

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE OF CAREGIVERS REGARDING REUSABLE DIAPERS AND INCONTINENCE MATERIALS

Background

The healthcare sector's contribution to environmental problems represents a significant challenge^{1,2}. Healthcare is responsible for 2% of industrial waste in Flanders². Therefore, the *Green Deal Sustainable Care* has been launched to stimulate sustainability in healthcare with waste and circularity of materials as one of the pillars⁴. It is important to focus on sustainable alternatives such as reusable materials, since 43% of the residual waste consists of diapers and incontinence materials³. However, studies on knowledge and attitudes of professionals towards reusable materials in healthcare are rather limited and not available in Flanders.

Aim(s)

The aim of this study was to investigate knowledge, attitude and practice of healthcare providers in Flanders regarding sustainability in personal and professional life, and reusable diapers and incontinence materials.

Methods

A quantitative study with an online survey was conducted among Flemish healthcare providers (n= 281) in child and elderly care (resp. n=185 and n=96), including midwives, nurses, paramedics, doctors, managers, etc. Descriptive statistics and χ^2 tests were applied for data-analysis using SPSS. A P-value of <0.05 was considered as significant.

Results

Knowledge, attitude and practice regarding reusable materials was significantly related to the work setting, but not to age or job function. Respondents in childcare were better informed about reusable diapers than those in elderly care (73 vs. 12,5%; $p<0.001$) and had a higher willingness to use (77 vs. 24%; $p<0.001$). Disposable diapers were mostly used (62% childcare, 100% elderly care). Only 8% used reusable diapers exclusively in childcare. Impact on the environment was the most mentioned stimulator for reusable materials (70% childcare; 52% elderly care). Lack of usability (46% childcare) and knowledge (58% elderly care) were the most important barriers. The majority considered sustainability important in their personal (84%) and professional lives (78%). They were less convinced that their organization (49%) and the government (26%) consider sustainable care as important.

Discussion

This study highlights the need to increase knowledge and awareness of sustainable healthcare and reusable diapers and incontinence materials. A proper translation of sustainability policies into practice is required.

Implications and future perspectives

It is recommended to provide relevant information to healthcare providers and implementing policies at the workplace. Also further research is needed on ease of use, time and cost efficiency, including an environmental impact analysis of disposable and reusable diapers and incontinence materials.

References

1. World Health Organisation (2016). Toward environmentally sustainable health systems in Europe. A review of the evidence. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/340377>
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3. <https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/nl/green-deal-duurzame-zorg>