



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Knowledge of Andalusian paediatricians and parents about early-onset tooth decay[☆]



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KEYWORDS

Early-onset decay;
Children;
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Questionnaire

Abstract

Objectives: To determine the level of knowledge of paediatricians and parents from Andalucía (southern Spain) about early-onset tooth decay, and to assess if paediatricians provide information to parents about paediatric oral care and visits to the paediatric dentist.

Materials and methods: A random sample of 113 paediatricians and 112 parents with children under 3 years of age received an anonymous questionnaire comprising 14 items for paediatricians and 16 items for parents, grouped into five blocks: visits to the dentist, oral hygiene, caries, nutritional habits, and treatment of caries. The chi-squared test was used to assess differences between groups.

Results: Paediatricians showed deficiencies in their knowledge about visits to the dentist and treatment of caries, however their level of knowledge on oral hygiene, tooth decay and nutritional habits were adequate. Parents showed a low level of knowledge in all aspects of the study, mainly about the treatment of tooth decay. There were no significant differences between paediatricians and parents in the knowledge about visits to the dentist, however paediatricians had more knowledge than the parents about hygiene, tooth decay, nutritional habits and treatment ($P < .001$). Most of the parents indicated that paediatricians did not provide them detailed information on oral care, and about the possibility of visiting a paediatric dentist.

Conclusions: Andalusian paediatricians should improve their knowledge about early-onset tooth decay, and provide more information to parents about the oral care and the possibility of visiting a paediatric dentist. Parents have a very low level of knowledge about early-onset tooth decay, and particularly about treatment.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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Conocimiento de pediatras y padres andaluces sobre caries de aparición temprana**Resumen**

Objetivos: Investigar el conocimiento de pediatras y padres andaluces sobre las caries de aparición temprana y valorar si los pediatras proporcionan información a los padres sobre salud oral infantil y visitas al odontopediatra.

Material y método Una muestra aleatoria de 113 pediatras y 112 padres con niños menores de 3 años recibieron un cuestionario anónimo compuesto por 14 ítems para pediatras y 16 ítems para padres. Las preguntas se agruparon en 5 bloques: visitas al dentista, higiene oral, caries, hábitos nutricionales y tratamiento de caries. Las diferencias entre los 2 grupos se establecieron mediante la prueba chi-cuadrado.

Resultados: Los pediatras mostraron escasos conocimientos con respecto a las visitas al dentista y al tratamiento de las caries; sin embargo, su nivel de conocimientos sobre higiene oral, caries y hábitos nutricionales era adecuado. Los padres tenían bajos conocimientos en todos los aspectos del estudio, especialmente sobre el tratamiento de las caries. No hubo diferencias significativas en el conocimiento sobre visitas al dentista entre pediatras y padres, sin embargo, los pediatras tenían un mayor conocimiento sobre higiene, caries, hábitos nutricionales y tratamiento ($p < 0,001$). La mayoría de los padres indicaron que los pediatras no les informaban detalladamente sobre cuidados orales ni sobre la posibilidad de visitar al odontopediatra.

Conclusiones: Los pediatras andaluces deberían mejorar sus conocimientos sobre las caries de aparición temprana e informar más a los padres sobre cuidados orales y sobre la posibilidad de visitar al odontopediatra. Los padres tienen unos conocimientos muy escasos sobre caries de aparición temprana, especialmente sobre tratamiento.

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Introduction

Early childhood caries is a chronic and transmissible disease with a complex multifactorial aetiology.¹ Its worldwide prevalence varies, ranging from 3.6% to 15.3% in developed countries, while in developing countries it rises up to 67.7%.^{2,3} The prevalence in Spain is 22.06%.⁴

Some aetiological factors are: frequent bottle feeding with sweetened fluids; prolonged recurrent formula feeding or breastfeeding while sleeping; the use of the pacifier sweetened with honey, sugar, or fruit juice; excessive carbohydrate intake; poor oral hygiene; and reduced salivary flow.^{5,6} Other factors associated with caries are genetic predisposition, dietary habits, and the education level and socioeconomic status of parents.¹ *Streptococcus mutans* (*S. mutans*) has been identified as the major bacterial aetiological agent in early childhood caries.⁷ The vertical, mother-to-child transmission of this bacterium has been observed, and it is found in children by 6 months of age. A child whose mother has high salivary *S. mutans* levels is at risk of being colonised by the microorganism earlier than a child whose mother has lower levels.⁸

The prevention of early childhood caries in children focuses on the control of aetiological factors, that is, on increasing host resistance, reducing the number of oral microorganisms, controlling the diet, reducing the duration of the presence of cariogenic foods in the mouth, and establishing good hygiene habits. Once caries has developed, the lesions must be treated by a dentist. The possibility of mitigating or eliminating many of the factors involved in tooth decay depends directly on the motivation and willingness of

parents to cooperate. The role of paediatricians is crucial in this regard, as they are the first line of contact with children and their parents. Paediatricians are the professionals that can best and at the earliest motivate parents and seek their collaboration.⁷ They could also diagnose carious lesions at the earliest possible stage in order to refer children to the paediatric dentist for their management.⁹ Thus, the attitude and level of knowledge of paediatricians are essential factors that affect the prevention and treatment of early childhood caries.

The purpose of this study was to determine the knowledge of early childhood caries of paediatricians and parents in Andalusia. Specifically, we sought to assess the knowledge of paediatricians and parents in regard to when the child has to have the first dental visit, oral hygiene, dietary habits, and the prevention and treatment of caries. Last of all, we wanted to assess the information provided to parents by paediatricians pertaining to oral care and dental visits.

Materials and methods**Participants**

We conducted a cross-sectional randomised study of regional scope (Andalusia) on a sample of 113 paediatricians and 112 parents. The inclusion criteria were for paediatricians to be currently practising, for parents to have children 3 years old or younger, and for both paediatricians and parents to be willing to be interviewed.

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