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Titolo tesi: Intervention and training needs for health promotion in the first 1000 days of life: from research to action

ABSTRACT

Background. While breastfeeding has been shown to reduce the costs of health care, its rates still remain low in many countries. A Public Health approach is needed to establish the appropriate context in order to facilitate and support the women's choice to breastfeed. Breastfeeding must be considered an aspect of public health that requires social interventions by adopting multi-level strategies that allow cultural and organizational changes in order to obtain higher breastfeeding rates. Breastfeeding training is one of the main actions to invest in order to support and protect the choices of mother and child, because health workers can influence a woman's decision to breastfeed and continue breastfeeding.

Objectives. The objectives of this doctoral program are: 1) To evaluate the effectiveness of the e-learning program in improving attitudes and self-declared practices of healthcare professionals. 2) To evaluate the long-term effectiveness of an online national program on infant nutrition for health care professionals. 3) To assess the training needs of the healthcare professionals involved in the training programs. 4) To describe the perceptions of health and social professionals on the provision of care to migrant children, the bio-psycho-social needs of this population and the training needs and methodologies of the operators.

Methods. Three different studies were carried out. The first, was a pre-study–post-study assess if an online course was effective in improving healthcare professionals' attitudes and practices before (T0) and after (T1) the course through a 20-item questionnaire. Changes in APs were analyzed using paired t-test. The second was a follow-up study to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the online course using data from three time points: T0 (pre-training), T1 (immediately post-training), and T2 (1 year after training). The differences between T0, T1, and T2 were tested using repeated-measures ANOVA. The third, was a qualitative descriptive study to describe the perceptions on the provision of care and the professional training needs.

Results. Regarding the effectiveness of the e-learning program, the online course improved attitudes immediately post-training, while minor changes were observed on practices. The main effects regarded the use of medications during breastfeeding (3.02 – 1.29 at T0 and 1.88 – 1.08 at T1) and the self-reported compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes (2.29 – 1.24 at T0, 2.03 – 1.21 at T1).

One year after training (T2) there was a decrease in attitudes and practices as compared with T1 but not with T0 (before the course). The greatest changes over time concerned the use of drugs during breastfeeding (T0: 3.00 – 1.33 versus T1: 1.74 – 1.03 versus T2: 2.64 – 1.35) and dietary restriction (T0: 2.77 – 1.35 versus T1: 1.76 – 1.12 versus T2: 2.57 – 1.35).

About professionals' perceptions, the qualitative study explored different areas of the provision of care to minor migrants including, bio-psycho-social needs, care provision, barriers to care. The main training needs declared by the social health professionals concerned the use of drugs, breastfeeding in premature infants, breastfeeding and work, child diseases, positioning, latch-on and effective suckling, maternal diseases, use of

natural products, code, ethics, and conflict of interest. Other contents included counselling skills, complementary feeding with a cross-cultural approach, the processing of sensitive data and the use of active participation methodologies.

Conclusion. Healthcare professionals play an essential role in promoting breastfeeding and, although their lack of knowledge may not be critical in influencing a mother's decision to breastfeed, it can impact on breastfeeding exclusivity and duration. To provide adequate support to mothers and parents, health professionals must be trained on all aspects of breastfeeding. Continuing education is, also, an opportunity to acquire knowledge, improve performance, support growth and development, broaden the professional role and introduce, develop, advance professional competencies/skills and to ensure that the patient care quality remains optimal. Online methods can be as effective as alternative methods, with different times and costs.

On the basis of these findings, the doctoral program has opened the possibility of new projects and new training activities that include: the dissemination of training on infant feeding in emergencies, a culturally sensitive accompaniment in the first 1000 days with a focus on high vulnerable populations, training accompaniment of new parents and health professionals according to Brazelton and Maria Montessori's perspective.

Keywords. Breastfeeding, Breastfeeding training, E-learning, Training needs, Healthcare professional.