

Accepted Manuscript

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Catherine Haeck, Pierre Lefebvre

PII: S0927-5371(16)30017-3
DOI: doi: [10.1016/j.labeco.2016.05.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2016.05.003)
Reference: LABECO 1444

To appear in: *Labour Economics*

Received date: 31 August 2015
Revised date: 22 April 2016
Accepted date: 1 May 2016



Please cite this article as: Haeck, Catherine, Lefebvre, Pierre, A simple recipe: The effect of a prenatal nutrition program on child health at birth, *Labour Economics* (2016), doi: [10.1016/j.labeco.2016.05.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2016.05.003)

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A Simple Recipe: the Effect of a Prenatal Nutrition Program on Child Health at Birth

Catherine Haeck* and Pierre Lefebvre

Abstract

We study the impact of a Canadian prenatal nutrition program on child health at birth. The objective of the "oeuf-lait-orange" (eggs-milk-oranges) (OLO) program is to reduce the incidence of prematurity and low birth weight by providing a specific food basket and nutritional guidance to pregnant women in situations of poverty. Our identification strategy exploits exogenous variations in access to the program caused by the progressive implementation of the program. Using detailed administrative birth records for over 1.5 million newborns, we find that the program significantly increased the birth weight of treated children by 69.8 grams and reduced the probability of low birth weight by 3.6 percentage points. We also find that prematurity decreased by 2.2 percentage points and gestation increased by 1.5 days, but these effects are generally not significant. While the cost of the program is equivalent to the comparable United States Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the food basket is simpler and the gains on birth weight are larger.

JEL I12, I18, J13

Keywords: Child health at birth, Public program, Prenatal nutrition

* *Catherine Haeck*: Université du Québec à Montréal (haeck.catherine@uqam.ca). We gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture. We thank Joseph Doyle, Rafael Lalive, Fabian Lange, Philip Merrigan, and two anonymous referees, and also the participants at SOLE, ESPE, CEA, SCSE, McGill University, and RGHC workshop at the Université du Québec à Montréal. We also want to thank the Quebec Inter-University Centre for Social Statistics (QICSS) and the Institut de la statistique du Québec research data centre (CADRISQ) for great support throughout this project. The analysis is based on the Live birth registry and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) restricted-access Micro Data Files available at the QICSS and CADRISQ. All computations on these micro-data were prepared by the author who assumes responsibility for the use and interpretation of these data.

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