

Patients’ and healthcare providers’ knowledge, practice and attitudes regarding postnatal contraception

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Objective

Women are more vulnerable to unintended pregnancies in the first year after childbirth, as contraception may not be their primary concern during this period. Discussing and providing contraception in the immediate postnatal period may prevent rapid repeat pregnancy and its associated risks. Studies show that an interpregnancy interval shorter than 12 months is linked to preterm delivery, small-for-gestational-age neonates and stillbirth(1). Doctors and midwives are best placed to counsel women about contraceptive choices during the postnatal period. This study examines the knowledge, practices, and attitudes of postnatal women and healthcare providers regarding postnatal contraception(PNC).

Design

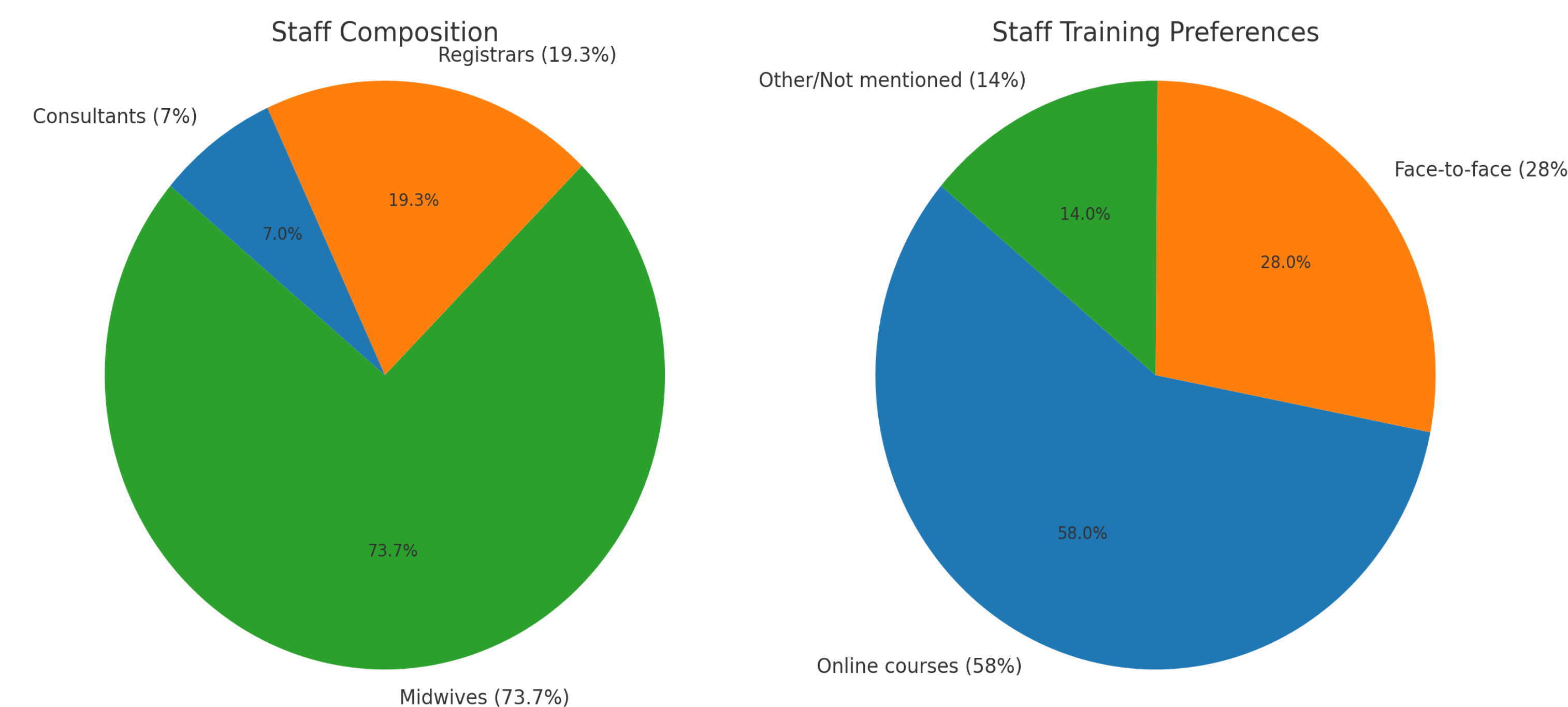
An anonymous survey of staff and patients was conducted in a district general hospital in the UK.

Methods

Survey was conducted over 4 months(September–December 2024). Staff questionnaire was handed out to all grades of doctors and midwives and patients’ questionnaire was given to 75 postnatal women. Quantitative data was analysed statistically, and free text responses by thematic analysis.

Results

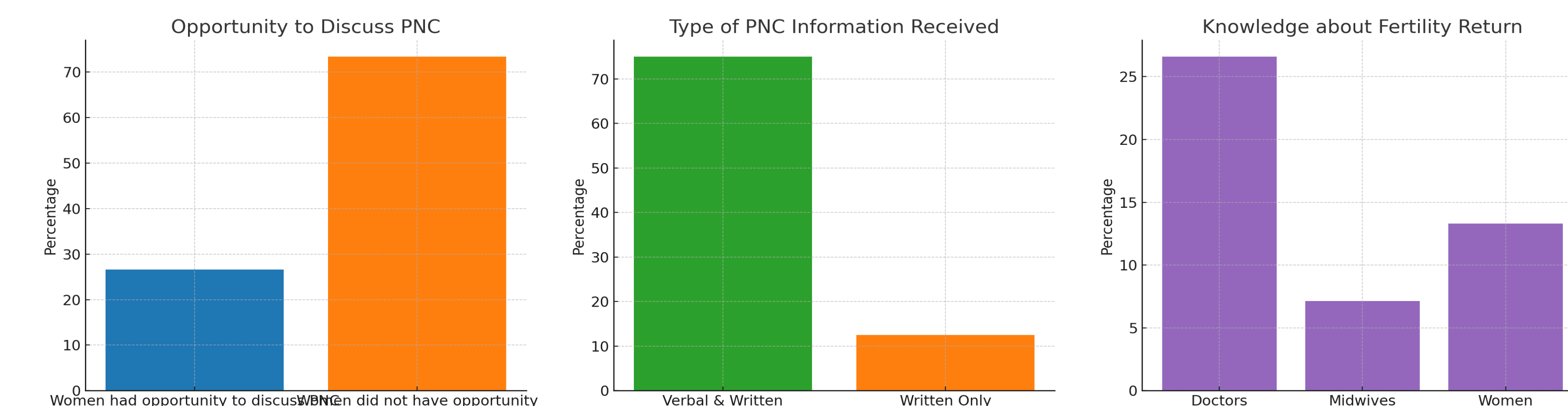
57 staff members completed the survey of which 73.7% were midwives and 26.3% were doctors.



While all the staff members acknowledged the importance of PNC, a greater proportion of midwives(83.3%) felt advising on PNC was part of their clinical role in contrast to 40% doctors.

Though time constraint and work pressure were the main barriers to routinely discuss PNC, 23.8% midwives felt lack of training was a barrier. Majority of midwives (92.8%) and 13.3% of doctors reported inadequate training in providing PNC, and most staff members(92.8% midwives, 80% doctors) agreed for further education and training on PNC, with 58% preferring online courses and 28% favouring face-to-face sessions.

60 postnatal women completed the survey and the mean age of women was 32 years. 53.4% women had two or more children prior to the recent delivery, which was unplanned in 43.3% cases. Only 26.6% women had the opportunity to discuss PNC, of which 75% women received verbal and 12.5% received written information. Surprisingly, only 26.6% of doctors and 7.14% of midwives had the knowledge that fertility can return as early as 3 weeks postpartum, while only 13.3% of women were aware of this.



Conclusion

Our survey highlights the need to improve the training of healthcare providers in PNC so that they are better equipped in counselling women about their contraceptive choices after delivery.

References

1. Smith GC, Pell JP, Dobbie R. Interpregnancy interval and risk of preterm birth and neonatal death:Retrospective cohort study. BMJ. 2003 Aug7;327(7410):313.