



CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS AND CAREGIVERS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COW'S MILK PROTEIN ALLERGY IN CHILDREN: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the emotional, social, and practical impacts of cow's milk protein allergy (CMPA) on the daily lives of mothers and caregivers, highlighting challenges such as stress, social isolation, and the need for adaptations in the family routine. The research highlights the importance of support and appropriate interventions to improve the quality of life of these families.

Keywords: Cow's milk protein allergy, Mothers, Caregivers.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, allergic reactions to food have increased significantly, posing a contemporary nutritional challenge. These allergies, often triggered by protein, affect about 8.0% of children and 3.0% to 10.0% of adults globally (Reis et al., 2020). Cow's milk protein allergy (CMPA) is one of the most common in infants, affecting 1.0% to 5.0% of this population, with factors such as genetic and environmental predisposition contributing to its development. In Brazil, the incidence is approximately 2.2%, with an increasing prevalence of 5.7% (Pinto; Fruitful; Speridião, 2021).

The treatment of CMPA requires the total exclusion of milk and dairy products from the diet, requiring careful planning to avoid nutritional deficiencies, especially calcium deficiencies (Reis et al., 2020; Dick; Fruitful; Speridião, 2021). This adaptation alters the family routine, requiring changes to avoid allergic reactions and cross-contamination in common foods (Korz et al., 2020). Mothers and caregivers face emotional and social challenges, impacting their well-being and quality of life (Moen; Opheim; Trollvik, 2019).

Therefore, understanding the experiences and strategies of these families is crucial to offer adequate support. This study, part of a master's research at the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), investigates the emotional, social and practical impacts on the daily lives of mothers and caregivers of children with CMPA, as well as the strategies adopted to deal with the condition.

METHODOLOGY

This is an integrative review research with a qualitative approach and exploratory nature. The process followed six stages: definition of the theme, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data extraction and categorization, evaluation of studies, interpretation of results, and presentation of the synthesis (Mendes; Scott; Galvão, 2008).

The guiding question was: "What are the experiences and main challenges faced by mothers and/or caregivers of children with CMPA?" The inclusion criteria were based on: articles, theses and dissertations in Portuguese, English and Spanish, from the last ten years, excluding editorials, opinions and duplicates. Studies covering food allergies were considered, as long as they mentioned CMPA.

The databases consulted were: Virtual Health Library (VHL), CAPES Journals, SciELO and Science Direct. The following descriptors and their combinations with the Boolean operator AND were used to search for the articles: "APLV" AND "everyday challenges" AND "emotional impacts"; "children with cow's milk protein allergy" AND "caregivers" AND "emotional experiences"; "challenges in the daily routine" AND "mothers" AND "allergy to cow's milk protein"; "emotional impacts" AND "caregivers of children with cow's milk protein allergy"; "emotional experiences" AND "daily routine" AND "cow's milk protein allergy"; "CMPA" AND "family". In Science Direct, the "subject areas" filter focused on medicine, health and psychology, excluding dentistry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The search in the databases resulted in 3,318 articles, of which, after filtering and analysis, 12 were included in the final sample. Most of the studies were published between 2018 and 2023, with four conducted in Brazil, three in the United States, and the rest in countries such as the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Sweden. Of the selected articles, three were published in Portuguese and nine in English, all from university institutions.

According to the findings, CMPA affects the quality of life of children and families, requiring continuous monitoring (Abagaro et al., 2018). CMPA is more common in children under 3 years of age, usually diagnosed between 6 and 18 months during the introduction of food, a period that should be a period of discovery, but which becomes a source of stress for families. The impact of CMPA reaches all family members, especially mothers, who are the primary caregivers (Mikkelsen et al., 2015; Korz et al., 2020; Maciag et al., 2020; Ullmann et al., 2022). The Family Systems Theory explains that family interactions influence and are influenced by the experience of each member (Reis et al., 2020).



A study in the Southern Region of Brazil revealed that strict dietary restrictions cause social isolation and insecurity in health and education services, affecting mothers as children grow. Initially, they control their feeding, but children's growing curiosity generates frustration and social withdrawal (Reis et al., 2020). In addition, many caregivers feel that their care is seen as exaggerated, which generates discomfort in social relationships, and the lack of information about cross-contamination intensifies anxiety (Reis et al., 2020).

Understanding food labels is essential, and difficulty in interpreting it can compromise treatment (Ullmann et al., 2022). Food adaptation is complex and exhausting, requiring the involvement of everyone around the child (Abagaro et al., 2018; Reis et al., 2020). Challenges such as the high cost of formulas and the need to redefine social roles are evident (Reis et al., 2020).

In Turkey, mothers reported CMPA-related insomnia and stress, experiencing phases of shock and anxiety during treatment (Ozturk et al., 2023). The exclusion of allergenic foods impacts family dynamics and limits quality of life, requiring more food preparation at home (Meyer et al., 2017; Jung et al., 2023; Ozturk et al., 2023).

In addition, social isolation and decreased time between spouses are common. Mothers often avoid social engagements for fear of allergic reactions (Ozturk et al., 2023; Abagaro et al., 2018; Reis et al., 2020). This situation demands more responsibilities from caregivers, affecting family interactions and reducing leisure time (Ozturk et al., 2023).

In the United States, caregivers showed protective parenting styles, with difficulties in trusting others to manage dietary restrictions (Quach and John, 2018). The transition to school can be difficult, and many choose to homeschool to maintain control (Mikkelsen et al., 2015; Quach and John, 2018; Moen et al., 2019). Caregivers face challenges in stimulating children due to protective measures that limit social interactions and physical activity (Korz et al., 2020).

In short, CMPA profoundly impacts mothers and caregivers, affecting their emotional and social experiences. Managing the condition requires significant adaptations in the family routine, resulting in stress and isolation. The search for safe food options and constant vigilance require considerable effort, often accompanied by social judgments. Despite the challenges, mothers develop strategies to ensure food security and maintain an active social life. This highlights the importance of appropriate support and interventions that promote the emotional and social health of families, improving the quality of life for children with CMPA and their caregivers.



CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study highlights the significant impacts of CMPA on the lives of mothers and caregivers, evidencing the complex emotional, social, and practical experiences that permeate their daily lives. The main results reveal that the condition generates considerable stress, triggering feelings of anxiety and constant concern with children's food. Mothers often feel isolated and face difficulties in finding social support, as well as struggling with judgments about their food choices. In practical terms, the management of CMPA requires adaptations in family routines, including the need to educate oneself about nutrition and strict surveillance of food ingredients.

For future studies, it is suggested to explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at the emotional and social support of mothers and caregivers, promoting support networks that relieve stress and improve the quality of life of families affected by CMPA. In short, understanding caregivers' experiences and strategies is essential to developing more effective approaches that address the emotional and practical needs of these families.

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