

Financial incentives for breastfeeding offer tax-payer good value for money, study suggests

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Credit: Malte Luk from Pexels

Offering new mothers financial incentives to breastfeed their babies provides the tax-payer with good value for money, a new study has

shown.

Researchers from Brunel University London and University of Sheffield analysed data from a randomised trial which tested whether offering vouchers increased rates of [breastfeeding](#) in areas with historically low levels.

Women in 46 areas were offered five shopping vouchers of £40 each if their baby was receiving breastmilk at two days, 10 days, six weeks, three months and six months. The study found that the areas receiving the vouchers had significantly higher levels of breastfeeding when babies were six to eight weeks old compared with 46 areas where mothers didn't receive vouchers.

Published in the BMJ's *Archives of Disease in Childhood* and funded by the Medical Research Council, the study calculated that the total cost of the scheme, when set up and operating costs were included, was less than £1000 per additional baby breastfed at six to eight weeks.

The economic study builds on a comprehensive review from 2012 which found a clear association between increased breastfeeding and reduced cases of respiratory and gastrointestinal infections in young children.

"This is the first paper to investigate whether providing [financial incentives](#) to breastfeed is cost effective," said lead author, Dr. Nana Anokye, Director of the Division of Health Sciences at Brunel's Department of Clinical Sciences.

"We've shown that financial incentive programmes such as this can not only increase rates of breastfeeding, but also provide good value for money".

Co-author Dr. Clare Relton, Senior Research Fellow at University of

Sheffield, said: "We know that we have underestimated the value of the scheme, due to the current lack of economic data on the many, varied short and long term benefits of breastfeeding to both mother and child—for example, lower prevalence of breast cancer in mothers who have breastfed.

"We now need to find the best ways of using money to support and enable mothers to breastfeed. For example, would a universal single payment of £50 to [mothers](#) for exclusive breastfeeding at six to eight weeks be even better value for money?"

"Cost-effectiveness of offering an area-level financial incentive on breast feeding: a within-cluster randomised controlled trial analysis" is available from *Archives of Disease in Childhood (ADC)*.

More information: Nana Anokye et al. Cost-effectiveness of offering an area-level financial incentive on breast feeding: a within-cluster randomised controlled trial analysis, *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2019). [DOI: 10.1136/archdischild-2018-316741](https://doi.org/10.1136/archdischild-2018-316741)

Provided by Brunel University

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