

The influence of Infant Feeding and Nutrition on Morbidity, Mortality and Growth Outcomes in Childhood and Adolescence: Evidence from the London Foundling Hospital, 1893-1919

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Many historical studies have found relationships between infant feeding practices and infant mortality, suggesting that infant feeding practices were very important for health and particularly post-neonatal infant mortality (see for instance Reid, 2002).

However, few historians have evidence about how infant feeding influences mortality or morbidity in childhood and adolescence. This study provides new evidence about these links by studying the mortality rates and disease morbidity of children in the London Foundling Hospital between 1893 and 1919. The medical records of the Foundling Hospital provide several types of information about the nutrition of the children in infancy.

The records contain information about whether the children were breastfed, given milk or given food before entering the hospital; they sometimes record the duration of breastfeeding; they record the weights of children when they entered the hospital at 1-12 months of age; and they report a subjective rating of the child's nutrition. Thus, the paper will use statistical models to determine whether there is a relationship between these indicators of infant nutrition and the morbidity, mortality and growth of the children through adolescence.