



Mixed-method study on Audit&Feedback to reduce caesarean section. The Easy-Net experience.

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OBJECTIVE

The **Easy-Net project goal** was to promote Audit&Feedback strategy in different clinical setting. Due to the high prevalence of caesarean section (CS), the Calabria Region focused on the implementation of A&F to improve healthcare practice in childbirth and reduce CS rate. The study aimed to explore the healthcare professionals' prospective, in order to support the implementation of A&F strategy. The project was funded by the Italian National Ministry of Health (grant agreement NET-2016-02364191-6) and coordinated by the Epidemiology Department of Lazio Region.

DESIGN

Explorative sequential **mixed-method** study.

METHOD

The study involved all the maternity units (n=11) and three Community services (Consultori Familiari) of the Calabria Region. National data and regional current data were analyzed to describe the main maternal and neonatal outcomes. The **first phase** of the research consisted in qualitative data collection through **focus groups** (FGs). Participants were recruited through a purposeful sampling and included obstetricians, midwives, anesthesiologists and neonatologists. FGs were held online using semi-structured questions. Audio-recording were transcribed and analyzed according to categorical analysis. Based on the variables emerged in the qualitative phase, the **second phase** consisted of a **survey** on attitudes, practices, perceived determinants, training needs and perceived effectiveness and feasibility of A&F strategy. A structured questionnaire was administered to all professionals. Both qualitative and quantitative research protocols were approved by Data Protection Officer and Ethical Committee. Descriptive and inferential data analysis were carried out.

RESULTS

According to the Regional current data, the CS prevalence for year 2020 was 36.6%. The distribution of births using Robson classification showed an excess of CS, especially in the Group 1 (25.7%), Group 2a (31.4%), Group 3 (8.2%) and Group 4a (8%). From March to April 2021, six FGs were carried out involving 92 health professionals. Six main themes emerged: organisational and structural issues, barriers to hospitals-community services integration; personal beliefs, values and cultural heritage affecting clinical decision-making; need for a shared language and clinical behaviour; barriers to shared protocol and procedures; strengths of current provision of care; issues in A&F implementation. The survey respondents were 427 (response rate 91%). CS prevalence was perceived by 61.2% professionals as exceeding the current recommendations. Among the determinants, there are fear of medical legal issues (72.4%), frequency of high-risk pregnancy (41.2%) and women's request (34.7%). Continuous professional training (66.5%), organizational improvements (65%), A&F for CS (53.2%), hospital-community synergy (46.1%) and women involvement in clinical decision-making process (43.1%) are the actions identified to address the excess of CS.

CONCLUSIONS

The study results describe some of the underlying determinants of the excess of CS in the Calabria Region. A&F strategy together with organizational changing and stronger involvement of women could contribute to improve health outcomes.



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