

Research Profile

Maternal and Child Health Network (MatCHNet)



Harnessing cross-country administrative data to evaluate national policy impacts on maternal, infant and child health, and health inequalities across the four UK nations.

Summary

- Giving every child the best start in life is a key policy goal for a healthier society.
- Child and maternal health are not just affected by health policies. Welfare, housing, employment, education, and environmental policies are also important.
- MatCHNet is a new network, bringing together academics, policy stakeholders, data holders, practitioners, and NGOs to prioritise policy evaluation in the early years. The network is open to anyone with an interest in child and maternal health.
- MatCHNet is inviting feedback on their research manifesto.
- MatCHNet's rapid review of UK policy identified a number of policy areas that vary across the four UK nations. These are being prioritised with input from key stakeholders and policy makers.
- MatCHNet will scope the data and methods that could be used to evaluate these policies.

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Introduction to MatCHNet

Each child's health is affected by socioeconomic, cultural, political and environmental factors (collectively, the social determinants) that act at the national, community, household, and family level [1]. Interventions to tackle the social determinants of health can result in better outcomes during pregnancy and early childhood [2]. These health improvements will reduce the prevalence of adult non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and narrow health inequalities.

Existing research in this area demonstrates the potential value of policy evaluation utilising existing data sources. Previous studies include the evaluation of policies such as England's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy [3] and Scotland's smoking ban [4]. Secondary data analysis can also provide insight into the impact of welfare policies such as negative mental health outcomes caused by Lone Parent Obligations [5].

Moving beyond discreet studies, the Maternal and Child Health Network (MatCHNet) aims to harness cross-country administrative data to evaluate national policy impacts on maternal, infant and

child health, and health inequalities across all of the four UK nations.

Funded by the UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP), MatCHNet is a newly established UK-wide network that is developing a multidisciplinary community of public health researchers, methodologists, data holders, policy makers, and service providers. It has initial investment of four years and will run from 2020-2023. This community will come together to prioritise upstream policy interventions that can be evaluated using administrative data. Our academic members span epidemiology, child health, health informatics, population health statistics, public health science, health economics, and social science disciplines.

Welfare policies

- Maternity Grants (e.g. Sure Start Maternity Grant/Healthy Start)
- Universal Credit – various mitigating measures in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- Discretionary housing payments
- Lone Parent Obligations
- Scottish Child Payment/Job Start Payment

Education policies

- Early Years Education and Childcare Provision; Early Years Deprivation Grants
- Education Maintenance Awards

Health policies

- Healthy Child Programme
- Health Visiting Programmes/Family Nurse Partnership
- Baby box; Teenage pregnancy strategies
- Minimum Unit Pricing

Environmental policies

- Smoking bans

Manifesto for research

In [MatCHNet's interim research manifesto](#), we have identified early directions for research to evaluate national policies affecting maternal and child health using administrative data, summarised here as three challenges:

Challenge 1: To identify and prioritise upstream policies that vary across the four UK nations and potentially affect maternal and child health. This includes scoping out national and international policies and policy contexts.

Challenge 2: To ascertain what administrative longitudinal data can be linked and harmonised across the four UK nations. This involves identifying comparable administrative data sources and indicators that can be used for national evaluation.

Challenge 3: To determine suitable methods that can be used to evaluate national policies and make cross-country comparisons. This will include developing and consolidating a methodological toolkit for the quasi-experimental evaluation of national policies using administrative data.

Research progress to date

Addressing Challenge 1: Policy mapping in the four UK nations

Guided by the social determinants of health framework, we have used a systematic search strategy to identify all policies across the four UK nations that potentially affect maternal and child health.

Join us!

MatCHNet is now looking for new members to join our network, to provide input into our draft manifesto for research and to discuss our three challenges. As part of our policy prioritisation consultation exercise, [we are currently running an online poll, which we invite you to complete.](#)

If you would like to get involved in our virtual conversation or join the Network, please contact: [Emma Stewart@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Emma.Stewart@glasgow.ac.uk)

For more information,

Visit our website: www.gla.ac.uk/matchnet

Follow us on Twitter: [@MatCHNet](https://twitter.com/MatCHNet)

References

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