

HOW COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS INFLUENCED WOMEN UNDERGOING FERTILITY TREATMENT IN GREECE

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INTRODUCTION

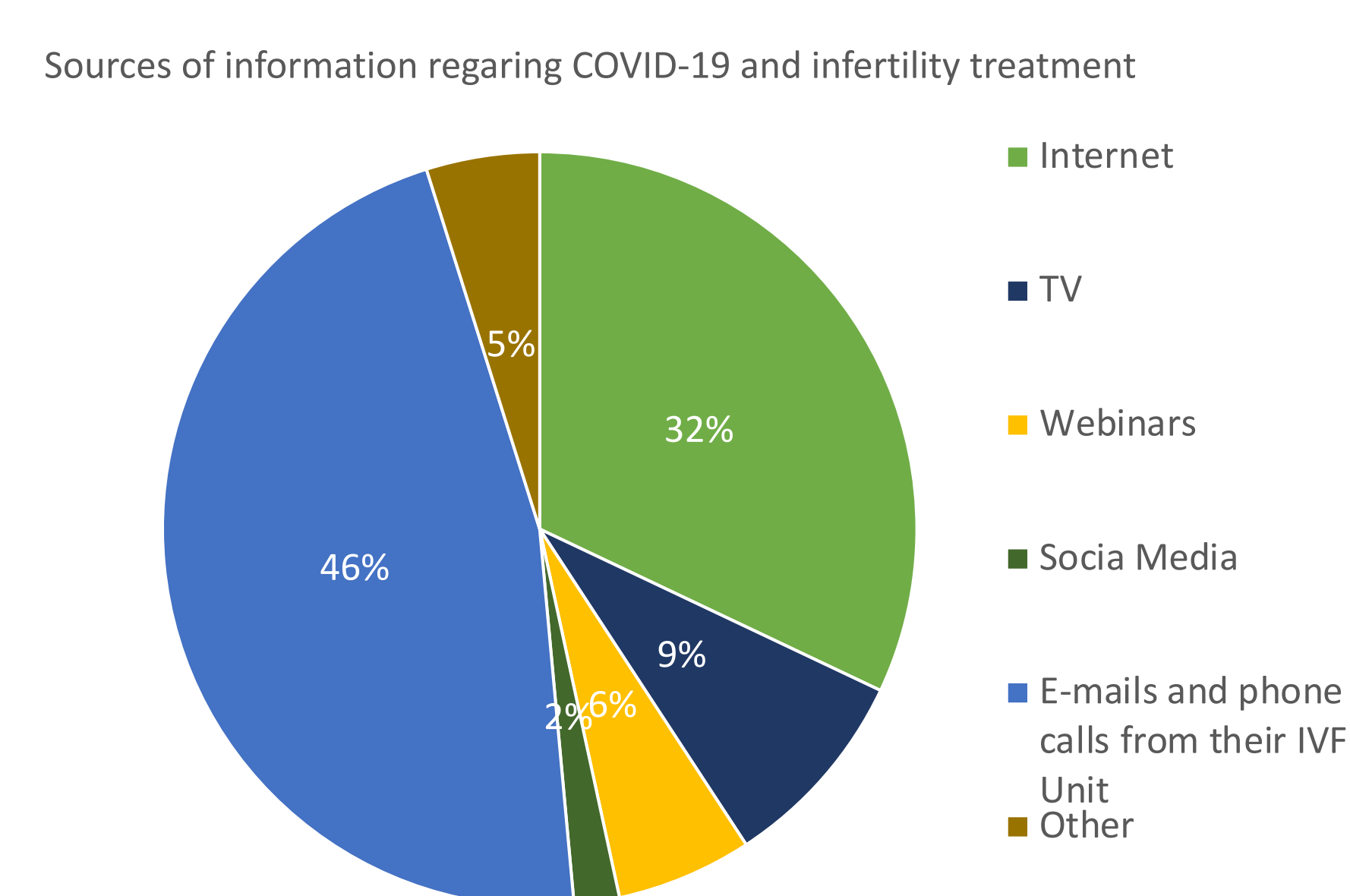
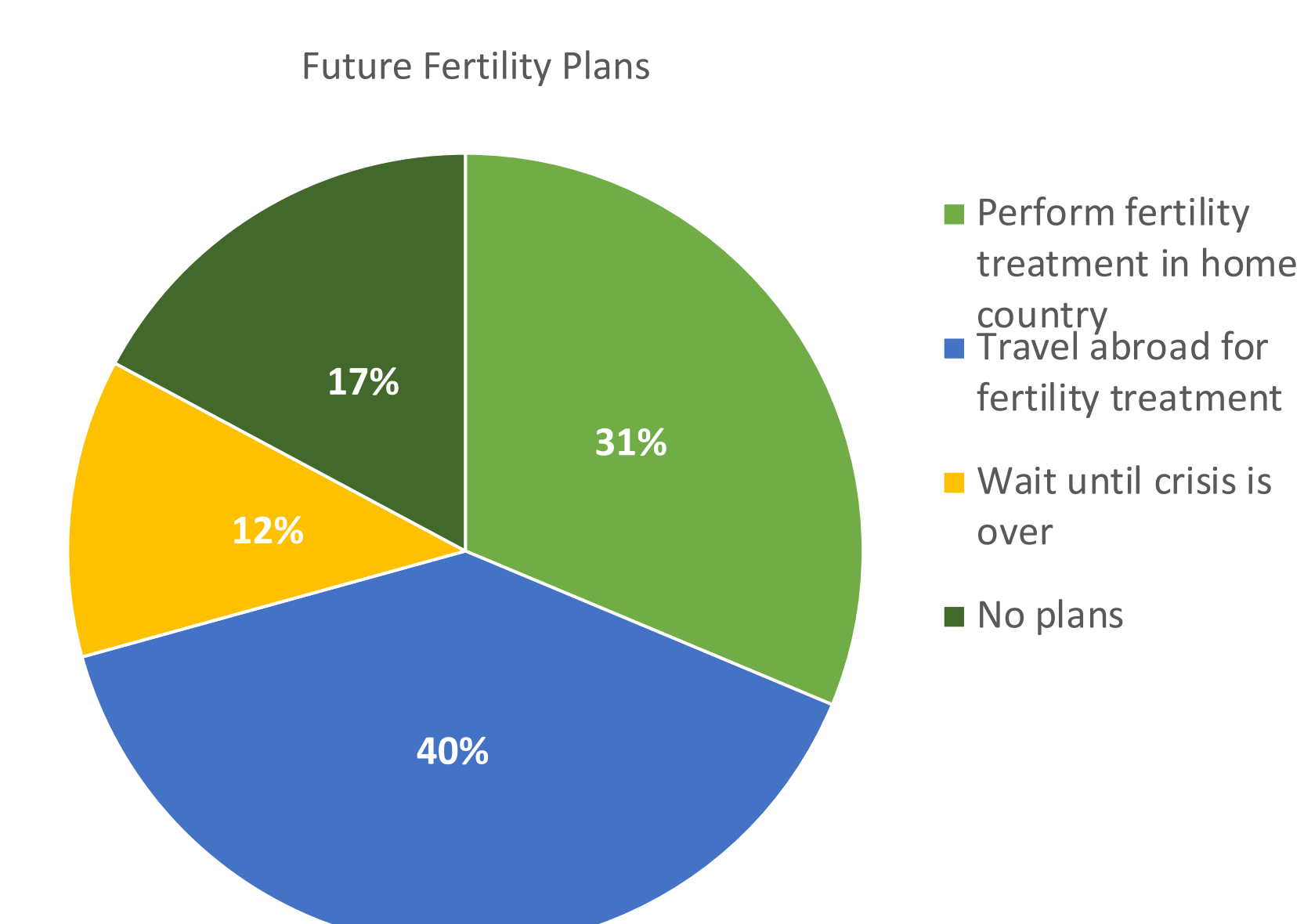
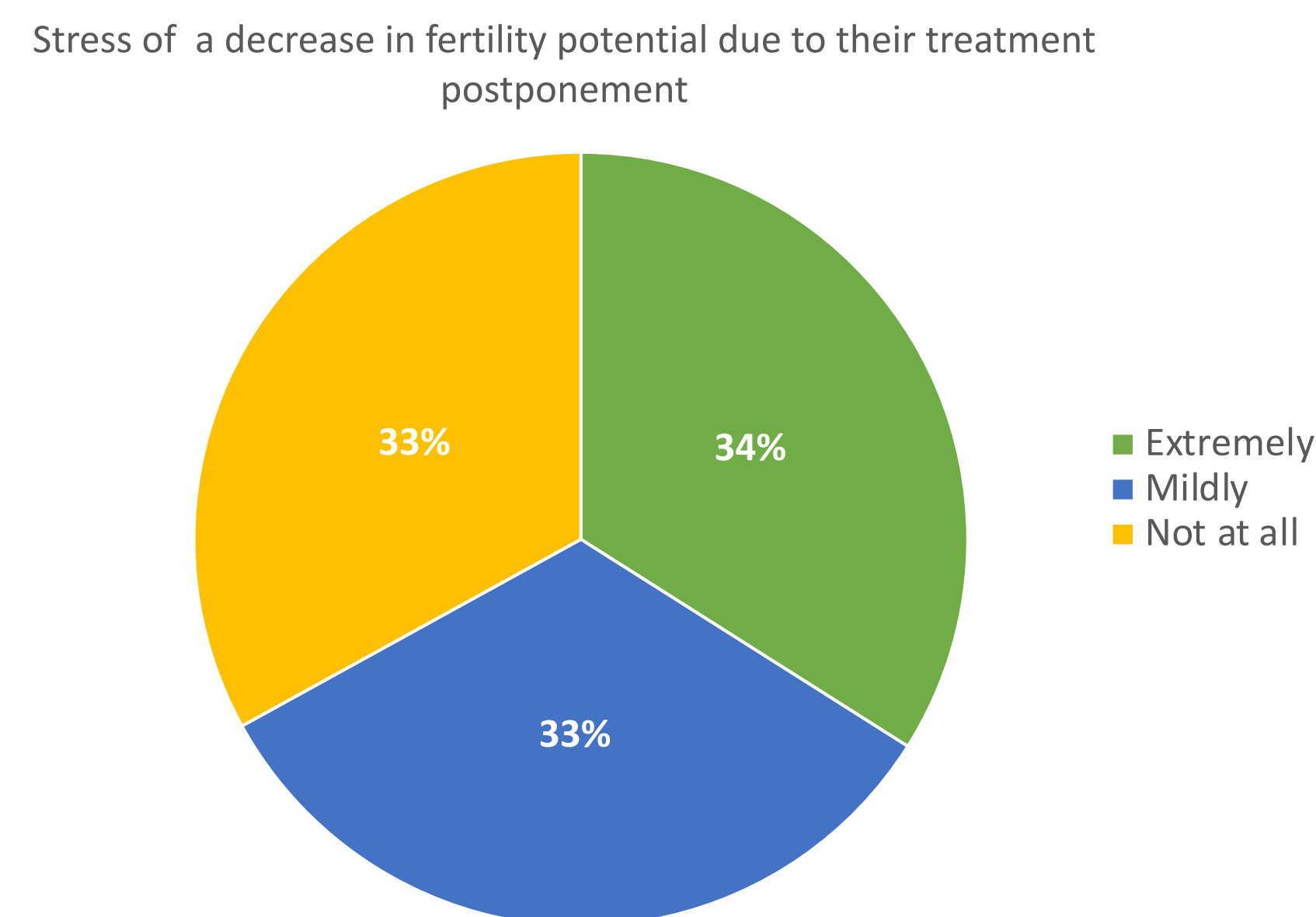
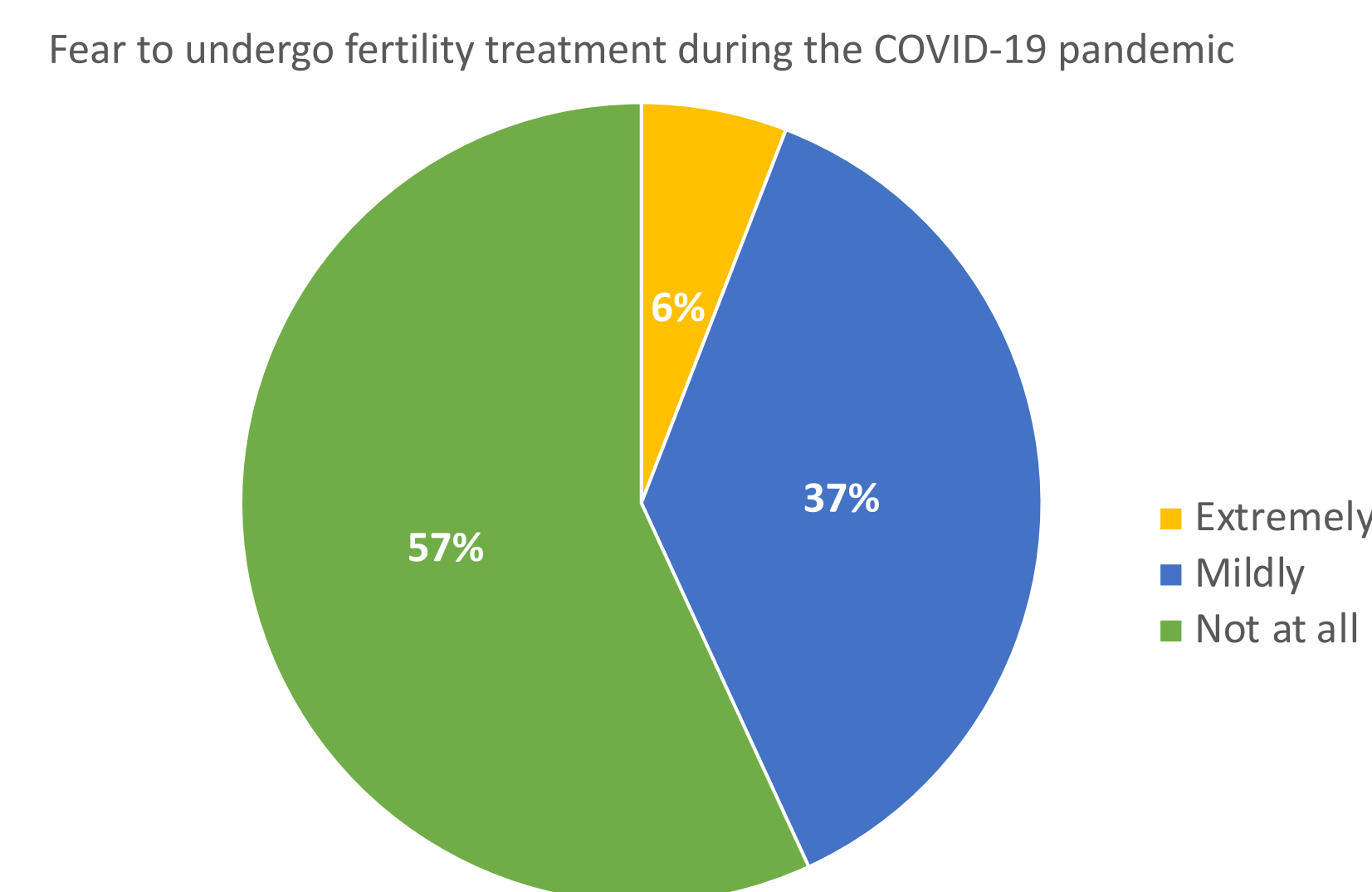
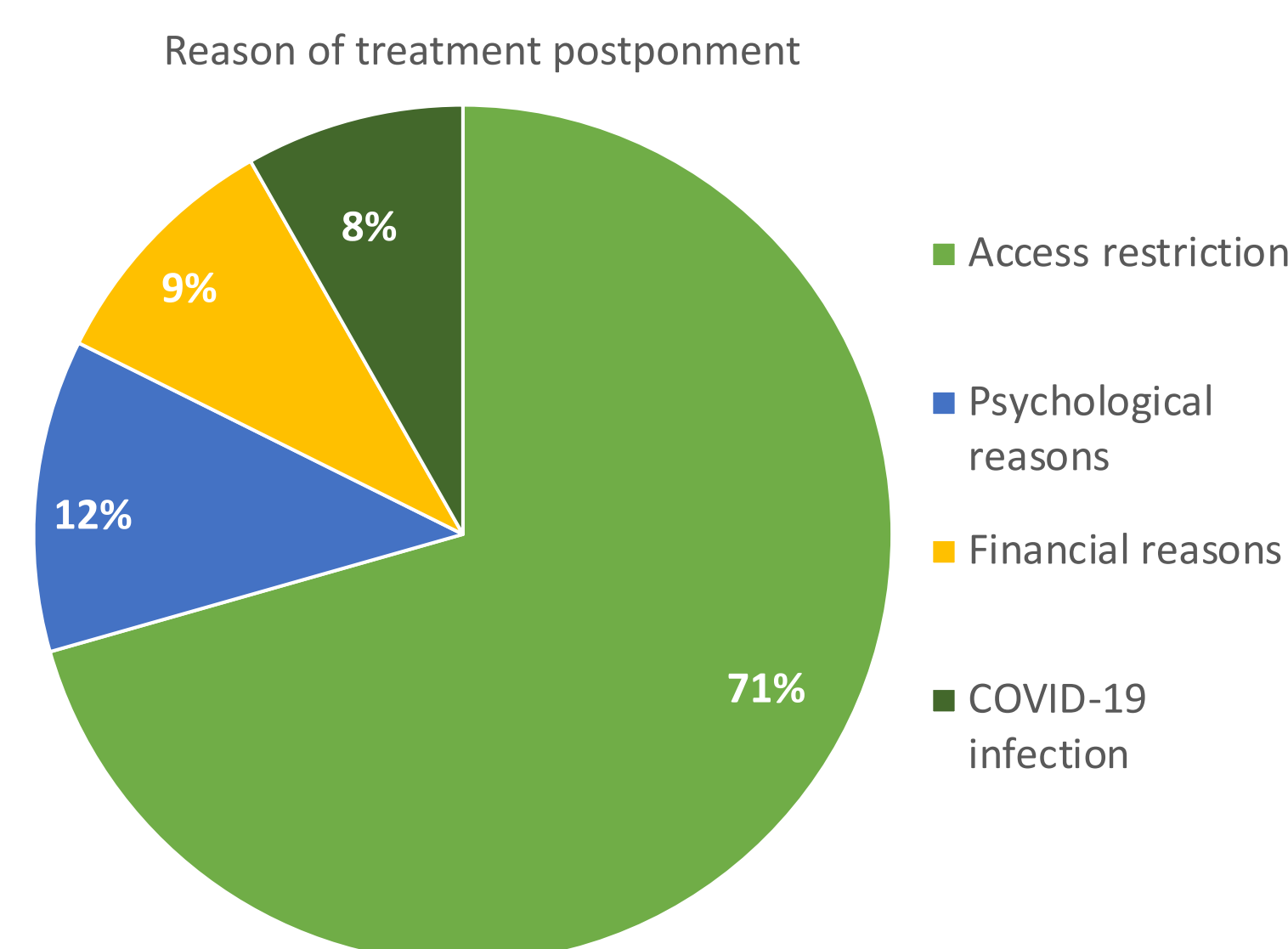
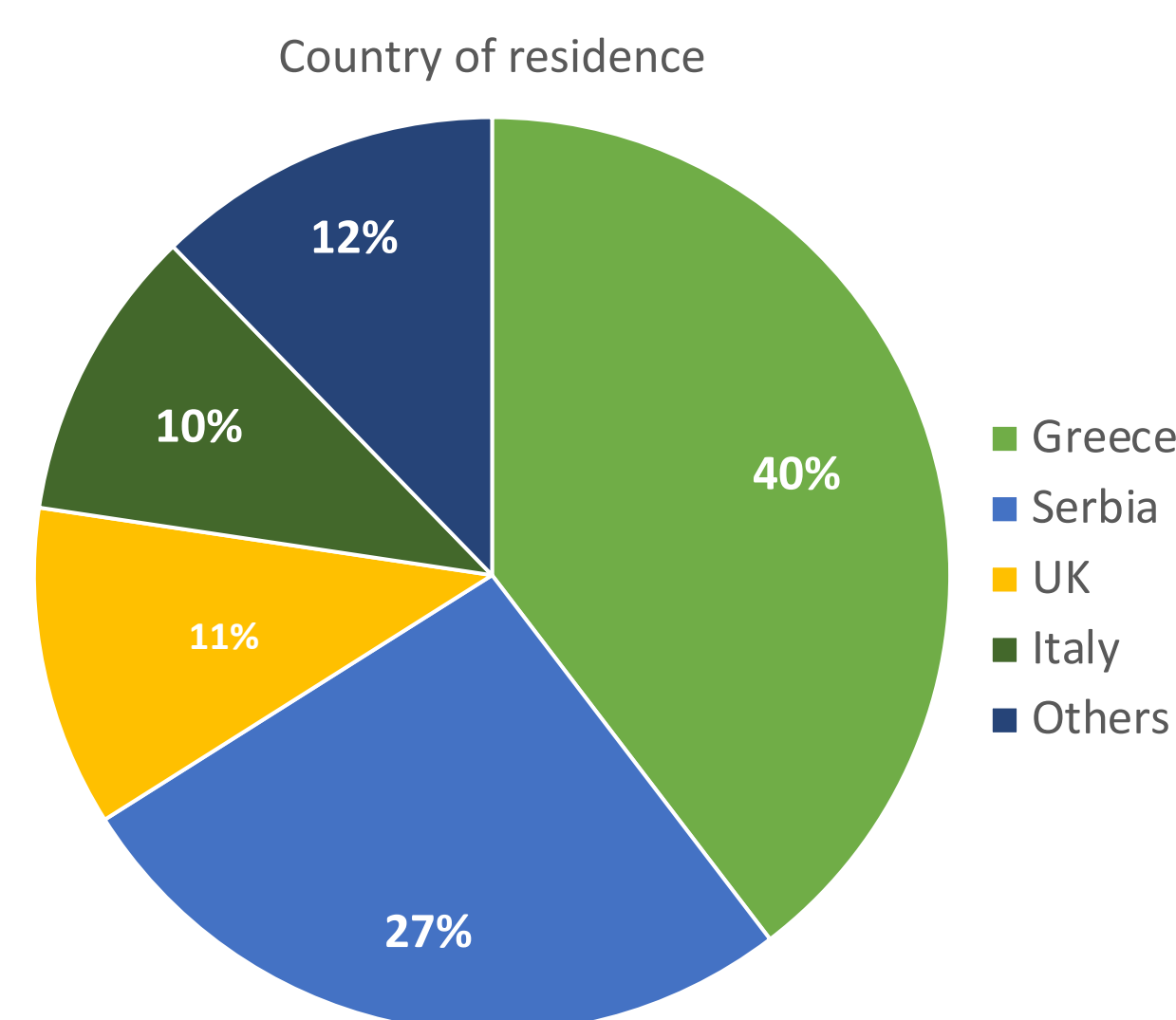
- The COVID-19 pandemic had several negative concomitant effects in the field of ART.
 1. Dissolutions of fertility clinics worldwide with subsequent uncertainty and insecurity regarding the initiated and future treatment cycles.
 2. Postponement of IVF treatments which created psychological distress and anxiety among patients.
 3. Lockdowns in different time periods worldwide leading to access restrictions of international fertility care patients.
- Due to the ongoing nature of COVID-19 pandemic, data from different time periods of the pandemic crisis will allow better management of the fertility patients.
- The aim of the present study was to collect information regarding patient's experience as this pandemic unfolds further and provide data and insight into fertility patient management in the event of a future crisis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- Cross-sectional, anonymous, single-center study, including 106 participants, from 13 countries.
- Online questionnaire, consisting of 17 questions.
- The questionnaire was prepared in four languages and distributed to national and international patients.
- Population: Female patients, over the age of 18 years, seeking or undergoing fertility treatment in Greece, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Study period: 18 January - end of April 2021

RESULTS

- Response rate: 26% (n=106/409)
- Mean age: 41.22 years
- 37.7% of patients postponed their fertility treatment for up to 6 months
- 32.1% of patients postponed an IVF cycle and 25.5% postponed a frozen embryo transfer
- Access restrictions were the main reason of postponement (49.2%)
- 49.4% of the participants faced limited travelling options
- 67% of patients were still willing to have a child
- 54.5% of patients reported no fear to undergo assisted reproductive treatment during COVID-19 era
- 33% of patients were stressed about the delay in fertility treatment resulting in diminishing fertility
- 80.2% of patients were aware of the protective measures taken by IVF centers
- 62.3% of patients claimed that contact with their IVF Unit was useful when dealing with their treatment postponement
- 69.8% of patients expressed their preference to receive professional guidance from an IVF Unit instead of other sources



DISCUSSION - CONCLUSION

- The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns restricted many patients seeking or undergoing fertility treatment and was even more impactful for cross-border reproductive care patients.
- Most participants had no fear to undergo fertility treatment and have a child during the COVID-19 era, highlighting the importance of fertility treatment for most patients, to the degree of outweighing fear of the pandemic. This trend was consistent with most available studies on the subject.
- The cessation of fertility treatment was a major cause of stress and depressive feelings, both in our study and in the available literature, in many cases regardless of the stress associated with the pandemic. This underlies the need for psychological support services for fertility patients.
- The protective measures taken allowed patients to experience a safe access to IVF treatments, during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Continued communication between centers and patients facilitate a safe continuation of IVF protocols, during the COVID-19 era.

REFERENCES

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