Exploring the potential of cash transfers in areas with low breastfeeding rates: the NOSH project

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Why did we start?

• UK: one of lowest breastfeeding rates in world

• Wide variation in initiation rates (17%-92%), socially patterned: contributes to inequalities

• Enabling women to breastfeed in low income communities in high income countries is serious challenge
Use of financial incentives

Will add to pressure on women; they need support, not incentive

Even if it works, it won’t become policy in the current climate

Not practical – what about fraud, women won’t tell the truth?

Bribery?

Anything that might help women living in poverty in bottle-feeding communities is worth trying
Financial incentives
Financial incentives

£6.20 per week
milk, fruit, vegetables, formula
What has already been done?

- **Negative** financial incentives
  - Taxes on harmful products

- **Positive** financial incentives
  - Taking medication/ injections/ weight loss
  - Stopping smoking in pregnancy
  - Healthy Start

- **Breastfeeding** financial incentive schemes
  - Islamic law
  - USA (WIC program)
  - Canada (Quebec)
  - UK (Star Buddies)
Review of **acceptability** of financial incentives for behaviour change

- Acceptability a prerequisite for effectiveness
- Consider if incentives fit with societal perspective
- Use incentives as a ‘last resort’
- Find strategies to overcome any negative effects (e.g. stigma)
Lessons from literature

• Successful examples in public health, nutrition, smoking cessation
• Small scale studies in breastfeeding
• Enough encouragement to proceed
We decided.....

• ....to proceed with caution

• working closely with staff and women in local areas

• Research question

  *Can offering cash transfers to women increase breastfeeding in areas with low rates?*
What was funded

• Series of studies to design and test cash transfer scheme in areas of low breastfeeding prevalence

• Focus on any breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks

• Four year project
  • Year 1 – development
  • Year 2 – feasibility test
  • Years 3-4 – full scale randomised trial

• Funders - Medical Research Council, National Prevention Research Initiative (MR/J000434/1)
Year one: 2012-13

- Developing the idea, designing the scheme
- Talking to local women & healthcare providers
- Street survey with 128 local women
Women’s views

• “I don’t think women should have money thrown at them to do something that should be so natural and they should want to do it in the first place”  (F3)

• “Wouldn’t it be better to spend that money on more support, initially, in the first place”  (FG - BF mothers)

• “It’s just creating more pressure for people who can’t”  (FG, BF mothers)
Women’s views

• “I do think it would be effective and I do think something perhaps needs to be done, so it is a good idea” (M2)

• “So maybe for those people who it just wasn’t in their consciousness, it might help, erm, to kind of just give them the incentive to give it a go” (B2)

• It balances with Healthy Start vouchers ‘given for formula’
Healthcare Provider’s Views

• “Is it ethical to use that hook?” (Local Authority)

• “You can give mums something to encourage them to breastfeed but she still might be getting hassle off family members, friends and things like that” (5, BFPSW)

• “They should do this because they want to do it not because someone’s saying well we’ll give you 50 quid for doing it” (19, Health Visitor)
Healthcare Provider’s Views

• “For the ones who are umming and awing about it, it might work” (FG2, Midwives)

• “without trying to delve into the ethical debate and getting all middle class about it, if it does what it sets out to achieve, then that is a good thing, because the knock-on benefits to the rest of the, you know, in terms of population could be big” (23, Midwife)

• Could help change culture around breastfeeding
Healthcare Providers views

Developing the intervention

Money, vouchers or gifts?

• Money
  – Canada (Quebec)
  – Adherence to anti-psychotic medication
  – Hep B vaccinations for opiate users

• Vouchers
  – NHS stopping smoking during pregnancy - groceries
  – Healthy Start - cows milk, fruit & veg, infant formula

• Gifts
  – UK Star Buddies
How much?

£s per week

- USA (WIC) (food/mall)
- Canada (Quebec) (gifts)
- Healthy Start (food)
- Smoking (Derbyshire)
- Smoking (Glasgow)
- Healthcarers views
- Women views
- Stakeholder

£ bonus (Excl BF at 2 months)

£ per week
Verifying breastfeeding...

- Breastfeeding schemes
  - USA (WIC) – visits by healthcarers
  - Canada (Quebec) - sworn affadavit by doctor
  - UK (Star buddies) – breastfeeding support worker visit

- Other schemes
  - Healthy Start - sign off by healthcare professional
  - NHS Stop Smoking Service - expired air CO monitoring
Verifying breastfeeding...

• Routine data and research on breastfeeding uses self report by women

• Is this sufficient?

• Anything else could be seen as breach of trust
Getting the language right

Help to breastfeed

To apply please see the form inside

Nourishing Start For Health
What do I get?

If your baby is being breastfed when he/she is 2 days old you will get vouchers worth £40.
You can claim for more vouchers when your baby is:

- 10 days old  Vouchers worth £40
- 6 weeks old  Vouchers worth £40
- 3 months old Vouchers worth £40
- 6 months old Vouchers worth £40
About NOSH

NOSH is here to help you give your baby the most NOurishing Start for Health.

If you are giving your baby breast milk (breastfeeding or expressed breast milk) then you could get vouchers worth up to £200 for you and your baby.

Breast milk is perfectly designed for your baby and provides everything they need for around the first six months of their life. It helps to keep them healthy and protected from infections. What’s more, it’s free, ready prepared and always comes at the right temperature!

What are the vouchers for?

You can choose whether you want High Street or Supermarket vouchers to buy food, household items, toys, clothes, books, music, film and much more.

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The why

“The NOSH Scheme offers vouchers to mums who breastfeed as a way of acknowledging both the value of breastfeeding to babies, mums and society, and the effort involved in breastfeeding”
Year one: 2012-13

• The idea – interest but uncertainty

• Support from local healthcare professionals and breastfeeding support workers
Year two: 2013-14

• Launch of the 4 month feasibility test
• 3 areas (Derbyshire, Rotherham and Sheffield) with 6-8 week breastfeeding rates <40%
• Est 124 eligible mother/infant dyads
Incentives to breastfeed

‘It’s all mum’s fault for not breastfeeding me’
We need to find ways to help more women breastfeed.

New mothers will NOT be paid to breastfeed, Nick Clegg says as he insists controversial voucher scheme is not government policy.

• Deputy Prime Minister insists vouchers will not be rolled out nationwide.
• Critics say the scheme amounts to ‘bribery’ and rewards certain mothers.
• 130 women in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire taking part in a pilot.
• Up to £200 in vouchers for Matalan, Tesco and John Lewis to breastfeed.

Under the pilot scheme, 130 mothers in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire will be given food vouchers worth around £340 if they breastfeed for the first six weeks of their child’s life.

One of the project’s researchers, Clare Reiton, admits there have been mixed reactions to the scheme.

“People’s initial reaction is ‘Oh goosh, you can’t do that’,” she said.

“They’re then when they start thinking about it and realising what the vouchers can do for them.”
• Pilot: The scheme is being tested in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire but could be rolled out nationally.
Year two: 2013-2014

Vouchers Claims

Mean Uptake across sites

Applicants 53%  
Day 2 44%  
Day 10 42%  
6-8 week 34%  
12 week 25%  
26 week 18%
Interviews
19 women, 36 healthcare professionals
Focus Groups and Information Sharing Meetings

“rewarded” “valued”
“it’s like a praise”
“it’s a nice treat”
“getting something good for doing something good”
“help me breastfeed longer”
(Mothers)

• “felt a bit uncomfortable I guess ... dissipated quite a lot cause I think we’ve seen how pleased the women have been ... about it” (Midwife)
• it gave me the opportunity to affirm her with what she’d done” (Health Visitor)
Year two: 2013-14

- Deliverable and locally acceptable
- Scheme extended (no changes)
- Media and social media interest
- Permission for the full trial
  - Research funders MRC/NPRI
  - NHS & Local Authority leads, NHS REC and site approvals
  - Funds for 50% of voucher costs from Public Health England
Year three: 2014-15

• Trial protocol published


• Trial began on 14th February 2015
NOSH information disseminated NOSH information offered by healthcare professionals (midwives, health visitors, breastfeeding support workers) to pregnant women and new mothers in intervention areas.

Eligible women join the NOSH Scheme
Claim forms are signed by mothers and co-signed by healthcare professional.
Claim forms are sent to NOSH Office, checked for eligibility and vouchers sent by registered post to mothers.

CONTROL
n=46 clusters

No change to usual care
Eligible women join the NOSH Scheme
Claim forms are signed by mothers and co-signed by healthcare professional.
Claim forms are sent to NOSH Office, checked for eligibility and vouchers sent by registered post to mothers.
Year 4: 2015-16

• Intervention delivered

• Intervention commissioned by FNP
  – Relton et al, Evaluating the effects of financial incentives to support first-time young mothers to breast-feed. Journal of Health Visiting, Jan 2017, 5, 1

• Routine data on breastfeeding (initiation and 6 weeks) for all 92 wards
Year 5 – what do we know now?

• Scheme acceptable and deliverable
• Media response ≠ Real world response

*Challenging social norms: discourse analysis of a research project aiming to use financial incentives to change breastfeeding behaviours: Relton C, Umney D, Strong M, Thomas K, Renfrew MJ. Lancet Public Health Science Conference, November 2017*
5 million years of product development

Vouchers for Breastfeeding
What next?

• ? – results will be published on December 11th
• Is it cost effective?
• Optimum voucher amount?
• Any vs exclusive breastfeeding?
• Link with existing nutrition schemes?
• Objective measure of breastfeeding?
Thank you!

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Public health teams, midwives, health visitors, advocacy groups

Women in Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire who took part in the development, feasibility testing and trialling of the idea