Utilization and costs of conventional and alternative pharmaceuticals in children: results from the German GINIplus and LISAplus birth cohort studies.

Abstract:
The socioeconomic determinants for drug utilization, especially in children, have not been investigated sufficiently so far. The study's aim was the estimation of prevalences and determinants of conventional, homeopathic and phytotherapeutic drugs and expenditures. Population-based data on drug utilization of 3,642 children in two German birth cohorts (GINIplus and LISAplus, 10-year follow-up) were collected using a self-administered questionnaire. For analysis, the reported drugs (use within the last four weeks) were classified into the therapeutic categories of 'conventional medicine', 'homeopathy', 'phytotherapy' and 'others'. Drug costs were estimated using pharmaceutical identification numbers. In all, 42.3% of the children reported drug use; 24.1% of the drugs were homeopathic and 11.5% were phytotherapeutic. The proportion of children who took at least one homeopathic remedy was 14.3%. Drugs prescribed by physicians were dominated by conventional medicine (76.5%), whereas in non-prescribed drugs, both homeopathy and conventional medicine accounted for 37% each. Boys (OR = 0.78) used less homeopathy than girls. Income showed only a weak influence. Education had a strong effect on the use of phytotherapy such that children...
of mothers with higher school education (>10 years vs.<10 years) used more phytotherapy (OR = 2.01). If out-of-pocket payments arose (n = 613), the mean was EUR20. On average, total drug expenditures summed up to EUR39 in 4 weeks for drug users if only clearly identifiable prices for drugs were considered (58% of all data). Utilization of homeopathy is common in children from the analyzed cohort. User profiles of homeopathy and phytotherapy differ from each other and should be analyzed separately.