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# Understanding lived experiences of low-income UK parents and carers (of infants aged 0-6 months) management of infant feeding in the context of the current cost of living crisis: the DIO Food project.

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# Understanding lived experiences of low-income UK parents and carers (of infants aged 0-6 months) management of infant feeding in the context of the current cost of living crisis:

## The DIO Food Project

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### Background

- UK Maternal and infant food insecurity is poorly characterised and understood.
- The first 1000 days of life have been recognised as a critical period in child development with lifelong impact on health and wellbeing<sup>1,2</sup> and good nutrition is essential<sup>3</sup>.
- ‘Exclusive breastfeeding, without any additional food or fluids, not even water’ is recommended for infants aged 0-6 months<sup>4</sup>.
- Breastfeeding can be challenging and for families choosing to bottle feed, infant formula is expensive<sup>5</sup>
- Formula is often not provided by food banks, due to UNICEF guidelines<sup>6</sup> and formula milk has been reported as one of the most shoplifted items from retail and pharmacy stores<sup>7</sup>.
- Efforts have been made to monitor household and childhood food insecurity and to secure the Right to Food for children in the UK through policy development<sup>8</sup>, a paucity of research on maternal and infant food insecurity in the UK remains.

This research aims to address this gap and provide qualitative evidence around the lived experience of maternal and infant food insecurity, in order to deepen understanding and help inform interventions and policy.

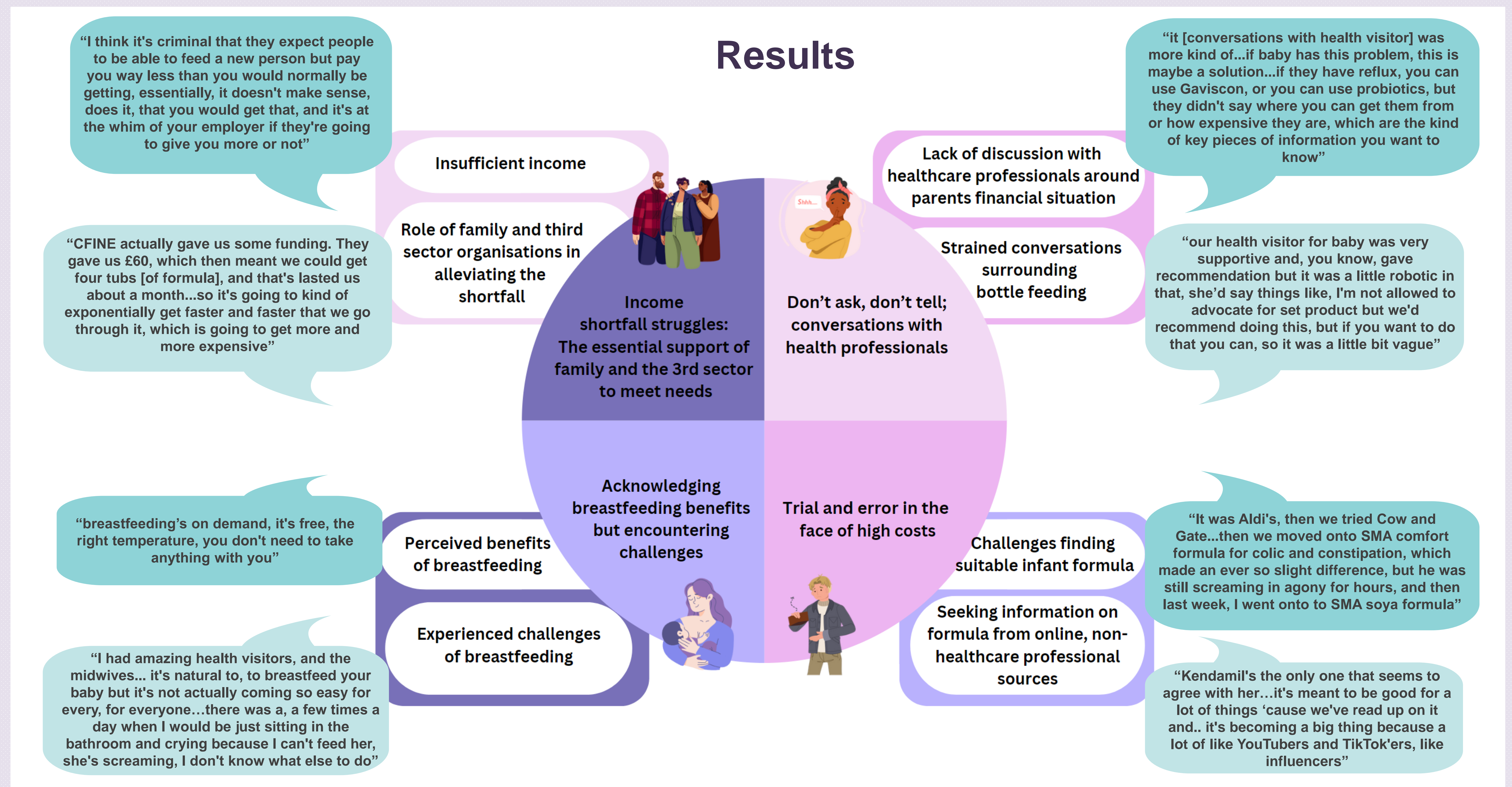
### Methods

**Recruitment:** Parents responsible for feeding a baby aged 0-6 months and self-reporting food insecurity identified through trusted networks and established organisations, (3<sup>rd</sup> sector and Government) in Scotland and England.

**Data collection:** Semi-structured interviews, online via Teams or by telephone, commenced December 2023. Recruitment remains open.

**Analysis:** We report **preliminary thematic data analysis**, following steps outlined by Braun and Clark<sup>9</sup>, conducted to date.

- Sample:**
- n= 9 (8 mums and 1 dad)
  - n= 6 living in Aberdeen; n = 2 in Aberdeenshire; n=1 in Inverclyde
  - n= 6 intended to breastfeed; n= 1 fully breastfeeding baby



### Conclusions

**Healthcare professionals avoiding conversations** around finances and formula feeding:

- creates a **missed opportunity** to ensure new parents and infants have the **financial support** they are entitled to..
- may mean new parents embark on an unnecessary lengthy and costly **journey of trial and error** to find a suitable brand of formula and **information seeking from unregulated sources**.

**Families and third sector organisations** provide a lifeline, **helping** new parents on a low income to **acquire food, formula, nappies and essentials**.

### Take home messages...

- **A joined-up approach** where **healthcare professionals and third sector organisations work together** to enable the delivery of both immediate (3<sup>rd</sup> sector provision of food, formula, nappies etc) and long-term support (healthcare professionals help new parents are receiving all benefit entitlement), **may be necessary**.
- **New parents favour upstream, Government level changes;** easier access to formula for those on low incomes, introduction of a cap on price of formula, review of rate of statutory maternity pay.

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