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PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON SELF-CARE FOR PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

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SUMMARY

Physical disability affects a significant percentage of the world's population, generating inequalities in health and well-being. Public health policies are essential in the promotion of self-care among these people, seeking to improve their quality of life. The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of public health policies on the self-care of people with physical disabilities, from the perspective of nursing professionals. A quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional approach was adopted, using a structured questionnaire applied to 34 nurses from public health institutions. The results indicated that 88% of respondents consider self-care extremely important, but significant obstacles were also evident, such as lack of accessibility to services and insufficient training in inclusive care. Concluding that investing in inclusive policies not only improves the quality of life of people with disabilities, but also strengthens the health system as a whole, promoting a more equitable and accessible society for all.

KEYWORDS: Social inclusion, well-being, public health, autonomy, accessibility

1 INTRODUCTION

Physical disability is a phenomenon that affects a significant part of the world's population, and its impact on people's health and well-being is a topic of growing concern in public health policies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1.3 billion people, or 16% of the global population, live with some form of disability, and this number continues to rise due to factors such as an aging population and the increase in noncommunicable diseases. Public health policies must address the inequalities faced by these people, who often experience worse health conditions and limitations in their daily lives compared to the general population. (1)

Public health policies play a crucial role in promoting the self-care and well-being of people with physical disabilities. At the global level, these policies seek to ensure equity in access to health services, foster personal autonomy, and reduce barriers that limit full participation in society (WHO, 2022). Physical disability can create additional challenges in daily life, so public health strategies must include comprehensive approaches that address both the medical and social needs of this population. These policies not only seek to improve access to health care, but also to encourage self-care, the latter being understood as the ability of people to promote their health and manage their health conditions with or without the support of a professional. (2) (3)

Self-care, understood as the ability of people to manage their own health and well-being, is essential to improve quality of life and reduce dependence on third parties. However, various studies indicate that people with physical disabilities face significant obstacles, such as lack of accessibility to health services, insufficient training of professionals in inclusive care, and deficiencies in the implementation of effective policies. In this context, public health policies should focus on inclusive strategies that promote equitable access to health care, the development of assistive technologies, and the training of health professionals in person-centered models of care. Investment in these aspects not only benefits people with disabilities, but also strengthens health systems as a whole, contributing to

more just and equitable societies. This paper will analyze the impact of public health policies on the self-care of people with physical disabilities, highlighting recent advances and pending challenges in the implementation of effective strategies. (4) (5) (6)

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional approach, with the purpose of analyzing the impact of public health policies on the self-care of people with physical disabilities from the perspective of nursing professionals. A non-experimental design was used, since variables were not manipulated, but the perceptions and knowledge of nurses on the subject at a given time were analyzed. A sample of 34 nurses working in public health institutions who have experience in caring for people with physical disabilities was considered.

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, specifically designed to assess: Knowledge about public health policies aimed at people with physical disabilities: Perception of the effectiveness of these policies in patients' self-care: Identification of barriers and facilitators in the implementation of health policies: Opinion on the role of nurses in the promotion of self-care in this population. The questionnaire included multiple-choice questions adapted to a Likert scale that measures the degree of agreement with different statements from 1 to 5.

The data were analyzed with the SPSS software, using descriptive and inferential statistics, for descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation were used to describe the responses, while for inferential statistics the Pearson or Spearman correlation test was applied (depending on the normality of the data) to analyze the relationship between policy knowledge and perception of effectiveness.

The study followed the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and the institutional regulations for health research, in addition to the informed consent of the participants, ensuring their right to confidentiality and the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time.

3 RESULTS

Table 1. Sociodemographic distribution

Ages	N	%
20 to 29 years old	11	32%
30 to 35 years old	6	18%
36 to 40 years old	8	24%
More than 40	9	26%

Total	34	100%
Gender		
Male	26	76%
Female	8	24%
Position held		
Nursing Assistant	9	26%
Nursing Technician	1	3%
Nurse Technologist	2	6%
Bachelor of Science in Nursing	22	65%
Total	34	100%
Years of work experience		
1 to 4 years	6	18
5 to 10 years	17	50
11 to 20 years old	5	14
21 years or older	6	18
Total	34	100%

Source: Survey applied to respondents

32% of health professionals are in the 20 to 29 age group, which indicates an openness to new practices in self-care and greater familiarity with modern technologies. The male predominance in the sector, with 76% compared to 24% of women, influences the dynamics of care and the implementation of policies. Johnson et al. (2021) highlight that younger professionals are more likely to adopt digital technologies, which can improve patient care and facilitate self-care. This modern approach is key to advancing healthcare. Likewise, García and López (2022) found that the most diverse health teams in terms of gender offer more comprehensive care and are more sensitive to the needs of patients. (7)

In terms of the position they hold, 65% of the professionals have a degree in nursing, which indicates an educational level that facilitates the implementation of effective and evidence-based self-care practices. The World Health Organization

(WHO) highlights the importance of continuous training and specialized education to improve care for people with disabilities. According to a study by Porras-Roque and Herrera-Sánchez (2022), health policies that promote continuous training and professional development are essential to ensure that health professionals apply their knowledge effectively (8) (9).

50% of health professionals have between 5 and 10 years of experience, reflecting valuable practical knowledge in caring for people with disabilities. It is essential that public health policies are designed with an inclusive and patient-centered approach. In addition, promoting self-care benefits this group and represents an economic return, according to the WHO. Ruiz et al. (2021) emphasize that although experience is valuable, practitioners should stay up-to-date with contemporary best practices and approaches in healthcare. (10)

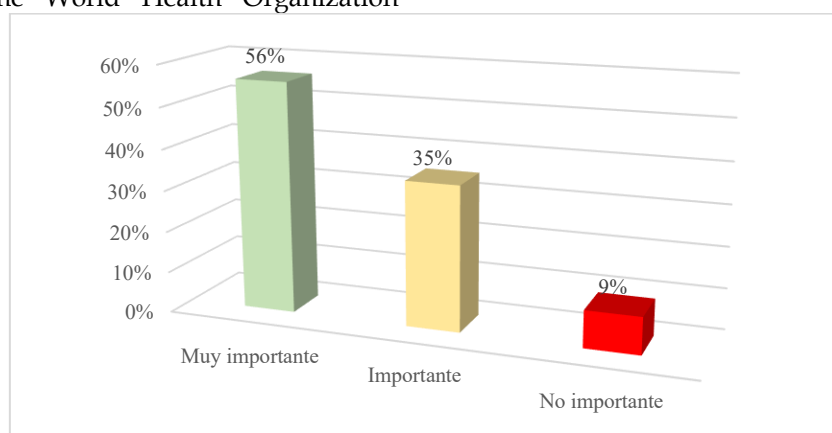


Figure 1. Distribution according to the importance of the practice of self-care nursing personnel. In the original Spanish language.

The practice of personal self-care among nursing professionals is critical to ensuring not only their well-being, but also the quality of care they provide

to their patients. According to the data presented, 56% of respondents consider self-care to be "very important", while 35% see it as "important", and only

9% consider it "not important". This overwhelming support for personal self-care highlights its relevance in the profession, given that nurses face high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion in their daily work. According to Chen et al. (2021), the implementation of self-care practices is associated with a reduction in professional burnout and an improvement in job satisfaction. Authors such as Eman et al. (2021) reveal that nurses who practice self-care report lower levels of stress and burnout, which in turn correlates with higher job satisfaction and better patient care. (11)

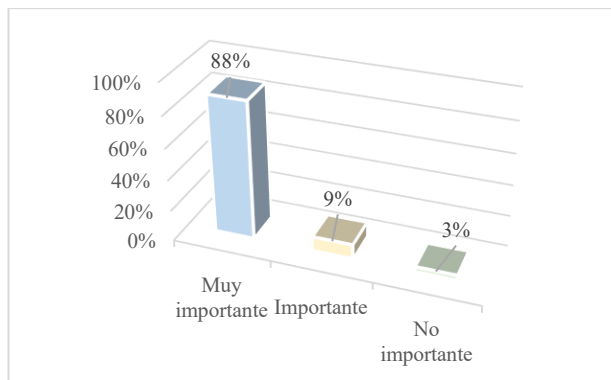


Figure 2. Importance of regular medical check-ups. In the original Spanish language.

The data show that 88% of those surveyed consider these check-ups to be "very important", highlighting the widespread perception of the need to maintain regular health check-ups. According to a study by Smith et al. (2021), regular check-ups can significantly reduce mortality from chronic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, by allowing for early interventions. However, despite the positive perception of the importance of medical check-ups, there are barriers that can limit their performance. A study by Gutierrez et al., (2022) indicates that factors such as cost, lack of time, and limited access to health services are significant obstacles that many people face. (12) (13)

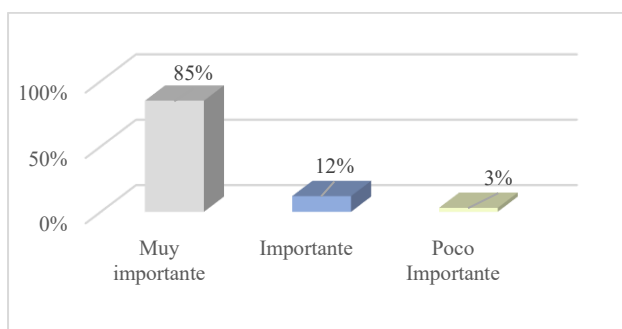


Figure 3. Importance of self-care in patients with physical disabilities. In the original Spanish language.

The graph shows that 85% of participants considered self-care "very important". Likewise, authors such as Torres et al., (2019) highlight that 80% of patients with physical disabilities saw self-care as essential for their well-being. However, it is relevant to consider the criticisms and limitations that some authors have presented. A study by Palencia et al., 2024 argues that although self-care is important, patients should not be overburdened with sole responsibility for their health, as access to resources and professional support also plays a crucial role (14) (15). Finally, López et al. state that promoting self-care increases patients' autonomy (16).

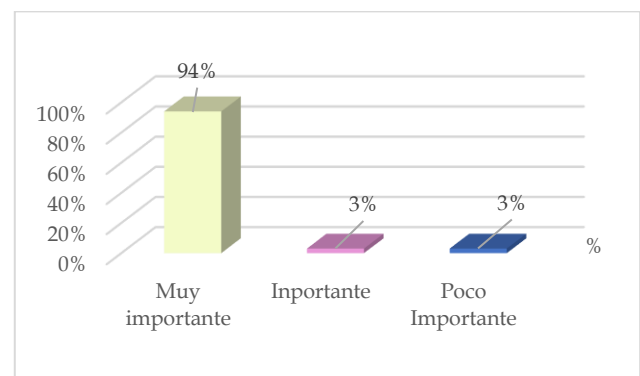


Figure 4. Importance of daily activities. In the original Spanish language.

This study revealed that 94% of participants considered these activities "very important" to their overall well-being. This data highlights the widespread perception that daily activities are essential for a healthy life, contributing to the prevention of diseases and the maintenance of an active lifestyle. Authors such as Moran et al., (2020) found that people who performed daily activities reported lower levels of stress and greater emotional satisfaction. This shows that mental well-being is intimately related to the performance of daily activities, which reinforces the need to integrate them into the daily routine. (17)

4 CONCLUSIONS

Research on the impact of public health policies on the self-care of people with physical disabilities reveals a reality that cannot be ignored: the need for a more inclusive and effective approach to the care of this vulnerable population. Through the voice of nurses, it is evident that, although self-care is considered fundamental, barriers such as lack of accessibility and insufficient training continue to limit the potential of these policies. It is crucial that health systems not only recognize the importance of self-care, but also implement strategies that

effectively foster it. Investing in the education and training of health professionals is an essential step to ensure that they can offer patient-centred care, respecting and enhancing the autonomy of people with disabilities. This approach will not only improve the quality of life of these people, but will also strengthen the health system as a whole,

promoting a more equitable and just society. Ultimately, a commitment to inclusion and self-care must be a pillar in public health policies, creating an environment where everyone, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to take care of their health and well-being.

Conflict of interest The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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