

HIPS/23/18 – Protection Of Vulnerable Women Against HPV Infection And Cervical Cancer – An Exploratory Study

This study aims to understand how health services can be best designed to reduce the risk of cervical cancer among vulnerable women in Scotland. Vulnerable women (i.e. those experiencing homelessness, transactional sex, substance misuse and in custody/prison) are at greater risk of developing cervical cancer, but are less likely to engage in and therefore benefit from the HPV immunisation and cervical cancer screening programmes, both of which substantially reduce risk. The vulnerabilities described earlier are often proxies of severe deprivation. Indeed it is sobering to reflect on the fact that the incidence of cervical cancer in the most deprived groups in Scotland is at similar levels to low and middle income countries. Proactive efforts are required to address this deprivation gap. This proposal has three strands: 1. Offering vulnerable women the opportunity to receive the HPV vaccine at health clinics and aligned services they already attend, and assessing uptake and the number of follow-up doses accepted, as well as baseline HPV testing. 2. Qualitative interviews with women, to hear their views on HPV vaccination and cervical screening and learn how they would wish vaccine and screening services delivered. 3. A review of international clinical guidelines to learn how other countries and health systems provide services to vulnerable women.