Stanford | Basic Income Lab

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

A CROSS-SYNTHESIS OF REVIEWS

By Rebecca Hasdell

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About the Stanford Basic Income Lab

The Stanford Basic Income Lab (BIL) aims to promote an informed public conversation on Universal Basic Income and its potential in alleviating poverty, precariousness and inequality. An initiative of the McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society at Stanford, BIL fosters research on basic income, holds events around the politics, philosophy and economics of the proposal, brings together thought partners, practitioners, policymakers and academics to document best practices, discuss implementation challenges, and derives practical recommendations for advancing basic income proposals. More information is available on our website basicincome.stanford.edu

About the Lead Author

Rebecca Hasdell is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Stanford Basic Income Lab. She holds a Masters of Public Health (Health Promotion) and PhD (Social and Behavioral Health Sciences) from the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto.

About this Report

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1 BACKGROUND

PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

In the last ten years, as Universal Basic Income has moved up the policy agenda, many reviews and reports have taken stock of the evidence on unconditional and universal cash programs. This report, "What we know about Universal Basic Income: A cross-synthesis of reviews," is intended as an 'umbrella review'—it provides a roadmap to the literature for experimenters, policy practitioners, policymakers and others involved in UBI development and implementation.

This report compiles and critically examines 16 reviews of the evidence in order to synthesize key findings, identify evidence gaps, and derive directions for future UBI research, policy and practice.

There is renewed interest in universal basic income (UBI) as a potential policy response to systemic poverty and rising inequality as well as new challenges associated with technological change and a fundamental restructuring of the global economy. Despite decades of economic growth in high-income countries, large swaths of the population have been left behind and inequalities have deepened.[1] In low- and middle-income countries, progress has been made on extreme poverty, but uneven progress within and between countries has opened new divides.[2] There is growing anxiety about emerging threats from technological change and concurrent job shortages from automation, while other structural forces—such as trade and globalization as well as the consolidation of large firms—have reduced job and economic mobility for some time.[3] Regardless of the root cause for today's inequities, there are questions about how effective the current patchwork of social transfers has been for redressing persistent poverty and inequalities, and whether systems are equipped to respond to societal changes.

Across the globe, pilots and experiments are underway in an attempt to understand how a UBI might address these public policy concerns. While definitions vary, at its core, UBI is a cash transfer given to all members of a community on a recurrent basis regardless of income level and with no strings attached (Figure 1).[4] Many UBI advocates argue for a transfer that is sufficient to cover essential living costs, but quite a few propose incremental levels that would function as a base for other sources of income (Figure 1).[5] A transfer of $1,000 a month, for example, is often floated as a reference number in the United States. Several experiments that are currently in progress are testing varying amounts

A fully universal and unconditional basic income has never been implemented at scale. However, evidence from programs, policies and experiments that share features of a UBI can be used to approximate economic, social, health and other impacts. There are a growing number of contemporary literature reviews that report on the substantial evidence base of interventions that meet at least two or more features of a UBI. Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of cash transfers in low- and middle-income countries and increased attention to UBI in higher-income contexts.

FIGURE 1

DEFINITIONAL FEATURES OF A UBI

Universal: It is paid to every individual and not targeted to a specific population

Unconditional: It involves no set conditions or sanctions and is given to those who are both employed and unemployed, voluntarily or not

Cash payment: It is paid in cash, which allows recipients to convert their benefits however they choose

Individual: It is paid on an individual basis (versus household-based)

Periodic: It is a recurring payment rather than a one-off grant

This report is structured as follows. First, it provides an overview of the reviews. Then it synthesizes the basis of evidence (e.g., experiments, policies, and programs) that has been used to arrive at conclusions about UBI as well as the types of outcomes that have been of interest to researchers and the evidence that exists for these outcomes. The final section highlights gaps in the current state of the evidence and where future research is required.

2 WHAT DID WE DO? DESIGN OF THIS REPORT

WHAT IS AN 'UMBRELLA REVIEW'

An 'umbrella review' (or 'cross-synthesis of reviews') compiles evidence from multiple review reports that search for, appraise, and synthesize multiple studies on a topic. By incorporating existing syntheses of research evidence, an umbrella reviews aims to provide a meta-level analysis to cross identify research findings and gaps on a topic and highlight areas where the reviews may diverge.

REPORT QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The objective of this umbrella review is to summarize the current state of the evidence on UBI-type programs across the globe based on published reviews, and to provide a roadmap for those involved in UBI. The questions addressed in this umbrella review are:

1) What types of interventions (policies, programs, and experiments) have been used by previous reviews of the evidence to arrive at conclusions about UBI?

2) What types of outcomes have been used to assess the effectiveness of UBI-type interventions?

3) What are the effects of UBI-type interventions?

IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING REVIEWS ON UBI AND OTHER CASH TRANSFERS

A targeted search was conducted starting with a reference list of review reports from a recently published comprehensive report on UBI by the World Bank Group.[6] Reference lists of the review reports included in the World Bank report were then hand searched, and recommendations were solicited from experts in the field to identify other relevant reviews. Any English-language review that set out to approximate the effects of a UBI was included, as well as reviews on social protection programs that focussed on unconditionality as an essential feature of program design and delivery. Reviews were also included if they compared unconditional transfers to conditional programs (those that require recipients to comply with certain criteria) when it was possible to isolate the evidence from unconditional transfers. Excluded from the analysis were: single studies, reviews that focussed exclusively on conditional or in-kind cash transfers, and conceptual reviews that did not comprehensively or systematically report empirical evidence. Data was systematically extracted from the reviews following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)[7].

3

WHAT DID WE FIND? DESCRIBING THE STATE OF THE EVIDENCE ON UBI-TYPE PROGRAMS

FEATURES OF THE INCLUDED REVIEWS

Sixteen reviews met the inclusion criteria. The reviews were comprised of nine peer-reviewed articles and reports from systematic review databases, five technical reports, and two working papers. Table 1 shows the reviews organized by objectives and geography.

All reviews were published between 2009–2019, but they all draw on empirical evidence that dates back to the 1970s. There are two distinct types of reviews in the literature. The first are reviews that directly address questions about UBI as a policy proposal. The second are reviews that report on the impacts of unconditional cash, but do not directly address UBI. The latter preceded UBI entering mainstream policy discussions, but they report on similar types of policies, programs, and experiments that have been used to approximate or anticipate the impacts of a UBI and are therefore relevant for this report.

The literature focuses on the following themes and potential impacts:

- projected economic impacts of a UBI[3,8]
- intersecting health, social and economic outcomes among all recipients[5,9,10] and based on demographic characteristics[11–13]
- specific outcomes for education[14]
- adult[6,15] and child[16] labor market participation
- health and health care access[17]
- reproductive health[18]
- the social determinants of health[19]
- infant and early childhood health[20]

By study location, eight reviews[8,9,11–14,16–19] report on outcomes from countries defined as low- and middle-income by the World Bank, three in high-income countries[3,5,10], and two across country contexts.[6,20]

Other than two meta-analyses, which combined data from multiple studies to arrive at common effects[15,17], all studies utilized systematic or narrative synthesis strategies. Other than a handful of reviews that included results from qualitative studies, almost all of the knowledge syntheses reviewed had inclusion criteria that was limited to experimental and quasi-experimental designs.[10,12,19]

TABLE 1 **SUMMARY OF REVIEW REPORTS ON UNCONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS, 2009–2019**

AUTHORS	YEAR	PRIMARY OBJECTIVE(S)	N	REVIEW TYPE	GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS AND COVERAGE OF STUDIES	RESEARCH DESIGNS
UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME REVIEWS						
Banerjee, A., Niehaus, P., Suri, T.	2019	Assess what recipients would likely do with incremental income and the extent to which basic income unlocks further economic growth	N/R	Narrative review	Low- and middle-income countries	N/R
Bastagli, F. (in Gentilini et al., eds)*	2020	Examine the evidence for UBI related to labor effects with an emphasis on how design features impact work outcomes	N/R	Systematic review	Low- and middle-income countries	N/R
Gibson, M., Hearty, W., Craig, P.	2019	Describe the nature of interventions evaluated in previous studies and the study designs to evaluate them, including data sources and outcome measures	28	Scoping review	Low-, middle-, and high-income countries	Experimental, quasi-experimental and qualitative studies
Hoynes, H., Rothstein, J.	2019	Review evidence on how UBI should be defined and the impacts it intends to address, and the evidence for programs that meet definitions of either universality or minimum payments	N/R	Narrative review	United States and advanced economies	N/R
Marinescu, I.	2018	Explore the impact of unconditional cash transfers in three major natural experiments on consumption, labor force participation, education, health and other social outcomes.	N/R	Systematic review	United States, Canada, Sweden	Experimental and quasi-experimental
Owusu-Addo, E., Renzaho, A.M.N., Smith, B.J.	2019	Synthesize qualitative and quantitative evidence on the contribution of cash transfers in addressing the wider social determinants of health, and the effect on health and health inequalities	53	Systematic review	**Sub-Saharan Africa** Malawi (13%), Uganda (13%), Zambia (13%), Kenya (8%), South Africa (8%), Tanzania (8%), Zimbabwe (8%), Burkina Faso (4%), Congo (4%), Ghana (4%), Lesotho (4%), Mozambique (4%), Niger (4%), Nigeria (4%)	Experimental, quasi-experimental and qualitative

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AUTHORS	YEAR	PRIMARY OBJECTIVE(S)	N	REVIEW TYPE	GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS AND COVERAGE OF STUDIES	RESEARCH DESIGNS
UNCONDITONAL CASH TRANSFER REVIEWS						
Baird, S., Ferreira, F.H.G., Ozler, B., Woolcock, M.	2013	Assess the relative effectiveness of conditional and unconditional cash transfers in improving enrollment, attendance, and test scores in developing countries	75	Meta-analysis	Low- and middle-income countries	Experimental (35) and quasi-experimental (40)
Baird, S., McKenzie, D., Ozler, B.	2018	Examine impacts on the adult labor market of a wide range of cash transfer programs	N/R	Narrative review	Low-, middle- and high-income countries	Experimental and quasi-experimental
Banks, L., Mearkle, R., Mactaggart, I., Walsham, M., Kuper, H., Blanchet, K.	2016	Examine the financial and non-financial impacts for persons with disabilities who participate in social protection programs, and the extent to which programs are disability inclusive	15	Systematic review	Low- and middle-income countries South Africa (53%), Vietnam (20%), China (13%), Namibia (6%)	Experimental, quasi-experimental and qualitative
Bastagli, F., Hagen-Zanker, J., Harman, L., Barca, V., Sturge, G., Pellerano, L.	2016	Examine the evidence for the impact of cash transfers on a range of individual- or household-level outcomes and the links between outcomes and variations in program design and implementation, with a specific focus on women and girls	201	Systematic review	Low- and middle-income countries Latin America (54%), sub-Saharan Africa (38%), East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa (8%)	Experimental and quasi-experimental (intervention outcomes) and institutional and descriptive analysis (program design)
de Hoop, J., Rosati, F.C.	2014	Evaluate the impact of unconditional cash transfers on children's labor market participation and heterogeneity of effects across demographic categories	30	Systematic review	Low- and middle-income countries Latin America (77%), Mexico (17%), Malawi and South Africa (7%)	Experimental and quasi-experimental

(Continued)

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UNCONDITONAL CASH TRANSFER REVIEWS						
Hagen-Zanker, J., McCord, A., Holmes, R.	2011	Assess the evidence of the impact of employment guarantee schemes on the poor compared with cash transfers	44	Systematic review	Low- and middle-income countries, and the USA (employment guarantee schemes from the 1930s)	All study types
Khan, M.E., Hazra, A., Kant, A., Ali, M.	2016	Measure the effect of conditional cash transfers and unconditional cash transfers on outcomes related to contraceptive use and reproductive health	10	Systematic review	Low- and middle-income countries Studies covered Honduras, Malawi, Medico, Nicaragua, South Africa and Zambia	Experimental and quasi-experimental
Pega, F., Liu S.Y., Walter, S., Pabayo, R., Saith, R., Lhachimi S.K.	2017	Assess the effects of unconditional cash transfers for improving health services use and outcomes in vulnerable children and adults in LMICs, and to assess the effects of UCTs on social determinants of health and healthcare expenditure.	21	Meta-analysis was conducted for cluster RCTs Systematic review of non-RCTs	Low- and middle-income countries Studies covered Ecuador, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Malawi, Indonesia, Lesotho, Mexico, South Africa, Uruguay, Zambia, India and Zimbabwe	Experimental and quasi-experimental
Siddiqi, A., Rajaram, A., Miller, S.P.	2018	Synthesize the current body of research from around the world on the effects of cash transfer programs on the first year of life	14	Systematic review	Low-, middle- and high-income countries USA (57%), Canada (14%), Mexico (14%), Brazil (7%), Nepal (7%)	Experimental and quasi-experimental
Yoong, J., Rabinovich, L., Diepeveen, S.	2012	Examine the evidence of the impact on family well-being of giving economic resources to women relative to the impact of giving them to men	14	Narrative review	Low- and middle-income countries	Experimental and quasi-experimental

*This was a comprehensive review of the attributes and evidence for UBI, including country-level poverty and distributional implications, financing and the policy and social feasibility of UBI. For the purpose this review, we focus on chapters that review empirical evidence of cash transfer interventions.

N = number of included papers

N/R not reported

WHAT OUTCOMES ARE ADDRESSED IN THE LITERATURE?

Within the broad areas of focus, reviews address a range of outcomes at the individual- and community-level, and for implementation processes. Table 2 describes overarching domains of interest and the measures or indicators used to operationalize the domains. **Poverty and expenditures, labor and employment, education, and health and healthcare access are the most commonly investigated.**

In most cases, indicators are addressed at the individual level, although community-level labor and employment trends have been prominent in reviews that analyze potential impacts of a UBI in the United States. Given the potential for cash transfers to redress social inequities, several reviews conduct sub-group analysis for gender[11,13,16] and measure absolute and relative inequality across outcomes.[17]

TABLE 2 DOMAINS, MEASURES AND INDICATORS ADDRESSED IN REVIEWS

DOMAIN	MEASURES AND INDICATOR(S)	REVIEWS *(First author/date)*
INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL OUTCOMES		
Poverty and expenditures	Income (wage and profits)	Baird 2018
	Ability to meet basic needs	Banks 2016; Pega 2019
	Monetary poverty	Banks 2016; Owusu-Addo 2018; Taafe 2017
	Total household expenditure or consumption	Bastagli 2016; Hagen-Zanker 2011; Marinescu 2018; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Food expenditure	Bastagli 2016; Hagen-Zanker 2011
	Poverty headcount	Bastagli 2016; Hagen-Zanker 2011; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Poverty gap	Bastagli 2016; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Squared poverty gap	Bastagli 2016
	Food insecurity	Hagen-Zanker 2011
	Healthcare expenditure	Pega 2019
Savings, investment and production	Household savings	Bastagli 2016; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Borrowing	Bastagli 2016; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Investment in productive assets (agricultural and other)	Bastagli 2016; Taafe 2017
	Livestock ownership	Bastagli 2016; Pega 2019
	Involvement in business or enterprise	Bastagli 2016
	Household productivity	Taaafe 2017

(Continued)

TABLE 2 DOMAINS, MEASURES AND INDICATORS ADDRESSED IN REVIEWS

DOMAIN	MEASURES AND INDICATOR(S)	REVIEWS *(First author/date)*
Labor and employment	Adult labor force participation	Bastagli 2016; Gibson 2018; Marinescu 2018; Pega 2019; Yoonge 2012
	Adult hours worked/labor intensity	Baird 2018; Bastagli 2016; Marinescu 2018
	Adult labor intensity by sector	Bastagli 2016
	Adult type of work	Baird 2018
	Child and youth labor force participation	Bastagli 2016, de Hoop 2014; Gibson 2018; Owusu-Addo 2019; Pega 2019
	Child and youth hours worked/labor intensity	Bastagli 2016; de Hoop 2014
	Migration	Bastagli 2016
Women's Empowerment	Physical abuse by a male partner	Bastagli 2016
	Non-physical abuse by a male partner	Bastagli 2016
	Women's decision-making power and control over resources	Bastagli 2016; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Marriage	Bastagli 2016; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Fertility	Bastagli 2016
	Use of contraception	Bastagli 2016
	Multiple sexual partners	Bastagli 2016; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Adolescent pregnancy	Owusu-Addo 2019
Education	School enrollment	Baird 2013; Owusu-Addo 2019; Taafe 2017
	School attendance	Baird 2013; Bastagli 2016; Marinescu 2018; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Test scores	Baird 2013; Bastagli 2016; Marinescu 2018; Owusu-Addo 2019
	Cognitive development	Bastagli 2016
	Educational attainment	Gibson 2018; Hoynes 2019; Marinescu 2018
	Parenting quality	Pega 2019
Healthcare access	Care seeking behavior	Banks 2016; Owusu-Addo 2019; Pega 2019
	Maternal health (antenatal visits; access to skilled delivery)	Owusu-Addo 2019; Taafe 2017
	Hospital admissions	Gibson 2018; Marinescu 2018
	Registered births	Owusu-Addo 2019; Pega 2019
	HIV service utilization	Taafe 2017

(Continued)

TABLE 2	DOMAINS, MEASURES AND INDICATORS ADDRESSED IN REVIEWS	
DOMAIN	MEASURES AND INDICATOR(S)	REVIEWS *(First author/date)*
Health	Mortality	Pega 2019
	General health	Banks 2016; Gibson 2018; Hoynes 2019
	Mental health	Banks 2016; Hoynes 2019; Marinescu 2018; Owusu-Addo 2019; Pega 2019
	Child anthropometry/nutritional status (underweight, child wasting)	Owusu-Addo 2019; Pega 2019
	Nutritional status and dietary diversity	Pega 2019; Taafe 2017
	Birth weight	Siddiqi 2019
	Child mortality (neonatal and post-neonatal)	Siddiqi 2019
	Gestational age	Siddiqi 2019
	Apgar scores at birth	Siddiqi 2019
Reproductive health	Use of contraceptive services or commodities	Khan 2016
	Method continuation and/or switching	Khan 2016
	New contraceptive users	Khan 2016
Civic Participation	Participation in community decision-making	Owusu-Addo 2019
COMMUNITY-LEVEL OUTCOMES		
Labor and employment	Labor supply	Hoynes 2019; Marinescu 2018
	State-level wage rates	Bastagli 2020
	State-level number of employed and unemployed	Bastagli 2020
	Early retirement rates	Bastagli 2020
	Conditions of paid work	Bastagli 2020
	Valuation and distribution of unpaid work	Bastagli 2020
Economic development	Increase in local businesses	Taafe 2017
Health	Contraceptive prevalence rate	Khan 2016
	Unmet need for modern contraceptive methods	Khan 2016
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES		
	Role of program size	Baird 2013
	Role of evaluation structure	Baird 2013
	Role of quality of data	Baird 2013
	Program access	Banks 2016
	Quality of care and services	Khan 2016

HOW ARE UBI-TYPE PROGRAMS CONCEPTUALIZED AND DEFINED? PROGRAMS, POLICIES, EXPERIMENTS AND PILOTS THAT INFORM THE UBI DEBATE

The studies that are used in review reports to project the impact of a UBI vary. Indeed, studies that analyze pilots, policies, and programs with quite different features have been used to arrive at conclusions about what could happen if everyone in a community or region received cash. For this report, all pilots, policies, and programs referenced in included reviews were classified according to the definitional features presented in the introduction of this report.

Programs, policies, experiments, and pilots fit into five broad categories (Table 3). A full list of programs covered by the reviews in these categories is included in Appendix 1:

- cash transfers, conditional and unconditional
- social insurance
- in-work benefits
- dividend payments from resource sector or other revenues
- cash from non-work sources, such as private remittances or lottery winnings

The broad categorizations include different combinations of the core, definitional features of a UBI: universality, unconditionality, in-cash, to individuals, and at a level that meets basic needs (Figure 1). Some pilots, policies, and programs that are included in the reviews synthesized for this report track more closely to the definitional features than others. For this reason, we break down interpretations of universality and unconditionality that explain some of the variability in studies that are included in reviews.

Universality is the idea that every person is covered under a given scheme. Universality, though, has multiple interpretations; it can refer to programs where every person is paid or programs where every person is guaranteed to be covered based on demographic characteristics such as age or the average income in the area where they live. In the case where there are criteria for initial eligibility, a defining feature of UBI is continuing eligibility despite changes to income or other characteristics.

Conditionality refers to requirements that are imposed to receive benefits. Conditions can refer to service requirements (attending a health clinic or attending school) and to work requirements. Service conditionalities are often used as an exclusion criteria by reviews, however some programs that require recipients to hold or seek employment in the formal economy are commonly used to draw conclusions about the impact of cash. Examples include social assistance programs with work requirements and income-based tax credits. Programs that do not meet any of the meanings of the definitional features may be included when reforms are introduced that allow researchers to evaluate changes in outcomes, as has been the case with the welfare assistance program Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in the United States.

Only a handful of the interventions covered by this review are truly unconditional and universal. In an exhaustive review, Gentilini and colleagues[21] identify only a small number of schemes that reach everyone within a geographic region without means-based or demographic targeting, and regardless of work history. These included national schemes in Mongolia and Iran, dividend transfers in Alaska and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, a one-off transfer to all citizens in Kuwait, and pilots financed by private contributions and the non-governmental organizations in Kenya and Namibia, and by the national government in India. Several of these programs are either short-term, or not set to a level that would meet basic needs.

The types of evidence that is reviewed is also influenced by the existing coverage of a country's social safety net. Targeted transfers that comprise the social safety nets of advanced economies are often not included in evidence reviews, while grants in low- and middle-income countries that resemble social assistance due to targeting are often classified as unconditional cash.

TABLE 3	PROGRAMS, POLICIES, PILOTS, AND EXPERIMENTS INCLUDED IN REVIEWS, BY GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS	
	MEASURES AND INDICATOR(S) GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS OF REVIEW *(First author, date)*	
	LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME	HIGH-INCOME
CASH TRANSFER CATEGORIES		
Cash transfer, conditional and unconditional		
Means-tested transfers	Baird 2013; Baird 2016; Banerjee 2019; Banks 2016; Bastagli 2016; de Hoop 2014; Hagen-Zanker 2011; Owusu Addo 2019; Pega 2019	Hoynes and Rothstein 2019; Siddiqi 2019
Unconditional transfer within an unconditional/conditional trial or experiment	Baird 2013; Bastagli 2016; Khan 2016; Owusu Addo 2019	
Universal, unconditional transfer	Baird 2016; Banerjee 2020; Bastagli 2016; Gibson 2019	
Negative income tax (guaranteed minimum income)		Bastali 2020; Hoynes and Rothstein 2019; Marinescu 2019; Siddiqi 2019
Social insurance		
Disability or dependency grants	Banks 2016; Hagen Zanker 2011	
Child support grants	Baird 2013; Baird 2016; Banerjee 2019; Banks 2016; Bastagli 2016; de Hoop 2014; Khan2016; Owusu Addo 2019; Pega 2019	Hoynes and Rothstein 2019; Siddiqi 2019
Non-contributory old age pensions and social security	Baird 2013, Baird 2016; Banerjee 2019; Banks 2016; Bastagli 2016; de Hoop 2014; Hagen-Zanker 2011; Pega 2019; Siddiqi 2019; Yoonge 2012	Hoynes and Rothstein 2019
In-work benefits		
Income tax credits		Hoynes and Rothstein 2019; Siddiqi 2019
Resource dividends		
		Bastagli 2020; Hoynes and Rothstein 2019; Marinescu 2019; Siddiqi 2019; Gibson 2019
Cash from other sources		
Private remittances	Baird 2016	
Lottery winnings		Marinescu 2019

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF VARIOUS UBI-TYPE PROGRAMS?

This section summarizes evidence for areas that have received the most attention from researchers and policymakers, and where the evidence is most robust. For each domain, main findings are synthesized across studies. While positive impacts are generally observed across the outcome areas highlighted in this report, it should be noted that reviews that apply the most stringent criteria for appraising evidence arrive at less certain conclusions for intervention impacts.[17]

The majority of reviews focus on low- and middle-income countries, but outcomes for high-income contexts are reported where evidence is available. While this report focuses on the outcomes of unconditional transfers that are likely to produce results closest to a UBI, high-level conclusions on the effectiveness of unconditional cash compared to other types of programs are included when these are addressed.

What follows are main findings in the areas of poverty and investment, labor and employment, education and health. We also briefly discuss the ways that design features may impact outcomes. It is worth stating that effects of transfers in one outcome area may reinforce or mitigate impacts in other related areas, and that outcomes that are not described in detail here may be important pathways or mechanisms by which transfers achieve their intended impacts.[9,11]

POVERTY, CREDIT AND EXPENDITURES/ SAVINGS AND INVESTMENT

Overall, evidence consistently demonstrates that unconditional cash in low- and middle-income countries leads to a measurable decrease in poverty,[9,11,19] although one review raises some uncertainty based on the quality of the evidence.[17] For persons living with disabilities, transfers are generally insufficient to move out of poverty or beyond sustenance living, but evidence for this population was limited to social assistance programs.[12] Family earnings and profit generally remain constant after families receive a cash transfers.[14] No review reports on changes to poverty or household earnings for advanced economies.

There is good evidence to demonstrate that an injection of cash increases household expenditures.[5,11,15] Results are positive for food expenditure in all country contexts[5,19] and the purchase and ownership of assets such as livestock in low-and middle-income countries.[11] Less of an impact is observed for the purchase of productive assets/ capital such as agricultural tools.[11] Impacts are more mixed for savings and investment, with several studies indicating no significant results.[8,11] Treatment effects may differ because of the varied constraints that people living in poverty face, indicating that cash transfers alone are unlikely to alleviate any one constraint on savings.[8] Similarly, there is limited evidence that cash transfers boost access to credit for household expenditures and investments.[11]

LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT

The evidence from diverse interventions in low-, middle-, and high-income contexts indicates minimal impact on aggregate measures of labor market participation,[3,5,6] with some studies reporting an increase in work participation.[11] When reductions do occur, time is channeled into other valued activities such as caregiving.[6]

Greater differences for employment measures are observed depending on the type of intervention and between sub-populations. Decreases in work hours, for example, are observed for single mothers in means-tested programs in the United States, and for single and married women in households that received non means-tested transfers,[5] but other reports indicate increases in labor market participation for those that receive tax credits.[3,6] Small but not significant reductions are also observed in households that receive remittances.[15] In low- and middle-income contexts, reductions in labor market participation are observed among the elderly,[6,11,15] those caring for dependents,[6,11] women with care responsibilities,[1] married women with children[1] and those in casual and occasional work.[1] In the case of the latter group, there are positive but mixed results that individuals shift from wage labor to work that carries more financial risks, such as own agricultural work or non-agricultural household businesses.[15] Men's retirement pensions have no effect on the labor of working-aged men, but a negative effect is observed for working-aged women; conversely, when women receive pensions, the labor supply is reduced among men, leading to a net decrease in household income.[2,14] Mixed results are observed in youth labor market participation, but the effects decrease as children age, and in some cases children's participation in household work may increase with family investments in agricultural assets from cash transfers.[16]

EDUCATION

There is considerable evidence of an impact on educational attainment across country contexts. Clear and significant impacts are well-documented for educational outcomes that would be expected in the short term, such as school enrollment and attendance,[3,5,11,14,19] but impacts diminish over time.[19] Fewer improvements are reported for outcomes that may require longer periods over which to observe effects, including student achievement on learning outcomes[15,19] and cognitive development[11] in low-and middle-income contexts. Some effects on test scores are observed in high-income countries,[5] but gender-based analysis somewhat complicates this picture. Women's eligibility for cash transfer results in increased expenditures on children's schooling, but no significant effect is observed for the children of eligible men.[13] Evidence for investments in girls and boys is mixed, with some evidence suggesting that schooling effects are more significant for boys, and others for girls.[13] In all cases, effect sizes are larger for conditional cash transfers,[14,19] but the significance of the differences varies depending on the extent of the conditions and whether they are enforced or monitored.[15]

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

There is consistent evidence across contexts for improvements to health status and to the myriad behavioral and social factors that are linked to leading causes of premature ill-health, disability, and death. A small number of studies report on disease outcomes, with some evidence for clinically meaningful reductions in the likelihood of having any disease with sustained effects two years into the interventions[17] and reductions in sexually transmitted infections.[19] Positive impacts were generally observed for mental health,[5,19] but some negative impacts were also observed due to social stigma and fear of benefits for persons with disabilities receiving targeted supports.[12]

Given the long timeframe to directly observe health impacts, many studies report on clinical and behavioral risk factors for future poor health. There are mixed results for clinical measures in children, with limited impact on anthropometric measures,[11,17] and some positive effects on birthweight,[5,20] preterm birth,[20] and Apgar scores.[20] When program characteristics are taken into account, the most significant effects on birth weight in advanced economies are observed among low-income and white populations in targeted and unconditional programs, while programs that are accompanied by work conditions yielded no or mixed effects, or even negative effects when work reforms were introduced to existing social welfare programs.[20]

Several reviews examine reproductive status and health, with positive impacts observed for use of contraceptives,[11,18] early marriage,[11] and unplanned pregnancy[11,18] in low- and middle-income contexts, and a decrease in fertility in high-income countries.[5] Impacts increase with the duration of the benefit,[11] but in the case of contraceptive use, decrease over time.[18] The evidence is inconsistent for whether these effects are greater in girls and women or boys and men.[13,19]

Evidence was mixed for healthcare access, with some evidence for positive impacts on health seeking behaviors and the uptake of health services[11,19] and for household spending on healthcare.[17] However, one review found that improvements were more likely for programs where enrollment in national health care or health service utilization were included as program incentives.[19] Mixed results were observed for access to antenatal care and skilled delivery attendants.[19]

Some studies investigate impacts on social determinants of health. While the evidence for social determinants of health, such as education, income and employment, are more robust, less evidence is available for other social determinants, such as housing conditions and quality, civic participation, community resilience, and women's empowerment.[19] The health impact on food security is generally well-reported, with positive effects on food security,[17] food expenditure,[11] and dietary diversity.[17] The gender of the recipient impacts nutritional effects, with greater impacts observed for girls over boys.[13]

4 TAKE-AWAYS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There is enthusiasm for unconditional transfers within a broad coalition of policy communities. Our 'cross-synthesis of reviews' signals that a vast literature has amassed on interventions that share one or more features with a UBI. We identify several take-aways from the current evidence base and directions for future research.

There is an obvious research evidence gap in the evaluation of an experimental, sustained UBI, which is considered the 'gold standard' for evidence. There is a shortage of evidence that meets most or all of the definitional features of a UBI, and the interventions covered by this report vary significantly. To arrive at conclusions at what may occur if all core features were unified into UBI policy, reviews have synthesized evidence from interventions that may not meet the most stringent definitions of universality or unconditionality. Existing experiments with cash payments that are defined as universal often require recipients to have a sufficiently low income to qualify. Additionally, universal programs rarely provide support at a level that would allow people to meet their basic needs. A truly universal program may produce significantly different results based on increased coverage and a change in the identity of recipients to those who are less vulnerable.[3,8] Given the feasibility challenges of implementing a universal program at scale, modelling studies may account for heterogeneity in populations and contexts may improve an understanding of the impacts of hypothetical policy reforms. Specifically, these methods can estimate how differences in household circumstances and complex interactions with tax and benefit systems may impact intervention effects.[5]

Findings are generally positive that UBI-type programs alleviate poverty and improve health and education outcomes and that the effects on labor market participation are minimal. There are a variety of other outcomes that have been pursued by researchers but where evidence is less certain. More research is needed on outcomes such as stigma and social cohesion to clarify the imperative to provide transfers universally. Our review surfaced that impacts of UBI-type programs are not uniform across all groups. Sub-group analysis that more comprehensively examines how intersectional factors—such as gender, race and age—modify intervention impacts could elucidate for whom UBI matters and why. It is evident from the social inequalities' literature that income differences between groups matter for many of the outcomes that a UBI is intended to improve. Without careful attention to uneven impacts, interventions risk leaving existing inequalities untouched, or even exacerbating them, rather than ameliorating the issue. Further research

is required to identify how different policy designs address not only absolute changes in outcomes among recipients, but also relative gaps based on income levels.[20]

The contexts where interventions are introduced are relevant for anticipating how interventions may work across settings and are also important for determining what types of programs are considered as unconditional and universal. Examining the variability in interventions that are claimed to approximate a UBI is important. In countries with minimal or fragmented welfare states, the injection of cash through payments or categorical transfers may play a very different role than when interventions are introduced into and evaluated against a more robust social safety net. Simply put, effects that are observed under some social and economic conditions may not transfer elsewhere. Evidence is also limited for how cash transfers may interact with the existing fabric of social supports in countries with well-established social safety nets, or how cash transfers compare to spending on other public goods in settings with less collective infrastructure. This is highly relevant to decisions about universality in settings where individuals are guaranteed benefits in an existing system of supports. Experiments which are underway in many countries across the globe will allow for comparison between individuals receiving benefits under the current system and those who receive additional unconditional cash and clarify the relative effectiveness of unconditional cash under different welfare schemes.

The potential trade-offs between UBI and other programs are largely unaddressed. There is limited attention to the impact of the broader social and fiscal policy environment on outcomes within the existing body of evidence. It is widely agreed that financing a UBI will require new revenue streams or diversions from existing programs. The interactions between UBI and additional taxes or decreases in expenditures from other programs are needed for a more complete picture of program effects.[5]

A small body of evidence examines the pathways or mechanisms by which UBI-programs trigger particular outcomes. Most of this evidence focuses on individual and household determinants or program design features that mediate impacts. However, recipients of cash transfers are embedded in broader environments. Outcomes are not simply the result of changes to individual factors, but rather their interactions with contextual factors that operate at multiple conceptual levels—from local neighbourhoods to the broader policy environment. In other words, UBI implementation must account for the environments where people live, work, and play, as these contextual factors can enable or constrain the decisions people make in ways that either amplify or diminish intervention effects. There are several frameworks that conceptualize the relationships between individuals and their environments that can be deployed to better contextualize interventions at the local-level. Future research that examines these pathways should also examine complementary policies or programs at the community-level to maximize the benefit of a UBI.

There has been limited research on the impact of UBI-type programs at the community level. Research to date has focused on more proximate impacts for individuals and households. The question of what happens in a community when some or all of its members receive unconditional cash remains to be answered. Most pilots and experiments that are planned or underway have not implemented true universality due to feasibility constraints or concerns about fairness.[22] Given these decisions about recipient populations, a better grasp of 'spill-over' effects shed light on what happens when there is an injection of cash within a community or region. Defining community-level social, economic, cultural and political measures or indicators that encompass a broader definition of health and well-being might address question on how benefits or harms are distributed outside of recipient populations and build the normative case for a UBI.

RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

GAP	DIRECTION
Evaluation of a long-lasting, universal UBI	Evidence-based theories of change that credibly demonstrate how immediate indicators relate to long term change
	Modelling studies to account for dynamic, heterogenous conditions and interactions under different policy scenarios
Equity implications of different policy designs	Analysis of relative outcomes between population groups
Relative effectiveness of UBI under different welfare schemes	Experimental designs that compare UBI recipients with those receiving the existing supports
Trade-offs between UBI and tax and benefit systems	
Pathways and mechanisms or contextual features through which UBI achieves impacts	Measurement of individual and community-level mediators of intervention effects
Economic and social spill-over effects in communities	Measurement of community-level indicators of intervention impact

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APPENDIX 1

CATEGORY	PILOTS, EXPERIMENTS, PROGRAMS, POLICIES
Cash grants, conditional and unconditional	
Means-tested transfers	Basic Social Subsidy Program (Mozambique) Basic Social Subsidy Program (Mozambique) Benazir Income Support Program (Pakistan) Bone de Desarollo Humano (Ecuador) Concern Worldwide Drought Response Direct Cash Transfer Program (Indonesia) Harmonized social cash transfer (Zimbabwe) Hunger Safety Net Programme (Kenya) Innovation for Poverty Randomized Trial (Ghana) Monze Cash Transfer Pilot (Zambia) Multiple Category Targeting Grant (Zambia) Nahouri Cash Transfers Pilot Program (Burkina Faso) Ndhima Ekonomike (Albania) Plan de Atención Nacional a la Emergencia Social (Uruguay) Programa de Apoyo Alimentario (Mexico) Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (Uganda) Social Cash Transfer Scheme (Malawi) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (USA) Temporary UCT (Indonesia)
Unconditional within a unconditional/ conditional experiment	Community led cash transfer program (Zimbabwe) Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (Ghana) Prospective Nutrition Intervention Study (Niger) Schooling, Income and Health Risk (Malawi) Tayssir (Morocco) Zomba Cash Transfer Programme (Malawi)
Universal, unconditional transfer	B-Mincome (Spain) Give Directly (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda) Kela Basic Income Experiment (Finland) Madhya Pradesh (India)
Negative income tax, guaranteed minimum income	Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment (MINCOME) (Canada) Seattle-Denver Income Maintenance Experiment (SIME/DIME) (United States)

(Continued)

CATEGORY	PILOTS, EXPERIMENTS, PROGRAMS, POLICIES
Social insurance	
Disability or dependency grants	Namibian Disability Grant (Namibia) South African Disability Grant (South Africa) Social Security Disability Insurance (USA)
Child support grants	Child Support Grant (South Africa) Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (Kenya) Child Grant Program (Zambia) Child Grant Programme (Lesotho) Child Benefit (Canada) Cash benefit to mothers on social assistance (Canada)
Non-contributory old age pensions and social security	Beneficio de Prestacaro Continuada (Brazil) Bonosol (Bolivia) Mexico's 70 y Más (Mexico) Old Age Pension Program (South Africa) Old Age Pension (Brazil) Programa de Atención a Adultos Mayores en Zonas Rurales (Brazil) Social Pension Previdencia Rural and Renda Mensual Vitalicia (Brazil and South Africa) Supplementary Security Income (USA)
In-work benefits	Child Tax Credit (USA) EITC (USA)
Resource dividends	Alaska Permanent Dividend Fund (USA) Bantuan Langsung Tunai, Fuel Subsidy (Indonesia) Californian Native American Nations tribal casino dividend (USA) Eastern Cherokee Bank of Indians Casino Dividend (USA Meskawai Nation Casino Dividend (USA)