

GWNZ PhD Fellowship Progress Report

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Thank you for the support GWNZ has shown for my PhD work. Below is an overview of the project followed by a summary of my achievements since being awarded the scholarship.

1. Overview of Project

The title of my project is “*Post-pregnancy wellbeing and the impact on subsequent pregnancy outcomes*”. It is best conceptualised in two parts and consists of a retrospective and prospective study.

Part A: Examining Interpregnancy Weight Change in Aotearoa

Interpregnancy weight change (IPWC) refers to the change in weight experienced by birthing people between two pregnancies. Associations between IPWC and increased rates of adverse outcomes in subsequent pregnancies have been the focus of a growing body of international literature. However, no studies have examined how IPWC presents in an AoNZ birthing population or how it impacts subsequent pregnancies. I have designed a retrospective cohort study to:

1. Examine the distribution of interpregnancy weight change in a birthing population in Aotearoa/New Zealand
2. Examine patterns and predictors of interpregnancy weight change following the first pregnancy and its impact on perinatal outcomes of a second pregnancy

Part B: Postpartum weight retention in a primiparous birthing cohort

The **W**eight, **I**dentify, **S**upport and **E**ating (WISE) Study.

IPWC results from both postpartum weight retention and new weight change in the interpregnancy period. The second part of this study will measure weight change in first-time parents (both birthing and non-birthing parents) for 12 months following birth. This will identify postpartum weight retention in this population, providing context for the IPWC findings in Part A.

Along with weight change, other well-being assessments will be undertaken to capture a holistic evaluation of the participant’s well-being. To inform a holistic and culturally aware approach to data collection, the Meihana Model, will be used to inform the study design.

The preliminary objectives of the WISE study are:

1. Examine patterns and predictors of PPWR in the first 12 months following the birth of a first child
2. Identify the mean PPWR (BMI change from pre-pregnancy to 12 months postpartum) following the first pregnancy in an AoNZ birthing population
3. Observe the weight change of the non-birthing parent over the first 12 months of parenthood

This research provides an opportunity to examine how the well-being of parents is impacted over the course of the first year of parenting and how maternal well-being during this time may impact subsequent pregnancy outcomes. Separately, each of these components will address knowledge gaps that currently exist in perinatal care in AoNZ. Combined, they will contextualise and potentially enhance the findings of each other.

Overview of activities since being awarded the GWNZ fellowship

Part A: Interpregnancy Weight Change

The first paper from my thesis was published in the Australia and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in May 2025.

Study Admin

- Ethics amendments made through Counties Manukau Health
- Full re-application for Ethics at MidCentral Health
- Māori consultation pathway completed at MidCentral Health

Chapter 4

- Manuscript: *Examining interpregnancy weight change across a birthing population in Aotearoa New Zealand*, published in ANZJOG, will form Chapter 4 of my thesis.

Part B: The WISE study

In contrast to last 2024, where I felt that I had largely fallen behind in this space, a lot of progress was made on the WISE study in 2025. This includes:

Study Admin

- Drafted and finalised the study protocol for the WISE study (**August 2025**)
- Undertook consultation with the following stakeholders: Nga Maia (Māori Midwives) Manawatū Ropu and New Zealand College of Midwives (Manawatū Sub-Region)
- Submitted HDEC application and received approval (**August 2025**)
- Completed Mid Central Health Māori Consultation and Locality approval (**November 2025**)
- Commenced dissemination and recruitment (November 2025)
- 10% of study sample recruited (**February 2026**)

Professional activities and other highlights

Conferences/Workshops Attended

- NZCOM Biennial Conference August 2025- Oral Presentation

Another opportunity that I had this year was to contribute to the 6th Edition of *Midwifery Preparation for Practice*, a textbook that informs undergraduate midwifery education across Australasia and is endorsed by both the New Zealand and Australian College of Midwives. I independently authored the nutrition and physical activity chapter and co-authored the collaborative practice chapter.

Final comments

I feel very fortunate to have received the level of support that I have from GWNZ. Alongside being a recipient of the GWNZ Fellowship, I have been fortunate to become increasingly involved in my local GW branch. This fellowship has eased the financial burden of pursuing higher education while also raising my two young children. It has allowed me to take advantage of opportunities as they have presented themselves, including travelling to present at the NZCOM Conference and taking extra time to contribute to the textbook chapters. Without the extra financial support from GWNZ these opportunities would have been harder to take along the way.

The next 6 months will be focused on recruiting and data collection for both Part A and B of my project. The remaining funds will enable me to utilise paid-advertising campaigns to advertise for study participants and will enable me to offer whānau participating in the WISE study a koha of \$50 per whānau at the completion of the study. Something that was crucial to the project's ethical approval. So it is no understatement to say that the GWNZ fellowship has been the difference between my project progressing and languishing while koha funding was secured.

Outputs since receiving GWNZ scholarship

Peer-reviewed journal articles
Le Lievre, E. , Kempe, P., Cronin, R., Kim, A., & Hall, R. (2025) Examining Interpregnancy Weight Change Across a Birthing Population in Aotearoa, New Zealand. <i>Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology</i> https://doi.org/10.1111/ajo.70037
Peer reviewed book chapters, books edited
<i>Forthcoming</i> Le Lievre, E. , Hooper-Smith, M & Dahlen, H (2026). Working in Collaboration In <i>Midwifery Preparation for Practice</i> (6th ed.). Elsevier Health Sciences <i>Forthcoming</i> Le Lievre, E. (2026). Nutrition and physical activity foundations for pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. In <i>Midwifery Preparation for Practice</i> (6th ed.). Elsevier Health Sciences
Conference proceedings
Le Lievre, E. , Kempe, P., Cronin, R., Kim, A., & Hall, R. (2025 August 28-29) <i>Interpregnancy weight change in priority populations in Aotearoa New Zealand</i> [Oral Presentation] New Zealand College of Midwives Biennial Conference

Bio

Kia ora ko Emma toku ingoa. I am a Mum of two, a registered midwife and a PhD candidate at the University of Otago. I live and work in the Manawatū where I have been based for the last 10 years. My research focuses on the interpregnancy period and how measures of health and wellness change after the first pregnancy, and, in turn, how these changes affect future pregnancies.

I am completing my PhD part-time while I remain active in clinical practice, providing maternity care for whānau in the Manawatū. I believe this grounding in clinical work means I am constantly reminded of the real-world applications for my research and helps me keep whānau at the centre of my work.

How we support birthing people and new parents during the period following birth and before subsequent pregnancies can have a significant impact not only on their lifelong health but also on their child(ren) 's health. My research aims to address this very real gap in knowledge and public health guidance.