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# “Evaluating and simulating child poverty reduction policies to improve child and maternal health and reduce health inequalities”

## What is this research about?

We aim to explore which schemes to reduce child poverty are the best for improving children’s health in Scotland and whether they can be improved to increase their health benefits even further.

## Why is it important?

Children who live in poverty in Scotland are more than four times as likely to experience poor mental wellbeing and more than three times as likely to have ‘fair’, ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ general health. Children who live in households which are food insecure (where the mother reports being affected by food costs ‘more than a little’) are almost four times likely to be an unhealthy weight throughout childhood. In such a rich country as Scotland, this is not acceptable.

## What is being done about child poverty in Scotland?

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act set out targets to reduce child poverty and the government and local councils are required to make action plans to meet them. So far, a number of national schemes have been introduced to do this. These include:

The Scottish Child Payment which provides £27 per week to low-income families

Best Start foods -a prepaid card, worth £4.50-£9.00 weekly, to buy healthy foods

The Scottish Baby Box which contains essential items for infants, worth £429

Local schemes vary widely, as they are shaped to suit the needs of the local population. In areas of Glasgow, school uniform grants have been introduced and schools and hospitals have helped to raise awareness among families about the different monetary supports that they might be entitled to.

These are all positive moves. However, very little is known about which schemes will benefit health most and whether they can help to reduce the gap in health between children living in richer compared to poorer families in Scotland.

## What does this project seek to do?

1 Gain a better understanding of the prevalence of child poverty. We will look at how child poverty varies across Scotland and if some population groups (e.g. lone parent families, or families with lots of children) are more likely to experience poverty than others.

2 Look at the health impacts of some poverty reduction schemes. We will compare how health (measured in surveys or in health records) has changed before and after the schemes were introduced, or whether health varies between areas of Scotland that did and did not have the scheme. We will use methods that ensure fair comparisons, since other factors that are important for health can vary over time or between areas.

3 We will ask ‘what if?’ questions to consider how these schemes can provide even greater gains for child health. This involves taking what we know about what has already happened from real data, and making educated guesses as to what would happen to health if things were changed. For example,

What if weekly Scottish Child Payments were increased from £27 to £50 for the very poorest families? Or, what if school uniforms were made free to all children?

## Who is involved?

We will work with members of the public, child health professionals, children’s charities, and those in charge of local and national decision-making, to make sure the work is as helpful as it can be. For example, we will ask for help in choosing which aspects of child and family health to look at, which existing schemes to test, and which new ’what if’ questions to ask. This will ensure that the research is as valuable as it can be and that it can make a meaningful difference to child health in Scotland.

## Want more information or to share your views?

We would love to hear from you! Please contact us on: anna.pearce@glasgow.ac.uk

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