

The impact of early learning and childcare on the parents of pre-school children: results of a rapid systematic review



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BACKGROUND:

The Scottish Government aims to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up in for children and families. To realise this vision, strategic policy changes intend to ensure that increased access to funded early learning and childcare (ELC) is available. This will facilitate parental employment, or enable re-entry to education/training, while children are cared for in safe, stimulating environments.

The Public Health Evidence Network (PHEN) was asked to provide evidence regarding the impact of ELC on parental outcomes, to inform this vision.

AIM:

To investigate the impact of early learning and childcare on parents with pre-school children across a broad range of countries.

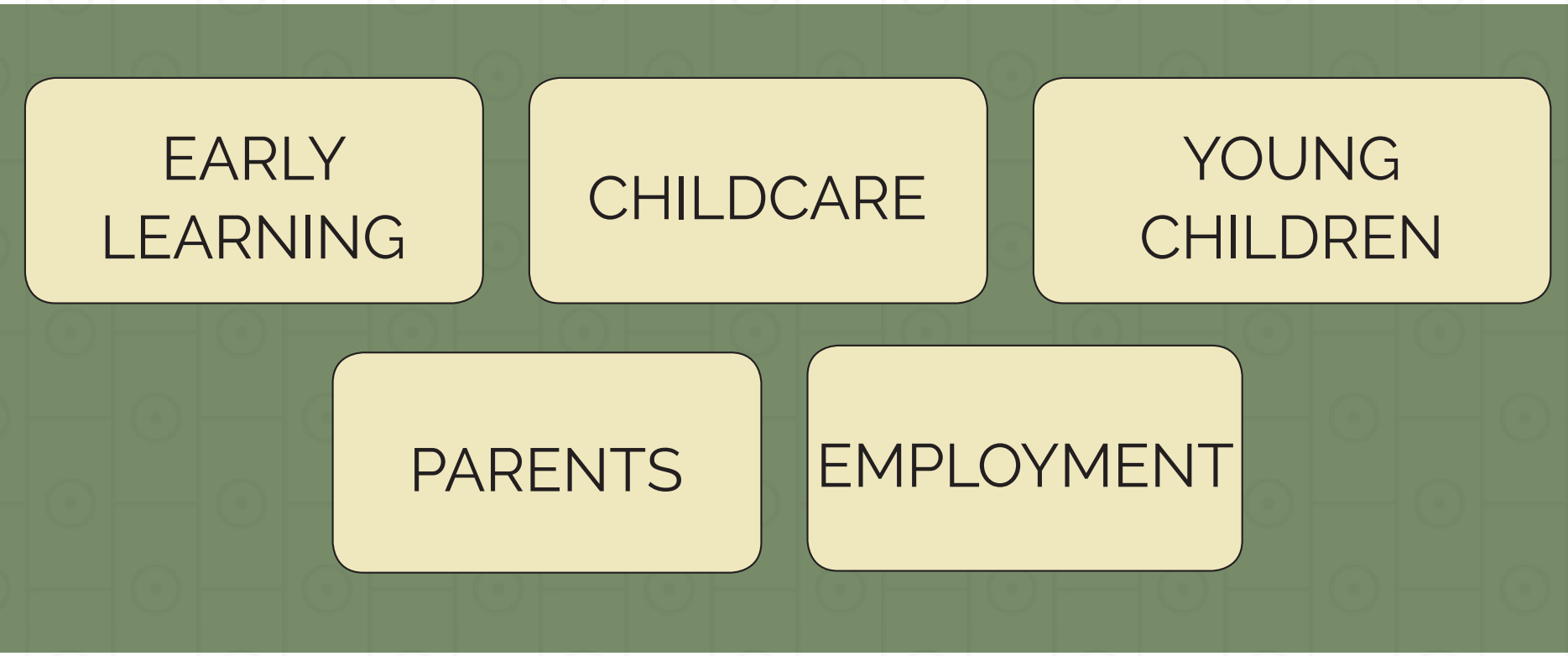


METHODS:

A rapid systematic review was conducted from June-September 2016. Two reviewers independently assessed papers for eligibility, using a protocol aligned to the PRISMA-R guidelines. Databases included:

Medline	ERIC	Embase	EConLit
Education Abstracts	Education Source	Web of Science	ASSIA
Sociological Abstracts	IBSS	PsycINFO	British Education Index

and the Key/text words associated with the following were adapted for use across all databases.



All English language publication types and research designs were sought, to enable inclusion of primary studies and expert (grey literature) reports. Inclusion dates ranged from 1st January 2006 to the 30th June 2016.

Due to heterogeneity of study type, methods and outcome measures, meta-analysis and quality appraisal were not feasible. A narrative analysis, using a tabulated system that facilitated cross-checking of results across studies, was employed to produce a fuller understanding of factors beyond cause and effect.

FINDINGS:

Of 5442 initial papers, 54 met the inclusion criteria. Analysis revealed two main areas of focus: those pertaining to ELC provision (flexibility, availability, affordability, and quality), and those that related to parental impact (employability, socio-economic issues, and health/wellbeing). Our findings support the case that affordable and flexible ELC can impact positively on maternal employment. However, policy must ensure that affordability, flexibility, and availability meet the needs of a range of groups, including those at disadvantage.



INTERPRETATION:

Affordable and accessible ELC can potentially mitigate the impacts of economic and social disadvantage by facilitating parental, particularly maternal, employment and employability, thus serving a redistributive function.

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