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Marco Lezcano, PhD, Margherita Pasini, PhD, & Maria Gabriella Landuzzi, PhD

Department of Human Sciences|University of Verona|Italy

Is it possible to promote a more sustainable lifestyle through the implementation of telemedicine services in rural areas? A qualitative study

Aim

we investigate the role of rural areas providers on the adoption of telemedicine services inside their communities, understanding the relationship between practitioners, patients, and mountainous environment

Background

Telemedicine services have been found effective in the reduction of health-related costs of the people who live in **rural areas** (Delgoshaei et al. 2017) and in an increase of trust in the local physicians and healthcare facilities (Potter et al., 2016).

A practical example of implementation is the *e-Rés@MONT project* (Marinelli et al., 2020), where has been estimated that around 18 ambulance and 12 emergency helicopters unnecessary calls and trips have been avoided, with subsequent environmental benefits related to traffic and pollution.

Method

The study was conducted among 16 health providers operating in two municipalities of the mountainous area of the Dolomites northern Italy. At first, all participants took part in a structured interview about their experiences, opinions, and interests in telemedicine services. After the interview, participants completed the Italian version of the Technostress Creators Scale (TCS, Molino et al., 2020) to evaluate the current technostress experienced in working activities, and an adapted version of the scale that measured the possible technostress experienced by using telemedicine services
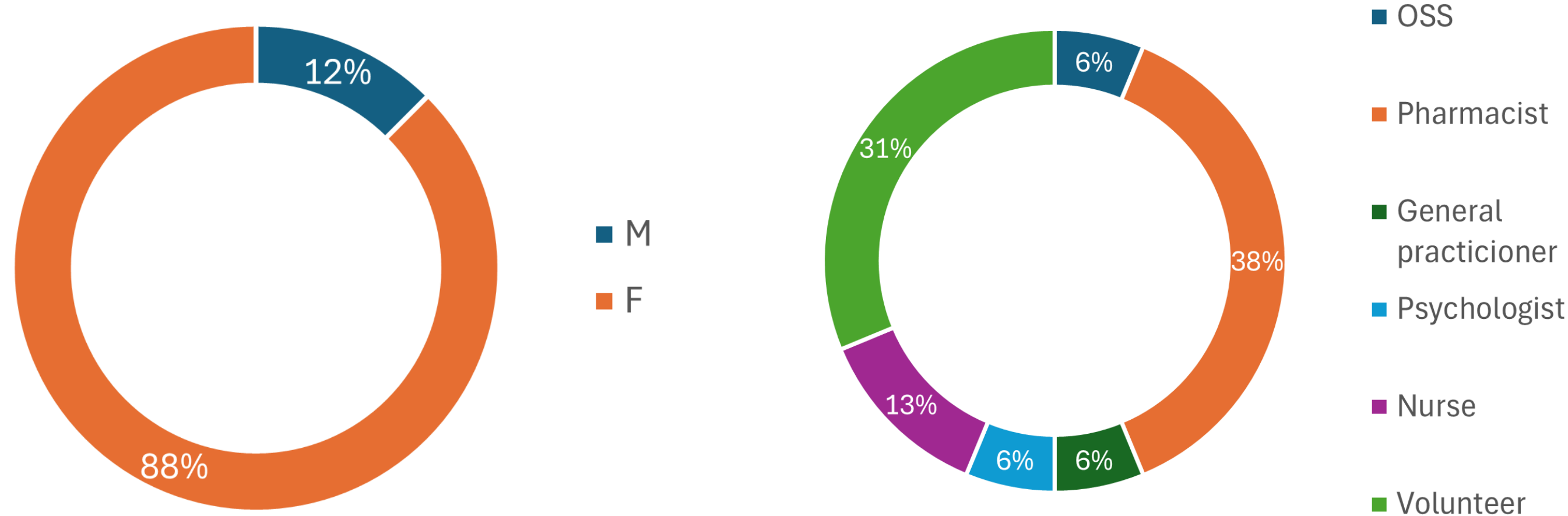
Results

Preliminary results derived from content analysis of the interviews highlighted in the **convenience of not having to travel**, the **age** of the population, the **cost savings,** and the **sense of community** the four main factors that will bring their communities to accept telemedicine services more easily. On the contrary, a **lack of digital competencies**, **reduction of social contact** with physicians, and **distrust over new technologies** are considered the main detractors of these services.

Furthermore, telemedicine services have been identified as one of the main tools to fight against **depopulation** of mountainous communities and a **great resource to cover the 40 minutes road** that separates these areas to the nearest hospital and avoid unnecessary travels.

All the participants expressed their support for introducing telemedicine services in their professional activities.

16 Healthcare providers

M: 12%
F: 88%

OSS: 6%
Pharmacist: 38%
General practicioner: 6%
Psychologist: 6%
Nurse: 13%
Volunteer: 31%

Implications

Our results, in line with the literature, underlines the importance of the implementation of telemedicine services for rural communities, who have the right to ask and build a more sustainable lifestyle.

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Contact: marco.lezcano@univr.it