

Vulval Symptoms in Female Cyclists

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Introduction

We noted a rise in women presenting to Gynaecology services with vulval problems related to increasing time spent on a bike, an area that there is limited information available in the current literature, with the two largest focusing on numbness and sexual function, rather than more general symptoms^{1,2}.

Our aim was to identify the impact and types of cycling related vulval complications and advice/treatment to alleviate these.

Methods

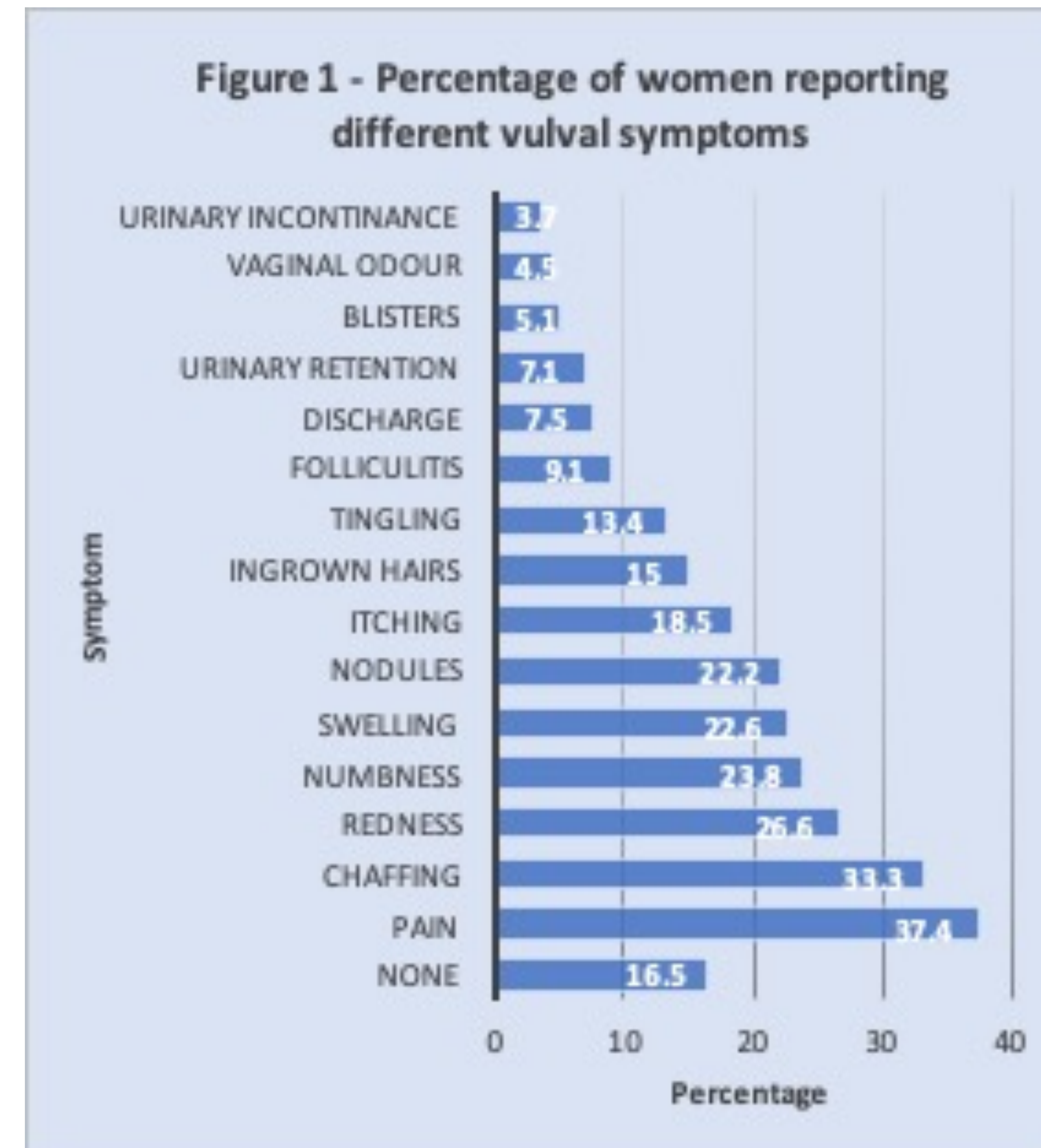
An anonymous electronic survey was set up and details sent to all cycle clubs in Devon and also promoted through the “South West Women’s Cycling” Facebook group. It was open for 4 months from 27/4/2021 to 31/8/2021. Questions were asked about specific symptoms with a free text option for providing additional comments.

Results

508 women responded to the survey between the ages of 20 and 60+.

43.5% (n=221) of women said they had **been put off cycling due to vulval/perineal discomfort**.

The most common symptom experienced by women was pain (190, 37.4%) followed by chaffing at (169, 33.3%) and redness (135, 26.6%). *See figure 1* Just over a fifth of women have experienced infections they attribute to cycling: 9.8% (n=50) urinary tract infections, 7.5% (n=38) vulvo/vaginal candida and 3.1% (n=16) bacterial vaginosis.



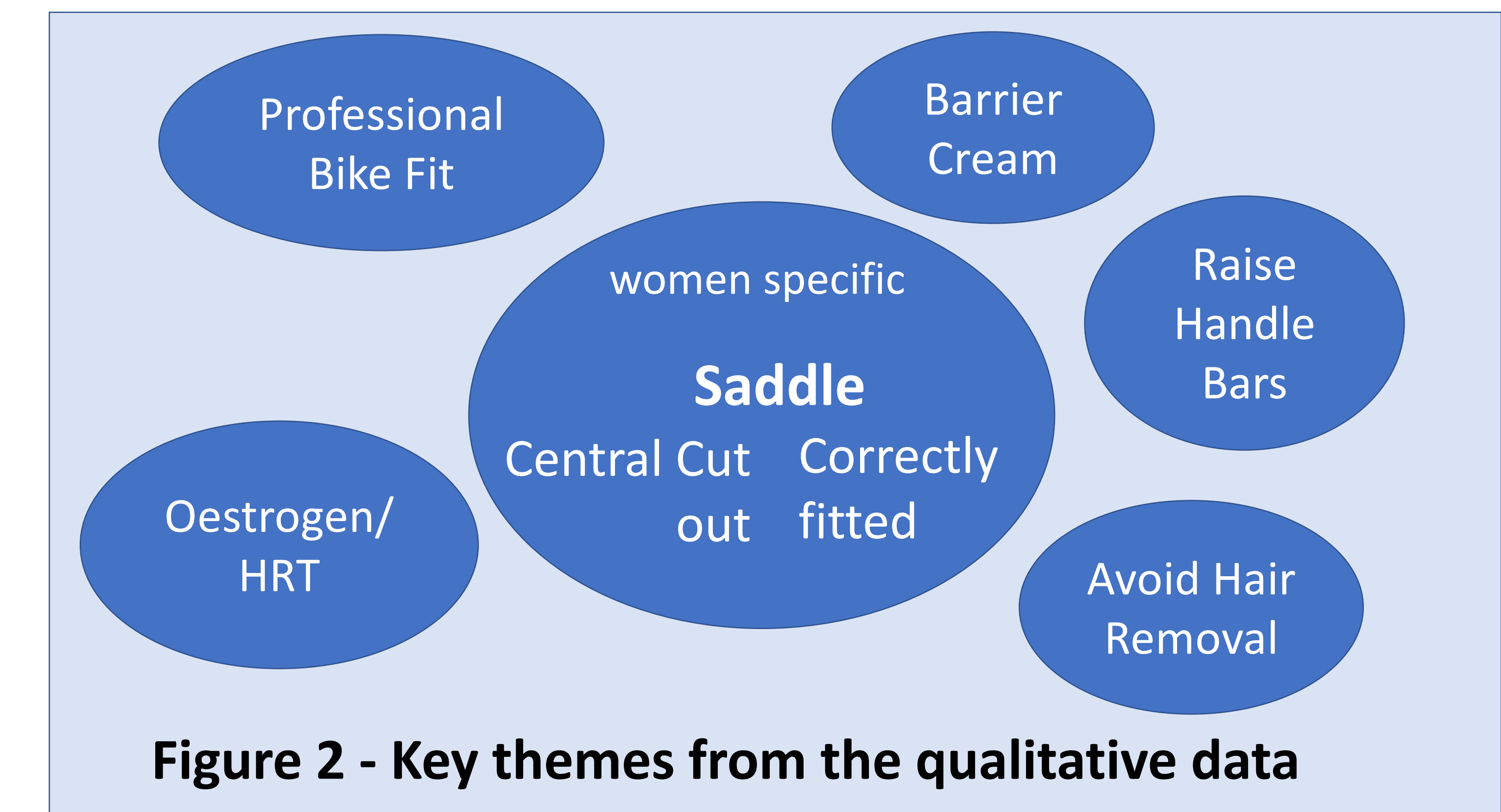
References

¹Lui H, Mmonu N, Awad MA, Namiri NK, Zheng MY, Amend GM, Eisenberg ML, Breyer BN. Association of Bicycle-Related Genital Numbness and Female Sexual Dysfunction: Results From a Large, Multinational, Cross-Sectional Study. Sex Med. 2021 Jun;9(3):100365

²Greenberg DR, Khandwala YS, Breyer BN, Minkow R, Eisenberg ML. Genital Pain and Numbness and Female Sexual Dysfunction in Adult Bicyclists. J Sex Med. 2019 Sep;16(9):1381-1389

Key themes

Key themes from the qualitative data are shown in figure 2. A correctly fitted, women specific saddle with a central cut out was the most frequently mentioned modification to improve vulval symptoms. The post-menopausal group (the modal group in our results) in particular commented on the benefits of oestrogen to counter the effects of atrophy – “oestrogen/HRT has helped enormously”. This could be a simple measure to enable women in this age group to continue cycling.



Conclusion

Vulval discomfort in female cyclists is a significant issue causing 43.5% of women in our survey to be put off cycling all together. The most common symptoms include pain, chaffing and redness. Advice such as using women specific saddles with a central cut out, saddle position, use of chamois cream, avoidance of pubic hair removal and the use of vaginal oestrogen in post-menopausal woman can help alleviate these problems.