

The Herbal supplements in Breastfeeding InvesTigation (HaBIT): preliminary results

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Background. Herbal remedies (HRs) are commonly used alone or concomitantly with prescribed medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding¹, a fact that needs to be addressed by pharmacovigilance professionals. Midwives, the main health-care professionals who take care of women during and after pregnancy, represent the more appropriate figure to focus on, in order to address this issue and promote mother and children health.

Aim. The aim of the present study was to evaluate midwives' support for HRs and to investigate use, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs regarding HRs among women during breastfeeding.

Methods. The sample under study was composed of 149 midwives and 204 mothers, investigated using a web-based questionnaire.

Results. About a third of midwives (36%) had children of whom the most part (96%) were breastfed. Midwives perceived natural products as safe (63%) and effective (55%), and used herbal products (70%), homemade herbal products (36%), dietary supplements (44%), galenic products (15.4%) and herbal medicines (20%). About a half (44%) reported giving information on breastfeeding to more than one women per week, more than half (58%) believed that mothers followed their advice (mainly on diet or dietary supplements), and a low percentage (25%) addressed mothers to qualified experts of integrative medicine before suggesting HRs. Moreover, our results indicated a general lack of knowledge about safety, efficacy and therapeutic indication regarding specific products. Similarly to midwives, mothers perceived natural products as safe (71%) and effective (49%). About two-thirds (70%) considered breastfeeding very important, and most of them (59%) reported receiving information about this issue by midwives. During breastfeeding, about a third (30%) reported using dietary supplements, herbal products (26%), homeopathy (16%) and phytotherapy (13%).

Conclusions. Our results suggest that an effective information campaign concerning herbal remedies may be fundamental for midwives who take care of women during and after pregnancy. This is particularly important considering the fact that HRs use could be dangerous for mothers and children.

1. Hall HG, Griffiths DL, McKenna LG. The use of complementary and alternative medicine by pregnant women: a literature review. *Midwifery*. 2011; 27: 817-824.