

Evaluation of Health in Pregnancy grants in Scotland: a natural experiment using routine data

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Plain English summary

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Several studies have reported that improving the health and nutrition of women during pregnancy could improve the health of their babies. From April 2009, for a 2-year period, a programme called Health in Pregnancy grants was implemented by the government across the UK. A cash sum of £190 was given to women reaching the 25th week of their pregnancy if they had been in contact with a doctor or midwife. The intention was to encourage pregnant women to visit a health professional earlier in their pregnancy, and to get advice related to a healthy lifestyle and diet. We investigated whether or not there was a difference in birthweight between babies born to mothers who were eligible for the grant and babies born either before the grant was introduced or after the programme had ended.

We used data relating to all single births in Scotland from 2004 to 2013. For our main analysis, this was 525,400 births. We found no evidence that the programme improved birthweight or babies' health. However, we found that, on average, women visited a doctor or midwife half a week earlier when the grant was in place than before the grant was introduced. Results were similar for all women, including those who might potentially have benefited most from the grant, such as single mothers or those living in disadvantaged areas. In terms of the overall cost of the programme, we found negligible financial savings compared with the existing costs of health care for babies and mothers.

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