule is flexible and prone to changes as things might unfold in an unanticipated manner during the interview process. de Vos et al. (2011) state that the advantage of using a semi-structured interview schedule is that the research participants are not limited when giving their responses and the researcher also gets the opportunity to follow up on responses that are not clear.

### **3.6. Piloting**

The researcher pre-tested the research tool before data collection took place. According to de Vos et al. (2011) piloting is a method which entails administering the research tool with individual/s that will not be in the sample before data collection occurs. The aim of piloting is to pre-check the research questions in the interview schedule to see if the questions are clear and also if they can be easily understood (Babbie, 2010). In this case, the researcher pre-tested the research tool with one social worker who was not included in the sample. During the pre-testing of the research tool, the social worker showed an understanding of the research interview and thus no changes were made to the research tool.

### **3.7. Data collection**

The data was collected using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to gather detailed information as the participants were not restricted or rather limited when giving their responses. The interviews took place at the participants' work place at the Department of Social Development and also at SASSA so as to avoid interfering with their working hours. Some participants availed themselves upon being approached while others made appointments for the day and time in which they would be available. The response time differed for each participant and the interviews lasted between 30 minutes to 40 minutes per interview. The researcher was able to ask follow up questions with the participants and also engage with them in an in-depth manner because the interviews were one on one.

The participants were provided with participants' information sheets, consent forms for participating in the study and also consent forms for audio-taping. With the permission of the participants, a tape recorder was used to record the interviews. However, regardless of the ethical issues regarding audio tapes being explained, there were a few participants who refused to be recorded. In those instances, the researcher had to take down notes. However it is acknowledged that some valuable information might have been lost as the researcher had to interact with the participants and ask follow up questions. It was proposed that data collection would be done in a

period of two weeks but it took about three and a half weeks as some participants were not available and the researcher had to wait for the time that was suitable for the participants.

### **3.8. Data analysis**

The data was analysed using thematic content analysis. According to O'Leary (2004) thematic content analysis is a method that entails using codes to organise the collected data into different themes that will then be used to interpret and make sense of the data. There are about five steps that are followed when employing thematic content analysis as outlined by Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006). The steps of which the researcher also followed are:

Familiarisation and immersion: this step entailed going through data like the interview transcripts and field notes with the aim of familiarising oneself with it, then brainstorming and making notes. The next step was to induce themes from the information that was been put together in the previous step. This step entailed arranging the information into themes. The third step was coding and it entailed organising the information and themes into codes which reduced the information from large quantities to manageable meaningful chunks. The fourth step was elaboration which entailed exploring the themes more closely and some were even revised. The last step was interpretation and checking which entailed providing an interpretation of the phenomenon that was studied in written format and going through it again to check for loop holes in information if any (Terre Blanche et. al, 2006, pp. 322-326). These steps were not followed in this order but they were however used as a guideline by the researcher.

In ensuring the quality of the research, the study looked into three of the four elements of trustworthiness which are credibility, dependability and confirmability. Bryman (2008) describes credibility as involving carrying out the study ethically and also providing the findings to the research participants at the end of the study to confirm if the findings are indeed correct; He explains dependability as entailing the storage of all detailed records, observations made and also raw data which can later be referred to. Confirmability on the other hand refers to the

researcher's ability to put aside their personal views, assumptions and beliefs and not let these interfere with the study. While conducting the research, the researcher tried by all means to put aside her personal views and followed the ethical code of conduct in research. The feedback on the research results and findings will also be provided to the Department of Social Development. As a means of ensuring the dependability of the study, the tapes and interview schedules will be kept for two years following any publication or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.

### **3.9. Ethical considerations: -**

#### ***Respect and autonomy***

Royse (2011) highlights that respect is a fundamental social work principle, thus the research participants were treated with regard and courtesy. The participants were not judged and their views and opinions were taken into consideration accordingly.

#### ***Voluntary participation***

According to Royse (2011), it is essential in social work research that the participants partake on their own free will. This is in alignment with the right to self-determination of the client in social work practice. The participants were not coerced to participate in the study and they were also informed that there will not be any penalties should they refuse to participate. Furthermore, they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point should they have wished to do so.

#### ***Informed consent***

Barbie (2010) highlights that for the participants to voluntarily participate in a study, they should be well aware of the details of the study. This includes factors like the risks and benefits involved and what the study entails. The participants were provided with written participant information sheets with details of the study and also consent forms which they were asked to sign when they were agreeing to participating in the study. Some of the participants did not give consent for audio taping, and their decision was respected.

### ***Anonymity and confidentiality***

According to Babbie (2010, p.67), anonymity in research is attained when “neither the researchers nor the readers of the findings can identify a given response with a given respondent” whereas confidentiality refers to “when the researcher can identify a given person’s response but promises not to do so publicly”. The data was collected using face to face interviews, thus the research cannot be said to have been anonymous as the researcher met the participants. However, confidentiality of the participants will be guaranteed as the researcher will not reveal the responses of the participants with their identifying information to anyone other than the supervisor.

## **3.10. Strengths and Limitations**

### **3.10.1. Strengths**

One of the strengths of the research study is that it was easy to gain access to the research participants. In addition to this, there were no travelling expenses for the researcher. The research was conducted with social workers at the Department of Social Development in Johannesburg metropolitan area and SASSA officials who are also in central Johannesburg and this was in an easy access area for the researcher. The researcher was flexible in that the date and time for the research interviews were determined by the participants. This in turn enabled the researcher to secure those participants who were interested in participating in the study. With regards to gender, the researcher was also able to obtain a balance of participants of both genders. As such the study can be said to have had a representative of both genders.

### **3.10.2. Limitations**

Although it was easy to gain access to the participants, getting them to agree to participate in the study was another issue. Some of the approached social workers did not seem keen in participating in the study and thus turned down the invite to participate. As a result, the

researcher had difficulty in getting the target sample of 12 participants and settled for 8 participants instead.

Another limitation in the study was the possibility that participants could have responded based on what they thought the researcher wanted to hear (de Vos et al., 2011). In the study, some of the senior social workers were not entirely open when giving responses that were related to political issues surrounding social relief of distress in fear that they might be implicated. It was also observed that some of the participants withheld their responses and thus took time to respond. The researcher tried to assure the participants that there was no right or wrong answer and that their personal details would not be included in the research report but only a few expressed themselves freely. Thus, it can be said that some of the participants gave responses that they thought were socially desirable.

### **3.11. Chapter summary**

The chapter provided a discussion on the research design, the research participants, the sampling procedure, the research tools and the research instruments, piloting, data collection and data analysis. Included also were the ethical consideration that were followed during the course of the study. The chapter that follows will discuss the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides the presentation and discussion of the data collected. The data was analysed using thematic content analysis as highlighted in the previous chapter. The findings are presented and discussed according to the research objectives.

#### **4.2. Demographic Information**

**Table 4.2.1 Demographic profile of participants (N=10)**

Demographic Factor	Sub-category	No.
Gender	Male	4
	Female	4
Ethnicity	Black	8
	Other	None
Age	21-30 years	3
	31-40 years	3
	41-50 years	1
	51-60 years	1

The table shows that all the participants in the study were black. The sample consisted of eight participants, 4 of whom were male and 4 female and the ages differed. Although the participants spoke different languages as per their ethnic group, the medium of communication was English.

#### **4.3. The first objective was to explore the views of social workers about the link between social relief of distress and the reduction of food insecurity.**

##### **4.3.1 Understanding of Social Relief of Distress**

The participants showed understanding of what social relief of distress is. However, at the beginning of the interviews, it was apparent that some of the participants preferred the terms food voucher and food parcels than they did social relief of distress as they are more used to the former terms. For instance, participant 2 responded by saying:

*“Social relief of distress entails food parcels that are distributed to people who cannot afford food. For example, during floods, house burnt down, people without ID documents, child headed households.”*

Similarly, participant 5 also said:

*“When you are talking about SRD, especially to people at grassroots level, the appropriate term is usually food parcels. The reason for this is that if you are going to be talking about Social Relief of Distress, you tend to confuse some of the clients. Thus, in everyday practice, the Social Relief of Distress programme is usually referred to as food parcels by most of us for convenience when communicating with the clients ...”*

These responses are in line with the observation by the International Labour Organization (2011) that although the social relief of distress can either be provided in the form of cash, food parcel or a voucher, the food parcels are the most common and well known form of social relief of distress amongst people.

Overall, the participants demonstrated knowledge about the social relief of distress programme, including who is eligible, for how long it is distributed and the entire process that is followed when determining need. Participant 1 said:

*“The social relief of distress is a programme aligned to help people with regard to the difficulties that they have, particularly the social and the economic aspects. A social worker conducts an investigation and once they decide that the individual is actually in need economically, the social worker then writes a report which the client has to take to SASSA*

*offices. Upon receiving the report from the social worker, SASSA then conducts a further investigation to determine whether the client is in need of the SRD. They do what is called screening. Once this is done, SASSA issues the SRD for the client. Sometimes you find that the client also requires help transportation wise. Either SASSA will take over if they are committed in assisting the client or they will ask the Department of Social Development to assist in this regard with transport money, or what we normally call petty cash. Once the transport issue has been resolved, the particular social worker will take the client to the shop which has an agreement with SASSA. On arrival, the client will contact the shop manager and they will have to produce documents from SASSA and thereafter the process holdouts. The person will be given the grocery.”*

Participant 4 also had this to say:

*“Social relief of distress is the relief that is offered to people who are in situations that hinder their development. It is provided in poverty stricken communities and also in situations where you find that the person does not have anything to live on. It is also concerned with how people are integrated into society. When you talk about distress, you are talking about something that is stressful and it hinders an individual to perform to their outmost best productivity. The people who qualify are people who are unemployed, those who have lost their jobs and cannot provide for their basic needs, those who earn less than R700 per households, orphans, those who are terminally ill to an extent that they cannot provide for themselves. It is distributed by means of a voucher, where the individual goes to a particular shop and redeem the voucher for basic food. It differs in terms of how long it is distributed; other people receive it for three months while others may receive it for a minimum of six months depending on the circumstance. The social worker will then need to write a motivation letter as to why the person still requires assistance.”*

This understanding was also confirmed by key informant 1 who responded by saying:

*“Social relief of distress is interim means of assistance. It is provided to those awaiting the outcome of their grant application, those who are sick and taking medication and they do not have the necessary means to provide for their dietary requirements, those who are temporarily disabled. It is provided by means of a voucher and the client is sent to a service provider like Boxer Superstore to redeem the voucher. It is provided for three months, but it can be extended*

*up to six months depending on the circumstance of the client. However, before the client can be given the social relief of distress, they undergo screening. This is where the socio-economic assessment is done to determine the need.”*

These responses also speak to Frye's (2008) observation that the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in addition to escalating levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa increase the burden among vulnerable households. This brings light the fact that HIV/AIDS affects food security in that it has the ability of causing the deterioration of one's health to an extent where they are unable to work. However, HIV/AIDS is not the only disease that has a negative consequence with regards to food security, but also other diseases such as high blood pressure, heart diseases and strokes.

#### **4.3.2 The objectives and rationale of providing social relief of distress**

With regards to the objectives and rationale of social relief of distress, the participants expressed different but rather similar understanding. The main theme that came up was the alleviation of poverty and addressing food shortages to those in need. Participant 2 responded by saying:

*“The objective is to minimize poor households while we are working on the long term socio-economic plan of intervention. Also trying to avoid situations where households have to frequently go to their neighbours to ask for food. The rationale is to provide food the households in need.”*

Participant 4 said:

*“The objective is to reduce poverty by addressing food shortages to individuals and households facing this problem. The rationale is to provide food in identified households by assisting them with basic food supplies.”*

Participant 6 responded by saying:

*“The objectives are to alleviate poverty and also to provide relieve in the form of food to individuals in need and/or facing a crisis. The rationale is to ease the situation that the client is in while they are busy looking for other alternatives like a job and/or small business*

*opportunities. It is understandable that living in poverty and being short of basic essentials like food can lead one to end up stealing and committing other crimes. Thus, the social relief of distress tries to also prevent such instances while the individual will be looking for other alternatives to alleviate their situation.”*

Participant 7 also said:

*“The objective is to alleviate poverty and the rationale is to assist people who are poverty stricken with a short term relief so that they can meet their basic needs while a long term intervention plan is being worked on.”*

Similarly, participant 8 said:

*“The objective of the social relief of distress is to alleviate poverty by addressing food shortages temporarily to those who are in need. The rationale is to provide relief in form of food to individuals in need or facing a crisis.*

Food security is defined as “physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all South Africans at all times to meet their dietary and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Department of Agriculture, South Africa, 2002, p. 15). This definition can be aligned with a response that key informant 2 gave when he said:

*“The objective is to relieve people from the situation in which they are unable to provide for themselves and their families. The rationale is to assist them get a means of survival so that they can meet their dietary requirements and function well both physically and socially. For example, some people have to take medication so they have to eat first before they can take the medication. The social relief of distress assistance can be a supplement in such situations.”*

Furthermore, in accordance with the findings, the objective and rationale of the social relief of distress can be said to compliment the right to social security that is highlighted in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, section 27 (1), where it is stated that “everyone has the right to health care, food, water and social security; … including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, social assistance” (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 13). From this it can be argued that the social relief of distress is addressing the right to food and social security to those who cannot provide for themselves and

their families. Thus, with regards to the link between social relief of distress and food insecurity it can be said that social relief of distress is a mechanism for addressing the basic human right and also decreasing the vulnerability to food insecurity in poor households. So the more social relief of distress assistance is made available to those in need, the more the chances of reducing food insecurity.

#### **4.4. The second objective was to establish the views of social workers on the perceived impact of the social relief of distress programme in improving access to food.**

As a means of establishing the views of the participants on the impact of the social relief of distress, the study looked at the effectiveness of social relief of distress as an indicator of impact. Thus, the following sections are discussing the issues relating to the effectiveness of the programme and the means to enhance the effectiveness thereof.

##### **4.4.1 Issues relating to the effectiveness of Social Relief of Distress with regards to improving access to food**

The findings from the study revealed different views regarding the effectiveness of social relief of distress. While some views highlighted that social relief of distress was effective in addressing food insecurity, thus improving access to food, there were however concerns regarding the issue of the short duration for the provision of social relief of distress. Some participants felt that this hinders its effectiveness to fully reduce household food insecurity in particular. Participant 3 said:

*“Although it can be said to be effective as it reduces food shortages to households that are in need, I personally have a problem with the fact that it is provided for three months. It is like we give our clients hope, then after that we take it. It is worrying because some families go back to the same situation that they were in after the service is terminated. In this regard, I question the effectiveness because it is not stable”.*

Regardless of the issue of the short-term duration of the social relief of distress, participant 6 said:

*“From my experience I think that it is effective as it helps people who are in dire need. You sometimes find that people go to bed on empty stomachs, but the SRD helps them with basic foods for the time being. In other instances, you find clients who are terminally ill and the social relief of distress assist them as they cannot take medication without having had eaten.”*

Hart (2009) highlights that global increase in food and fuel prices has led to food insecurity whereby households and individuals are experiencing food crises characterized by food shortages which leave households and individuals vulnerable. Thus, the above response demonstrates that social relief of distress is effective in improving access to food. This is further supported by a similar response by participant 8 when he said:

*“Although it is not that much, it does help with the basic needs and help alleviate the situation to a certain extent. Some families are even able to have a meal before they go to bed. This spares them the trouble of having to go next door and ask for food.”*

There were also other participants who thought differently. For instance, participant 5 questioned the utility of providing social relief of distress as a means of addressing food insecurity:

*“When looking at it with regards to food insecurity, social relief of distress can be said to be effective because honestly you find worse cases where clients do not have food. However, be it as it may, we are still not solving the problem, or rather the root cause of the problem. So one really needs to ask as to what would the situation be like if people were provided with job opportunities as an alternative.”*

Similarly, participant 1 said:

*“Some people once they start receiving the SRD, they want to stay at home and not seek employment. Again it is problematic in that although it addresses the food shortages, the socio-economic issues that lead to the problem are not always addressed.”*

Participant 4 had this to say:

*"There are two sides to the effectiveness of the SRD. In most cases you find that it is effective because it would be evident that some families were indeed in dire need of food, thus the SRD is provided as a means of addressing this issue. But now you are also promoting the issue of dependency. Some people once they start receiving the SRD, they want to stay at home and not seek employment. This is more especially amongst the youth as they feel that they are entitled to the services because they are not working."*

Participant 7 highlighted an interesting observation:

*"Honestly speaking, the social relief of distress is effective and from the observations that I have made, there are instances where you can also tell as a social worker that you made a difference in the lives of individuals and households as a whole. However, there are cases where during the onsite visits you find that the family claims not to have food and have been having frequent food shortages but then when you check the house you realise that their house has most of the basic things which cannot be considered as needs such as television, dstv, sofa etc. Then in such instances you really wonder and question as to how the family maintains all those things if they do not have food. So from my opinion, I do not think that some families are encountering food shortages because they are poor but because of poor planning and budgeting. So it is problematic because at that point during the intervention, the family would really be in need and you cannot necessarily deny them the service."*

From the above, it can be argued that although the social relief of distress does improve access to food and has a good impact on households and assist them meet their dietary requirements, there are still gaps and challenges that need to be addressed in enhancing the effectiveness of social relief of distress and also in ensuring fairness of the programme.

The participants highlighted ways in which the social relief of distress can be enhanced, thus enhancing the impact of the programme. These are:

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

In responding to the question on how the effectiveness of the social relief of distress programme can be enhanced, some participants indicated that close monitoring and evaluation is required during and after intervention with clients who come for assistance. Participant 2 said:

*“The ineffectiveness also lies in terms of the incapacity within the department to do follows up to determine whether the family is doing well since the intervention or not. This usually results in having the same family coming over and over again because their situation has not been alleviated and they are still living in poverty.”*

Also, participant 5 said:

*“There is a need for close monitoring and evaluation for the distribution. Some families sometimes come twice and if it is a different social worker, they are only identified later on when it is already too late that they are robbing the system.”*

These findings reveal a need from within the department to keep in touch with the clients and their families to check if they are coping after the intervention and also as a means of ensuring that the intervention was effective enough. The monitoring and evaluation of the service provided will also assist in indicating as to how many clients have been effectively assisted and identifying the overall gaps and challenges that exist.

## **More funding and increasing the content of the social relief of distress**

Some of the participants also pointed out that the effectiveness of the social relief of distress can be enhanced by increasing the funding targeted towards the programme and also through increasing the content and/or value the social relief of distress. Participant 7 reckoned:

*“There should be more funding channelled towards the social relief of distress. This can be done both by the state and the private sector. Also, people in communities should be encouraged to assist one another: this speaks about the practice of Ubuntu. Instead of relying on social relief of*

*distress, those in need can be identified by their fellow community members and assisted where possible. For example, local business can assist as well.”*

The above response also highlights the need for partnerships or the working together of different stakeholders in society. It also suggests that the responsibility of providing for people should not only be left to the state but that the private sector, including local businesses and the society at large can also take up the role of assisting those in need. Thus, it can be said that the role of addressing food insecurity should be a collective one in the country.

Participant 8 mentioned:

*“The content of the food parcel can be improved on. In some instances the clients would complain that the content is not their basic food or that it is not sufficient. So an alternative to this issue would preferably be to provide money in-cash which values the food parcel or give the client a voucher which allows them to pick the food that they need when they are redeeming the voucher. In some instances it is felt that the SRD is not sufficient so increasing the amount and/or content of the SRD would also increase its effectiveness in the lives of poor households.”*

Furthermore, key informant 2 also highlighted that:

*“Providing food vouchers is more effective than providing the food parcel as the client is given the opportunity to select their basic needs as opposed to a food parcel. Some of the clients have complained that the food is not enough so it would be preferable to provide voucher as they can be able to decide what they get based on their needs and dietary preferences. In further enhancing the effectiveness of the social relief of distress, the amount of the social relief of distress can be increased. For now, the amount of the social relief of distress does not exceed the value of the Old Age Grant and the families are expected to live on this for the entire month.”*

## **4.5 The third objective was to investigate the challenges encountered with the provision of social relief of distress as a strategy in reducing food insecurity.**

### **4.5.1 Challenges encountered in the provision of social relief of distress**

#### **Use of the means test**

As highlighted in chapter two, social assistance benefits are means tested. Van der Berg et al. (2010) highlight that the means test is important and required as it ensures that the funds and benefits are targeted to the most deserving people in society which are the vulnerable and less privileged. However, one of the participants raised the issue that the means test is likely to be subjective as some individuals might be excluded based on the criteria of the means test although they can be said to be in need. In his response, key informant 2 said:

*“Some individuals might not qualify based on the means test and screening regardless of them being in need. Thus, the means test excludes some individuals who are not regarded as being in need by the means test even though they are in need.”*

Participant 6 also had this to say:

*“During home visits when conducting an assessment, you find that some neighbours would come to you and say that they would also like the social relief of distress meanwhile they can afford to buy food for themselves and their families. So having to turn them down and explaining to them that not everyone is eligible for a social relief of distress regardless of the little that they may be claiming to earn. So this happens not only during assessments only but it also happens that you have to send a client back when they come to the office because they simply do not qualify based on the means test.”*

Participant 8 also had this to say:

*“Another issue is in regard with the criteria/means test that is used when conducting an assessment. Although you might see a need within a family, the criteria might deem that particular family not to be in need. So as a worker you also need to be objective and not let your*

*views affect the work that you do. This just simply means that you have to let your professional-self step in and do what is expected of you regardless.”*

Thus, although the means test can be said to be essential, it also has the potential of excluding other individuals upon screening. This implies that some individuals might not be deemed poor and in need based on the means test but they may however be in need of the assistance during the time of intervention.

## **Politics**

Political manipulation, or rather issues relating to the meddling of politicians in the provision and distribution of the social relief of distress was one of the challenges that was highlighted by few participants. This was also related to the means test criteria and participant 3 said:

*“During elections time, or rather towards elections, the screening is not the same. Thus, the social relief of distress (food voucher in particular) is not distributed based on the standard criteria. It is distributed to all those who apply without a proper means test. Sometimes you find that even those who are receiving grants are also given the social relief of distress. Thus, it can be said not to address food insecurity effectively during those times as it can also be provided to those who are not the intended target group.”*

She further added that:

*“If amendments are needed with regards to the criteria of the social relief of distress, they should be done in the right way. All the steps that are followed when changing a policy should be adhered to. The means test of the social relief of distress should not be manipulated by politicians during election times.”*

This response again highlights that the purpose of the means test is defeated during such times and as service providers, they are sometimes unable to challenge this as it comes from above. Similarly, participant 5 said:

*“Some people who are working would be coming in large numbers just for the grocery. And some of the officials, it was alleged, that they were taking some incentives so that they can give some people the SRD even though they do not qualify.”*

Participant 7 also had this to say:

*“Some of the challenges that I have encountered is the misuse of the voucher. This is more especially the case during elections. Political parties provide funding for food vouchers when they are looking for voters. After the election period, the poor people are left destitute as officials are then expected to follow the standard procedure for distributing the social relief of distress.”*

This further reveals that that corruption amongst officials defeats the purpose of the social relief of distress. The former Minister of Social Development Zola Skweyiya pointed out that social relief of distress is meant for the poorest of the poor in communities (Mail & Guardian, 2009). However, during such instances, this objective no longer applies.

### **Lack of partnership between different state departments**

Another challenge identified by participants was that there is a need for coordination or rather solid partnerships between different state departments in order to join forces to combat the challenges faced not only with regards to food insecurity, but also in relation to addressing social issues that affect food security such as poverty and unemployment. These state departments are for instance the Department of Social Development, the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Labour.

Participant 1 said:

*“The lack of cooperation and established relationships between different state departments sometimes pose as a challenge. You find that an individual does not have an identity document and they do qualify for a grant. While they are receiving SRD, it would have been easier if Home Affairs was part of the intervention then they would speed up the application process and the client will not have to wait long for their ID book. In other cases, you also find instances where the client does not qualify for a grant but are employable. Similarly, if the Department of Labour*

*is part of the intervention process, the client can quickly be linked to employment opportunities to avoid dependency on the state.”*

Key informant 2 also said:

*“Here at SASSA we work closely with social workers from the Department of Social Development. Most of our clients that come for social relief of distress are through referrals. In most cases, this makes our work easier as they would have done a background report on the client. Thus, such relationships are also required with other state departments. As it is already mentioned that the social relief of distress is temporary, it would be in the best interest of the client who came for such services to be linked with job opportunities. The Department of Labour can take over from here and assist in this regard. Also, you also find clients who sometimes have matric only. The Department of Education can assist with bursaries to help them further their studies. In other instances, clients would either be affected by disasters or have a crisis where their shack have burnt down. Similarly, the Department of Housing can assist with building proper houses for the clients. So I personally think social service delivery would be efficient and effective if these different departments were sort of incorporated.”*

This finding highlight that a multi-departmental approach should be adopted to resolve not only the issue of food insecurity, but also to effectively address other social ills in society. Such an approach would also improve social service delivery as people would not have to go to back and forth to get assistance.

#### **Lack of stable exit plan (long term intervention plans not always stable)**

Lack of exit plans was another challenge identified by participants. Participant 3:

*“Another challenge that I have seen is that the Department of Social Development should rather be focusing more on the developmental part of the life of the people, particularly economically because of the background that people are coming from”.*

Participant 6 also said:

*"There are no evaluation mechanisms in place to determine whether policies succeed or not. For example, the government is currently pushing on the EPWP and of which if you check, they are not sustainable. Someone would get a tender of maintaining roads and then hire other people. But immediately after the work has been done and the project is over, the people will lose their jobs and that means that they would have to start over. Thus there is a need for projects which are really sustainable so that people can continue on generating income"*

These findings highlight the need for stable and sustainable job opportunities and other economic opportunities aligned with the social relief of distress to ensure that individuals and their households are not left vulnerable. This would not only be assisting the clients in need but will also be decreasing the burden on the state. Alternatively, more funding should be channelled towards job creation which would be a more sustainable solution.

### **Dependence on the state**

Finally, another challenge identified by participants was that the social relief of distress was creating dependency on the state. This they expressed as the dependency syndrome where it is believed that providing people with state assistance like social relief of distress makes them more dependent on the state.

Participant 4 had this to say:

*"I believe that SRD is creating dependency whereby people are becoming unwilling to go study, particularly the young generation whereby they are just giving birth and you find that they are unable to maintain those children. So they will be coming to SASSA for assistance. In the long run it creates dependency on the state as some of the clients develop the mentality that they are obliged to state assistance."*

This was also brought to the fore by participant 6 who said:

*“Because of the dependency syndrome, people are unwilling to initiate their own efforts with regards to things like micro economic efforts where they can sell fruits and vegetables to the community. They are only depending on state funds and assistance”*

Similarly, participant 8 said:

*“Some clients would come repeatedly and would lie because they do not want to be sent back. In addition to this, the problem of dependency is also very much prevalent. Some of the clients are demotivated to go and look for jobs and this just means more will be coming again for social relief of distress.”*

Yet, key informant 1 said:

*“There is also the issue of the entitlement mentality. This refers to instances where the client/s adopt the attitude that they are obliged to state benefits because they are citizens and not taking into consideration the fact that these kind of assistance is means tested. In addressing these challenges, more information on social relief of distress should be provided, in particular addressing the terms and conditions.”*

The findings highlight that the youths are most affected by the issue of food insecurity and that they are the ones that usually come for social relief of distress. This is in line with the observation by Finn et al. (2011) that the high level of poverty in South Africa is associated with unemployment and that unemployment is highest amongst the youth.

While all the seven participants, including the key informants were of the opinion that the social relief of distress creates dependency in the long run, participant 2 thought differently. She said:

*“I do not see any negative outcome. It has a very limited time; it does not create dependency”.*

This implies that although some of the participants viewed the short duration of social relief of distress provision as a disadvantage to those who are not working and find themselves without employment after the intervention, participant 2 saw it as a positive thing as it would ensure that there is no dependency on the state. This means that we are working on the assumption that

clients will feel obliged to look for employment as a backup plan for when the social relief of distress is withdrawn.

## **General**

The participants raised another challenge that it associated with the issue of food insecurity. This they pointed out as the lack of sufficient job opportunities. The Department of Social Development (2010) indicates that there are about 4 million unemployed citizens in South Africa, making up an unemployment rate of 25.2%. This indicates a high unemployment rate in the country which needs to be addressed. In responding to the question about enhancing the effectiveness of social relief of distress, participant 1 said:

*“Something that I have realised is that the state does not give enough money for the youth so that they can start their own businesses. In actual fact more people should be encouraged to study business so that they can be absorbed in employment. That way we can increase our economy.”*

Participant 2 also said:

*“Again it is problematic in that although it addresses the food shortages, the socio-economic issues that lead to the problem are not always addressed”.*

Participant 8 had this to say:

*“Rather than giving someone a fish, teach them how to fish. Thus, instead of creating a programme that addresses food shortages and also vulnerability to food insecurity, we should rather create a programme that is aimed at creating jobs for people. This is because food insecurity can be caused by unemployment. Thus, this will be addressing the sustainability part to the initiative of increasing access to food to poor households and communities at large as the social relief of distress is not a sustainable programme in this regard.”*

Furthermore, key informant 1 had this to say:

*“Prevention is better than cure. So if there is employment opportunities, people will never come for social relief of distress. Thus, employment can be a means of reducing the high levels poverty. Thus, instead of enhancing the social relief of distress programme, more jobs should be created as a means of addressing poverty and reducing the number of people who come for social relief of distress.”*

From the above responses it can be argued that instead of enhancing the social relief of distress programme, we should rather focus on the root causes of food insecurity, which in many instances is poverty and unemployment. Thus, to address poverty and unemployment mean that we have to create sufficient job opportunities for people. This finding is further supported by the observation that as a means of addressing the high level of poverty and unemployment (in particularly, unemployment amongst the youth) in South Africa, more economic opportunities should be created to enhance self-reliance amongst those who are currently unemployed (The Presidency, 2008, cited in Van der Berg & Siebrits, 2010; Finn et. al., 2011). The main economic opportunities include employment opportunities and entrepreneurship. Thus, if households receive income on a continuous basis, this will ultimately reduce their vulnerability to food shortages which triggers food insecurity.

Bonti-Ankomah (2001) observes that poverty has serious consequences for food security and as unemployment increases, it becomes hard for many households to sustain themselves as incomes are low and in other cases, absent. Thus, employment is essential for addressing food insecurity as it will ensure that individuals and households generate monthly income to secure resources that are required and to further decrease their vulnerability to food insecurity.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of the study. The themes that were highlighted were in alignment with the research objectives and research questions. The views of the social workers regarding the link between social relief of distress and food insecurity were discussed,

together with their views on the perceived impact of the social relief of distress programme in improving access to food. Furthermore, findings on the challenges that are encountered in the provision of social relief of distress were also presented. The following chapter will present the summary of the main findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The study explored the perceptions of social workers at the Department of Social Development about the use of social relief of distress as an effective strategy to reduce food insecurity. This chapter presents the summary of the main findings that were discussed in chapter four. It also draws conclusions from the findings and the recommendations.

#### **5.2 Summary of findings**

##### **Views about the link between social relief of distress and the reduction of food insecurity**

The first objective sought to explore the views of social workers about the link between social relief of distress and the reduction of food insecurity. The study revealed that the social workers had a clear understanding of social relief of distress. The link between social relief of distress and the reduction of food insecurity was also revealed. Participants pointed out that the social relief of distress reduces the vulnerability of poor households to food insecurity. Furthermore, it was also highlighted in the study that not only does social relief of distress address the issue of food insecurity but that it is in alignment with the right to food and social security.

##### **Views on the perceived impact of the social relief of distress in improving access to food**

The second objective sought to establish the views of social workers on the perceived impact of the social relief of distress programme in improving access to food. In addressing this objective, the participants were asked about the effectiveness of the social relief of distress as an indicator of the impact of the programme. Thus, the study revealed different views regarding the effectiveness of the social relief of distress programme. Some of the views indicated that social relief of distress is effective as it improves access to basic food in poor households. Although it was highlighted that the social relief of distress is not much (value wise), it was said that it does

reduce food shortages. However, some of the participants indicated that the social relief of distress is not effective because it is short-term. This puts to question the sustainability of the social relief of distress programme. Thus, the social relief of distress can be argued not to be a sustainable mechanism for reducing food insecurity.

### **Challenges encountered in the provision of social relief of distress**

The last objective sought to investigate the challenges that are encountered in the provision of social relief of distress. The study revealed that lack of partnership between different state departments was a challenge. Participants felt that there was a need for coordination or rather solid partnerships between different state departments in order to join forces to combat the challenges faced not only with regards to food insecurity, but also in relation to addressing social issues that affect food security such as poverty and unemployment. These state departments include the Department of Social Development, the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Labour and the Department of Education.

The second challenge that was identified by participants was on the use of the means-test. Although the means test is crucial in addressing issues of corruption and also in ensuring that the most needy are targeted, it however has the potential of excluding some people who are in need. Another challenge that was identified by the participants was the development of the dependency syndrome. This refers to cases where some clients become too dependent on the state and on the extreme, develop the entitlement mentality. The consequence of this is that in the long run, such individuals become demotivated to seek employment opportunities.

Finally, another challenge identified by participants was the abuse of food parcels during elections by politicians in order to lure voters. Participants pointed out that it was done without the proper use of the standard means test that is normally used. Thus, it was indicated that the purpose of the means test is defeated during such times.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Based on the summary of the findings, it can be concluded that the participants have an understanding of the social relief of distress, including the objectives and rationale. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that social relief of distress decreases the vulnerability to food insecurity in poor and needy households. It can also be concluded that although the social relief of distress does improve access to food, thus a positive impact on the lives of the beneficiaries, the programme is however not sustainable. Therefore, it can be concluded that social relief of distress is not a sustainable mechanism for reducing food insecurity. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that issues such as the abuse of food parcels, the use of a means-test and the lack of partnership between state departments undermines the impact of the programme and they should be addressed accordingly.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings that were generated from the study, it is recommended that:-

More job and economic opportunities should be created to address the issue of dependence on the state. This will also assist in reducing the number of people who seek social relief of distress and increase the number of people who are economically stable to provide for themselves and their families. This in turn will reduce the vulnerability to food insecurity to those who are currently vulnerable. By so doing we are not only addressing food insecurity but also issues of poverty and unemployment.

Adjustments should be made to the means test. This will allow unemployed people who currently do not qualify to be considered when they are encountered with food shortages.

There should be thorough monitoring and evaluation of the social relief of distress assistance that is offered to clients. This also includes follow ups and assessments of whether the situation has been alleviated.

The value of the food voucher should be increased and the content of food parcel increased as well. This is an acknowledgement of the constant increases in fuel and food prices and the instability in the market economy. Furthermore, it can be recommended that the food voucher be used as the standard form of social relief of distress as the client is given the opportunity to select the food items that meet their dietary requirements.

More funding should be channelled towards the social relief of distress as there is currently no other social assistance for unemployed people yet there is a high unemployment rate in the country. However, this funding should not be the state's responsibility only, but the private sector and civil society can be encouraged to contribute towards this initiative.

Different state departments should form partnerships in order to work together to effectively address food insecurity.

#### **5.4.2 Future research:**

The study should be replicated in other provinces in the country in order to explore more views on the use of social relief of distress as a strategy to reduce food insecurity and improving access to food.

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# Appendices

## **APPENDIX A**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Good day.

My name is Sehlabane Portia and I am a post graduate student registered for the degree MA in Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on the perceptions of social workers about social relief of distress as an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity. It is envisaged that this study will contribute to knowledge on social assistance and specifically how social relief of distress can contribute towards the reduction of food insecurity.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. You may withdraw from the study at any time and you may also refuse to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with answering.

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. No one other than my supervisor will have access to the tapes. The tapes and interview schedules will be kept for two years following any publication or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. Please be assured that your name and personalized details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on tel. 078 6323453. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study, an abstract will be made available on request. Thank you for taking time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely  
Sehlabane Portia  
[366099@students.wits.ac.za](mailto:366099@students.wits.ac.za)

Supervisor: Prof. E. Kaseke  
Telephone: (011) 717 4472  
[Edwell.Kaseke@wits.ac.za](mailto:Edwell.Kaseke@wits.ac.za)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTION IN THE STUDY**

I hereby consent to participate in the research study. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may refuse to answer any particular items or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C**

### **CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPING OF THE INTERVIEW**

I hereby consent to tape recording of the interview. I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the tapes will be destroyed two years after any publication arising from the study or six years after completion if there is no publications.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**Title: Social Relief of Distress as an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity: the perceptions of social workers at the Department of Social Development, Johannesburg Metropolitan area.**

#### **Section A**

Introductions: Greeting: welcoming the participant, thanking them for their participation and briefing them about the research study.

Explaining the issues of confidentiality and consent.

Identifying information of participant

\*Name:

Age:

Gender:

Race:

Years of experience:

#### **Section B**

- 1. Please provide an overview of social relief of distress: What is it? Who is eligible; How is it distributed and for how long?**
- 2. What are the objectives and rationale of providing social relief of distress?**
- 3. Based on your work experience, how effective do you think social relief of distress is in reducing food insecurity? Explain**
- 4. What are the some challenges that you encounter in the provision of social relief of distress if any? What can be done to address these challenges?**
- 5. What can be done to enhance the effectiveness of social relief of distress in reducing food insecurity?**
- 6. Are there any negative outcomes associated with the social relief of distress?**

**APPENDIX E**

**ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**



Research Office

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**  
R14/49 Sehlabane

**CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**PROTOCOL NUMBER H13/09/06**

**PROJECT TITLE**

Social relief of distress as an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity: The perceptions of social workers at the Department of Social Development, Johannesburg Metropolitan area

**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Ms MP Sehlabane

**SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT**

Human & Community Development/Social Work

**DATE CONSIDERED**

20/09/2013

**DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE**

Approved Unconditionally

**EXPIRY DATE**

29/09/2015

**DATE** 30/09/2013

**CHAIRPERSON**

*T. Milani*  
(Professor T Milani)

cc: Supervisor : Prof E Kaseke

**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10003, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

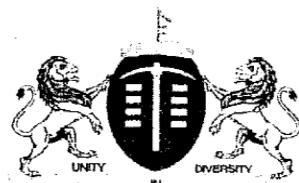
Signature

Date

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

**APPENDIX F**

**LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**



## GAUTENG PROVINCE

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enquiries : Refilwe Makapela  
011 355 7676 ; Cell No. 082 469 3131  
Sub-directorate Research and Policy Co-Ordination  
Dir.: Research and Demography  
CD: Development and Research

Dear Ms. Mahdima Portia Sehlabane

***RE: YOUR APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT***

Thank you for your application to conduct research within the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

Your application on the research on "Social Relief of Distress as an effective strategy in reducing food insecurity: The Perceptions of Social Workers at the Department of Social Development, Johannesburg Metropolitan Area" has been considered and approved for support by the Department as it was found beneficial to the Department's vision and mission.

The approval is subject to the Departmental terms and conditions as endorsed by you on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013

May I take this opportunity to wish you well for the research.

Looking forward to a value adding research and a fruitful co-operation.

With thanks.

**MS.W.R. TSHABALALA**  
**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

DATE 31/07/2013