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Early or Late? The Timing of Universal Cash Transfers and Infant Health

16 March 2026 (Mon)
16:00-17:30

LYH309, Lau Lee Yuen Haan Amenities Bldg., Lingnan University

Prof. Christine HO

Associate Professor of Economics
School of Economics
Singapore Management University

BIOGRAPHY

Christine HO is an Associate Professor of Economics at Singapore Management University, Academic Program Director of the Women in Social and Public Policy Research Hub (WISPPRH) at the London School of Economics, J-PAL Invited Researcher, and GLO Fellow. She was previously awarded a SMU Shirin Fozdar Fellowship and an ADB-IEA Innovative Policy Research Award. She is a co-editor of the *Review of Economics of the Household* and the editor of a special issue on Intergenerational Transfers and Time Use.

Ho's research interests lie at the intersection of public policy and family economics with a particular focus on household production using empirical and applied theoretical tools. Her works have been published in leading economics and interdisciplinary journals such as the *American Economic Review and Demography*. Recent research tackles the evaluation and design of child care subsidy programs, the linkages between old age support and parental investments in children, and improving human capital through education interventions.

ABSTRACT

We examine how the timing of universal and permanent cash transfers during pregnancy affects birth outcomes. Using US Vital Statistics natality data and exploiting variation in the payment schedule of the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend, we find that earlier payment---during the quarter pre-conception and during the first trimester---leads to considerably greater health benefits compared to later payment. While the effects on birth weight decrease monotonically with payment timing, pre-conception transfers generate nearly twice as much reduction in low birth weight incidence compared to later trimesters. Earlier transfers also translate into faster fetal growth and higher prenatal care utilization compared to later payment. Our results suggest that the returns to cash transfer programs may be substantively underestimated when timing is ignored.

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