

THE FHVSS: The Feminine Hygiene and Vulvovaginal Symptom Survey

A Performance Improvement Measure to Qualify Patient’s Understanding of Feminine Hygiene

.Oluwatosin Adebisi¹, Jennifer Even MD, Erica Overbeek-Wager DO
¹MD Candidate, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Colorado Springs Branch



BACKGROUND

Feminine Hygiene is a general term that encompasses the practices that one may incorporate to maintain optimal vaginal health¹⁻⁵. This term has evolved to include the use of periodic over-the-counter intravaginal products that advertise the enhancement of vaginal pH. Intravaginal practices and periodic usage of intravaginal products is common among women in the United States⁵. Research demonstrates an increased risk of bacterial vaginosis and candidiasis with continual incorporation of intravaginal practices³; Bacterial vaginosis and candidiasis have been estimated to incur five to ten million clinic visits annually in the United States with a corresponding health care cost of over \$1 billion every year⁵. Patients’ understanding of feminine hygiene and intravaginal practices are typically limited to online resources and previous exposure to sexual education classes during primary education.

Feminine Hygiene and Vulvovaginal Symptom Survey (FHVSS)

This 18-item questionnaire was adapted from the Vulvovaginal Symptom Survey (VSQ)¹ and a Feminine Hygiene survey conducted by YouGov in a cohort of 2,010 individuals². The VSQ is a 21-item, questionnaire that highlights four scales: symptoms, emotions, life-impact, and sexual impact with a test-retest reliability 0.75, 0.60, 0.55, and 0.65 respectively¹.

- There is currently no gold standard for the assessment of feminine hygiene knowledge in woman.
- The Feminine Hygiene pamphlet was adapted from the Cornell Vaginal Hygiene toolkit³ (Figure 1). Information was validated against publicly available resources on the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists platform⁴.

HYGIENE TIPS

- GENERAL TIPS:**
- Do NOT use “feminine hygiene” sprays, douches, or deodorants.
 - Wipe from front(urethra) to back(anus) after a bowel movement.
 - Keep the vulvar area clean, cool and dry, and to avoid upsetting the normal balance of the vagina.
 - Shower or bathe regularly; encourage sexual partners to do the same.

IN THE SHOWER

- Avoid using harsh soaps on the vulva, as these are alkaline and can upset the normal pH balance.
- Simply cleaning with water is sufficient. You may use gentle soap on the vulva only.
- Be sure to clean the areas around and between the labia majora and labia minora
- Do NOT use soap or cleansers inside the vagina itself or round the vaginal and urethral openings, as this can be irritating and can set the stage for infection.

DURING YOUR CYCLE:

- Change pads and tampons regularly.
- Only use pads or pantyliner when you have your period; they are not for everyday use, as they keep warmth and moisture close to the body.

CLOTHING:

- Wear only loose-fitting undergarments.
- Avoid tight-fitting clothing.
- Change out of wet swimsuits or sweaty workout clothing as soon as possible.

What is normal pH?

The overall health of your vagina is important regardless of your level of sexual activity. When the **pH of the vagina is balanced**, the vagina will usually have a mild, slightly pungent or earthy odor (not unpleasant). The vagina is mildly acidic (low pH). A bacterium called *Lactobacilli* helps prevent other organisms from infecting the vagina. It also assist in maintaining the pH.

What is not normal?

Unhealthy vaginal discharge may present as:

- unpleasant odor
- burning of the vulva or vagina.
- itching or irritation of the vulva or vagina.

There are many causes, and specific diagnosis is needed for appropriate treatment. If your discharge is associated with severe abdominal pain, pain with urination, back pain, or a fever, seek immediate medical care.

Figure 1: Example of Feminine Hygiene Pamphlet.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

- In 2019, The Feminine Hygiene and VulvoVaginal Symptom Survey (FHVSS) was finalized and adapted for clinical use.
- In 2019, the Feminine Hygiene Pamphlet was curated and finalized for clinical use.

Objective

To understand patients’ understanding of feminine hygiene and vulvovaginal symptoms. To provide feminine hygiene education to patients.

RESULTS

- Six(6) women completed the the FHVSS and Six (6) women received the Feminine Hygiene pamphlet.
- The mean age was 46.1 years and ages ranged from 37 to 52 years.
- 71% reported having at least one of the five vulvovaginal symptoms in the last two weeks (Figure 2).
- 33% of women misidentified the urethra on the anatomical vulva diagram.

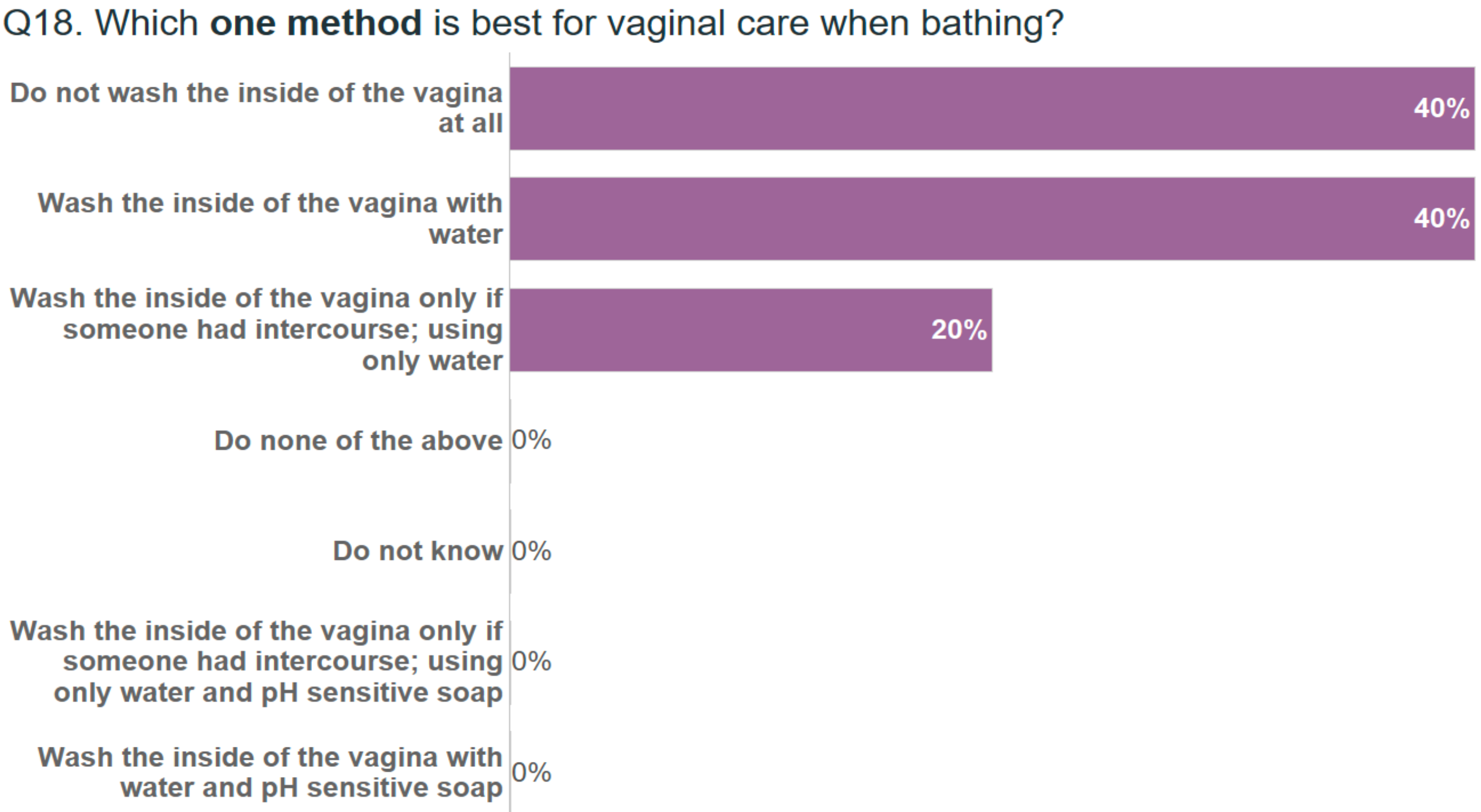
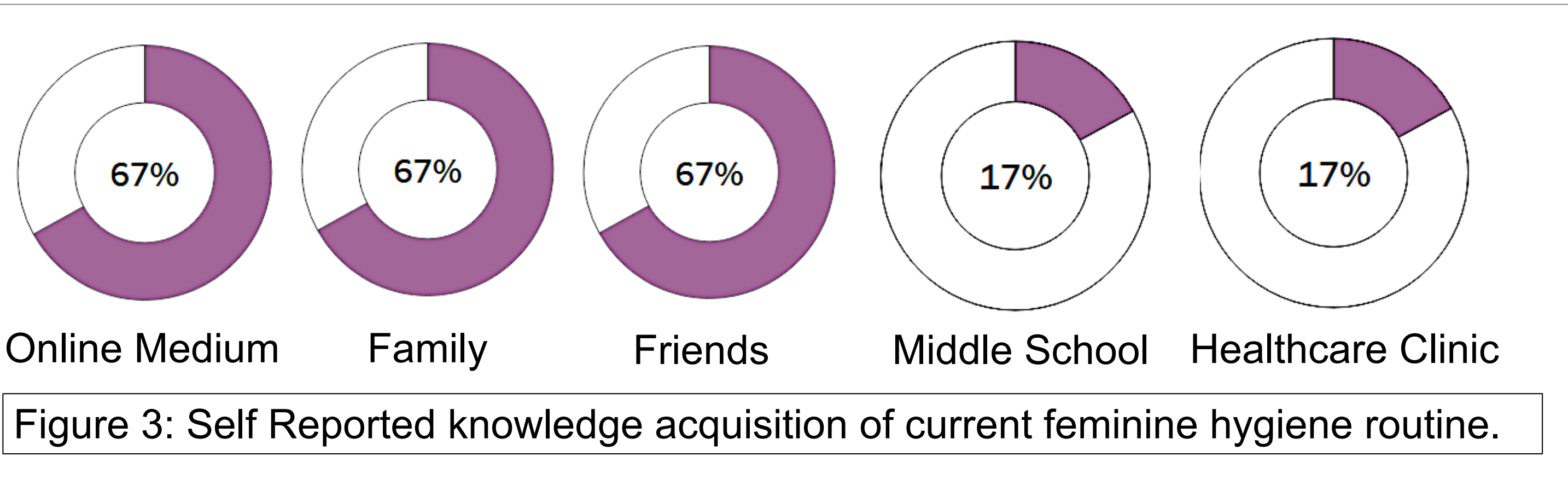
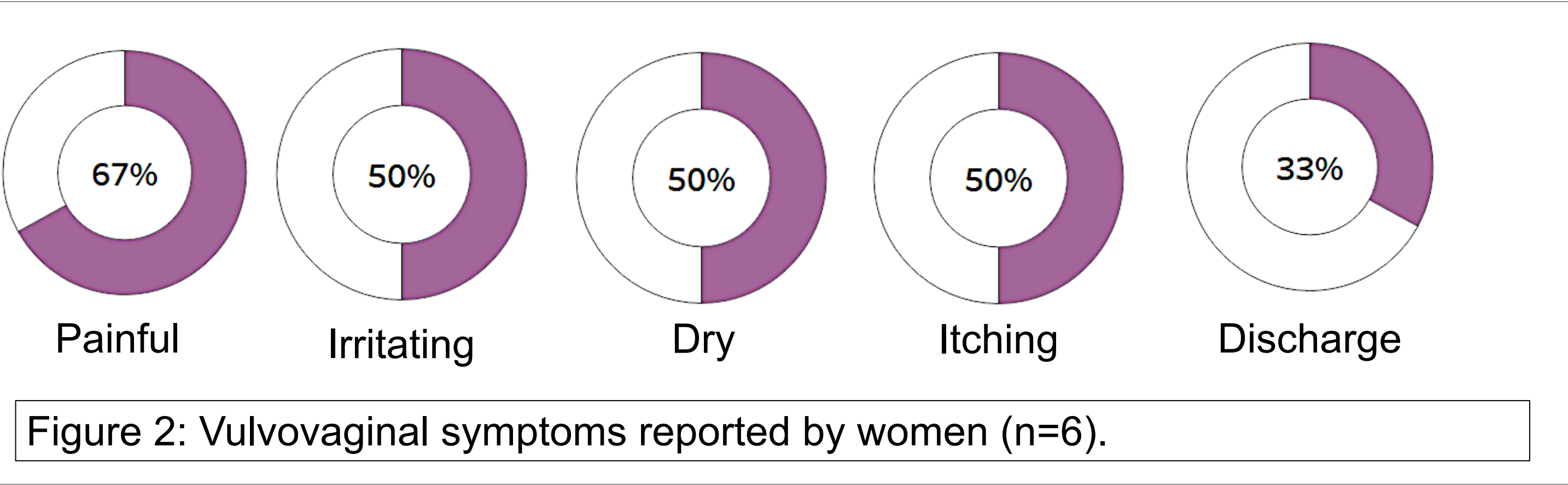


Table 1: 60% of women incorrectly identified intravaginal practices as a ‘best method’ for vaginal care.

DISCUSSION

Recommendation

Intravaginal practices are common among women. Clinics that provide Obstetrics and Gynecological services should screen patients’ vulvovaginal symptoms and provide corresponding Feminine Hygiene educational tools.

Future Direction

- Complete a second round of data collection to increase the sample size and obtain a representative sample of clinic population.
- Incorporate questionnaire in the Electronic Medical Record.
- Formulate a Post survey to qualify the efficacy of the feminine hygiene handouts. Through a follow-up phone conversation or through an online format (Relay).

CONCLUSION

Feminine Hygiene education is commonly acquired from family, friends, and online mediums. The healthcare clinic can serve as an outlet to provide best practices for feminine hygiene. Accurate guidance could decrease the incidence of intravaginal practices that lead to bacterial vaginosis.

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