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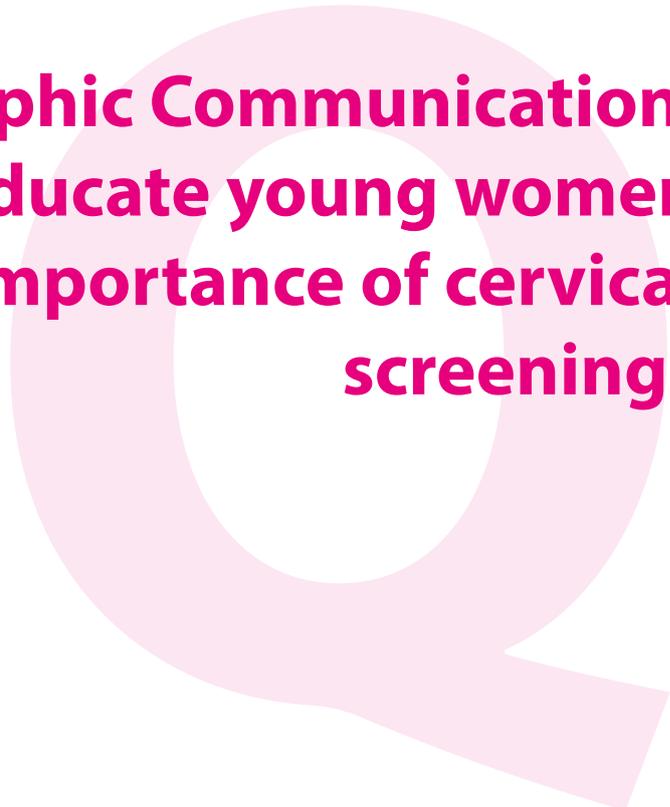
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**By using Graphic Communication,
how can we educate young women
about the importance of cervical
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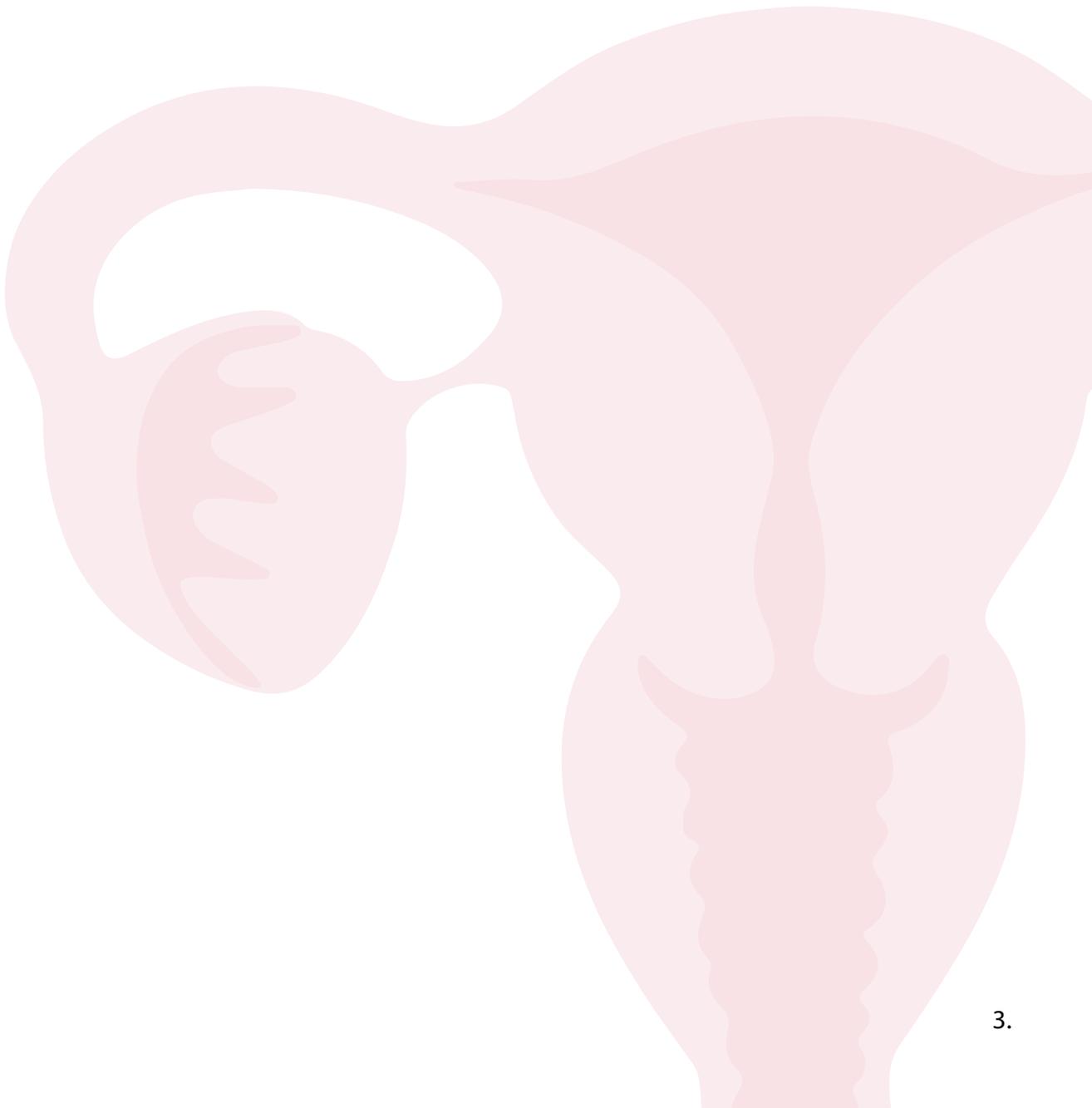
Lowri Williams
Graphic Communication BA
USW



**By using Graphic Communication,
how can we educate young women
about the importance of cervical
screening?**

Framing the Question

The subject that is being researched is smear tests; the question that the research will be centring around is "Using graphic design, how can we make women feel more comfortable getting smear tests?". It is feasible that the question will change over time and become more concise once the research has been carried out. The topic of smear tests is something that needs to be talked about more and involved in more conversations without feeling embarrassed or ashamed. The research conducted within this investigation will guide us to the final question and will highlight the underlying issues surrounded by cervical screenings.



Aims and Objectives

Aims

To discover why there is a decline in the number of women between the ages of 25 and 64 having smear tests in the last 10 years.

To find out whether there is a lack of information around smear tests and cervical cancer.

To distinguish if there is a correlation between the cervical injection and the decline in smear test appointments being booked.

Objectives

To interview women of different age groups that have experienced a smear test or have their first appointment and gauge their thoughts and feelings on smear tests. To select news reports and events within the last 10 years that could relate to the decline in women having smear tests.

To collect leaflets, information booklets, journals and reports that are currently available on smear tests, if they are being read and if the information is being put across so it can be easily understood.

To research the cervical injection, the education behind the injection and whether it is of the impression that this makes women immune to cervical cancer. Interviews will be conducted with young girls who have had this injection and nurses who are responsible for giving the injection.

Methodologies

A cervical screening, or as it is more commonly known, a smear test is a test that is carried out on a selection of cells from the woman's cervix which checks for abnormalities. These abnormalities could lead to cervical cancer if not picked up on. From research carried out by the NHS with the help of charity Jo's cervical cancer trust it has been found that "sixty-one per cent of women aged twenty-five to thirty-five were not aware that they belong in the highest-risk group for cervical cancer." Analysis by Bazian, Edited by NHS (2018)

To understand the importance of a smear test it is important to realise some of the everyday factors that can increase the risks of cervical cancer. The NHS website states that "Women who have never been sexually active rarely develop cervical cancer. Becoming sexually active at a young age can increase the risk for cervical cancer. Researchers think this increased risk is because the cervix changes during puberty. These changes make the area more vulnerable to damage." Giving birth more than once has also been linked with a higher risk for cervical cancer in women as well as smoking, using the contraceptive pill and having a history of sexually transmitted infections.

Through the research that has been conducted by the NHS, eleven per cent of women think that the HPV injection given to teenage girls in school prevents cervical cancer. The research that has been gathered shows a lack of education around the HPV injection, this factor could be contributing to the decline in smear tests being attended in the last ten years.

To be able to understand where smear test appointments peaked, it is important to look at past campaigns or articles that were around at the time of the increased numbers. One factor that was a major factor in the increase of women having cervical screenings is known as the "The Jade Goody Effect". Jade Goody was a public figure who was nationally diagnosed with cervical cancer whilst on the Indian version of Big Brother. She broadcasted her battle with cervical cancer by conducting interviews, talking publicly whilst being open and honest about her journey. She admitted to avoiding smear tests and ignoring letters about her abnormal results in fear of being told that she had cancer. She died at the age of twenty-seven which shocked the nation especially the young generation of women.

“Shortly after Goody’s death, NHS data showed the number of women aged between 25 and 64 seeking advice rose by 12 per cent, with half a million more women than usual booking smear tests.” The Independent (2019)

The methodologies that have been used throughout this research investigation will assist in finding the problems of smear tests, the way that they are portrayed and why there is a decline in women getting their cervical screenings. The methodologies that have been used throughout this research investigation are as follows: -

Collecting Resources

Gathering information such as leaflets, brochures and pamphlets are key in assessing the information that is already out there. This methodology tested the information that is out there already; this emphasised the lack of education available.

Survey

“Surveys are useful in describing the characteristics of a large population. No other research method can provide this broad capability, which ensures a more accurate sample to gather targeted results in which to draw conclusions and make important decisions.”

Conducting the survey in this research investigation provided fast results and was able to show how there is a lack of information regarding smear tests available for women at a quick dispense. It enables the research investigation to have reliable statistics and it is able to reach a wide range of women of different age groups.

Interviews

A number of interviews were carried out with different women whilst conducting this research investigation. These interviews gave the opportunity to ask more personal questions and gather some case studies

“Interviews are most effective for qualitative research: They help you explain, better understand, and explore research subjects’ opinions, behaviour, experiences, phenomenon, etc. Interview questions are usually open-ended questions so that in-depth information will be collected.”

Discussion

There are many different questions that need to be answered within this research investigation. To get a better understanding of the problems around smear tests there needs to be a variety of methodologies carried out. According to the NHS, the number of women booking their smear tests is at a twenty-year low with only 71 per cent of women attending their cervical screening. The research that will be collected throughout this investigation will aid a solution as to why there is a decline in women attending their appointments.



Collecting Data

After visiting a number of different doctor's surgeries around the Cardiff area, it demonstrated that there is not much information available around cervical screenings or cervical cancer in the form of a leaflet, pamphlet or brochure. There is an assumption that women feel uncomfortable or are embarrassed talking about cervical screenings, this is something that will need to be assessed throughout the investigation. Presuming this assumption is correct, women would feel uncomfortable asking for information on cervical screening. To be able to gather fair and reliable information as to whether there is sufficient information available, asking a receptionist for advice or additional information was key along with collecting the information that was readily available at the surgery.

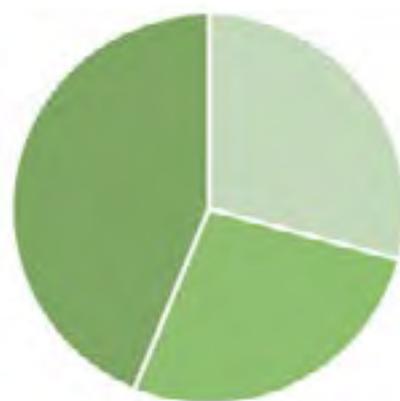
Every doctor's surgery that was visited had the same reoccurring information booklet on cervical cancer. This particular information booklet was created by Jo's cervical cancer trust which is the only charity in the UK that is dedicated only to cervical cancer. The booklet provides information on cervical cancer, however there is no information about the procedure of a cervical screening inside this booklet. Although the information in the booklet is pink, aligning to the colour of the charity it looks corporal and tedious to read. In the particular doctor's surgeries that were visited there were no information on the cervical screening, just cervical cancer. This adds to the issue of women being in the dark about what to expect in regard to having their first smear test.

Survey

The next point of call in this investigation is to create a survey for women between the ages of 25 and 65 to gauge their thoughts and feelings on cervical screenings. One assumption that has been made before carrying out any research is that the older the woman, the less daunting it is getting a smear test. This survey will be the first piece of research that will be able to solidify this assumption or prove it wrong. In this survey the women were asked a range of questions about what can increase the risks of cervical cancer and reasons for not having a smear test. The survey questions asked the women if they would answer them as how they felt before having their first cervical screening so we can gather how young women feel around this and to answer the assumption of whether there is a lack of education around the topic.

The results of the survey are as follows: -

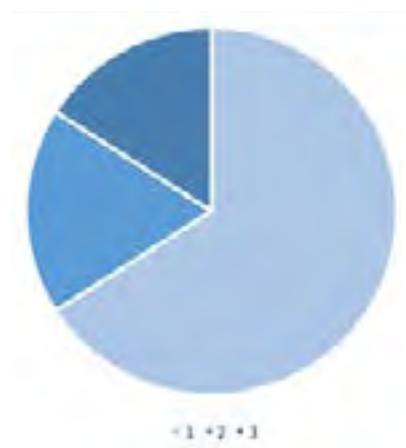
The first set of questions asked related to the woman themselves, in regard to their appearance and how comfortable they are around strangers. Forty per cent of women that answered the survey reported being too embarrassed to attend because they were uncomfortable with their body. A further thirty-seven per cent had concerns over the appearance of the vulva, they did not want to look abnormal and thirty-eight per cent were concerned about whether they smelled "normal". A staggering sixty per cent of the women that answered the survey said they wouldn't go if they hadn't shaved or waxed their bikini area due to feeling embarrassment or shame.



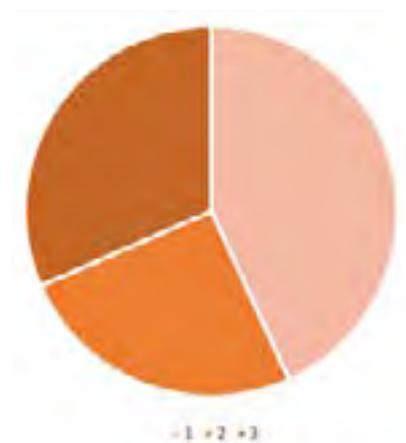
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Survey

The second set of questions asked around the life of a woman, work, children and other life commitments. Fifty-eight per cent of the woman asked in this survey said that they would not go to a smear test appointment if they had to take time off work, a further sixteen per cent would not miss the gym to attend and fourteen per cent would rather miss a smear test than a waxing appointment.



The last set of questions the women were asked was based around cervical cancer itself and the risks of getting it. Thirty-two per cent of women were unaware that if you have had a sexually transmitted infection you are at higher risk of developing cervical cancer. Forty-one per cent of women asked did not know that smoking along increased your risk, along with twenty-four per cent of women not knowing taking the contraceptive pill for a number of years can increase the risk. To finish off, thirty per cent of women would rather not know if something was wrong out of fear and twenty-two per cent of women did not know where they can get their smear test done.



Conclusion

These set of survey results prove the assumption that there is a lack of information around cervical cancer and smear tests within young women, whether that be forty years ago or today. To further the research investigation, the next point of call is to interview woman and get their personal experiences, this will assist in being able to work out the issues of why there is a decline in women in the last ten years attending their appointments.

Interviews

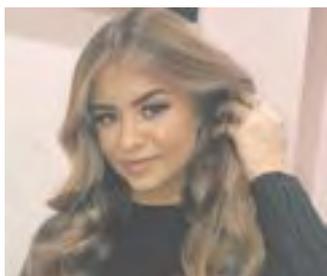
After collecting the results of the survey, seven different women within the age group of twenty and sixty-five were interviewed. By conducting interviews as well as surveys it allows you to be able to gauge the way someone is feeling. Through an interview you can hear their tone of voice as well as being able to see their expression. All seven women were interviewed with the same questions to get a better understanding of their thoughts and feelings on cervical screening. In total, three out of the seven people interviewed were between the ages of fifty and sixty-five; the other four people interviewed ranged from the age of twenty to forty.



Three women of the ages of fifty (Nicky), fifty-seven (Sarah) and sixty-two (Bev) were interviewed to gauge their thoughts and feelings on cervical screenings. Two out of the three women in this age category were between the age of twenty-three and twenty-five when they first received a letter about booking their smear test; both women booked theirs straight away to get it over and done with. The other woman in this age bracket received her letter at twenty-five but it took her to the age of thirty-three to book a smear test appointment. Prior to the letters, they all had no insight into cervical screenings, the procedure or why they had to have the procedure. It is important in the interview to gauge how the interviewees felt knowing they had to have their first smear test; all women felt nervous as she they were young at the time, one woman was uncomfortable with her body and she did not know what to expect. One was uncomfortable having to be without clothes in front of someone they do not know, the last was uncomfortable having to be undressed in front of her family doctor. As well as this, she was too afraid to find out the result because cancer runs in her family. When asked if any of them would have consulted with anyone about how they were feeling, they all said that at the time she would never have felt comfortable talking to a family member or nurse about the concerns they had, so they kept it to themselves and went fearing the worst. Each interviewee was asked whether they thought the second time having to have a cervical screening was easier, one answer was that she was more nervous because she had a bad experience the first time and because she knew what she was in for she dreaded it more. Another answer was that she was less nervous because she over thought it a lot and ended up being very quick and not as uncomfortable as she once thought. The other also said she felt less nervous the second time as her results came back fine, however she still feels uncomfortable going to get her smear tests now but feels "like I have accomplished something when I've been to have it done. I know how important it is to get it done, it just is not the easiest thing to do." Foulkes (2020). The last question each woman was asked whether they think there is enough information on smear tests and their importance; each said that they did not think that smear tests are not spoken about enough and young girls are not educated about the importance.



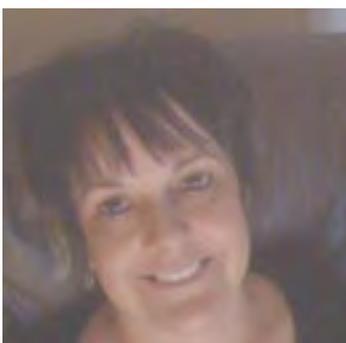
Two women, one the age of twenty (Sophie), the other of the age of twenty-five (Lucie) were also interviewed to gather their judgement on smear tests. One of these women had to have a cervical screening earlier than the recommended age, the other had her first late last year. One interviewee went to the doctors for a contraceptive pill renewal and ended up having to have a cervical screening. Hyde (2020) "it didn't give me any time to think about what was going to happen, it was just sprung on me. This was a good thing in regard to me overthinking the procedure, but I was on edge for weeks waiting for the results because I had to have my smear test at the age of nineteen and this worried me massively." The other received her letter in the post and had it for about eight months before booking her appointment because of outstanding commitments and a busy schedule; the interviewee said that she "put it at the bottom of her priority list, I avoided booking a morning or afternoon off work because I did not know what to expect and I didn't want to talk about it either so I put it to the back of my mind for a while." When both women were asked whether they think that they will be more relaxed the second time they have to get a cervical screening, both said that they now know what to expect so it will be easier for them to go a second time. Both women were of the opinion that it was an uncomfortable experience, but it only lasts a short amount of time and it could potentially save their lives so being uncomfortable for a few minutes every few years was worth it. Both interviews ended on the question of whether they think there is enough awareness about smear tests. They were both of the opinion that there is not enough information out there, one made the point that young girls should be educated whilst in school and receiving the HPV jab.



The last interviews that were conducted were with two women of the ages of twenty-eight (Hannah) and forty (Karen). Both women have had the routine check-up of a smear test more than once. Similarly, to all the other interviews, both women did not know much, if anything, about smear tests. They feel like there is little information on cervical screening and what it entails; this is something that worried the both of them before they went for their first routine test. When asked whether they booked their appointment straight away, "I put booking mine off for about two years, I was so uncomfortable with the thought of it, being undressed in front of someone I don't really know and I was scared of what the result would be." Hughes (2020).

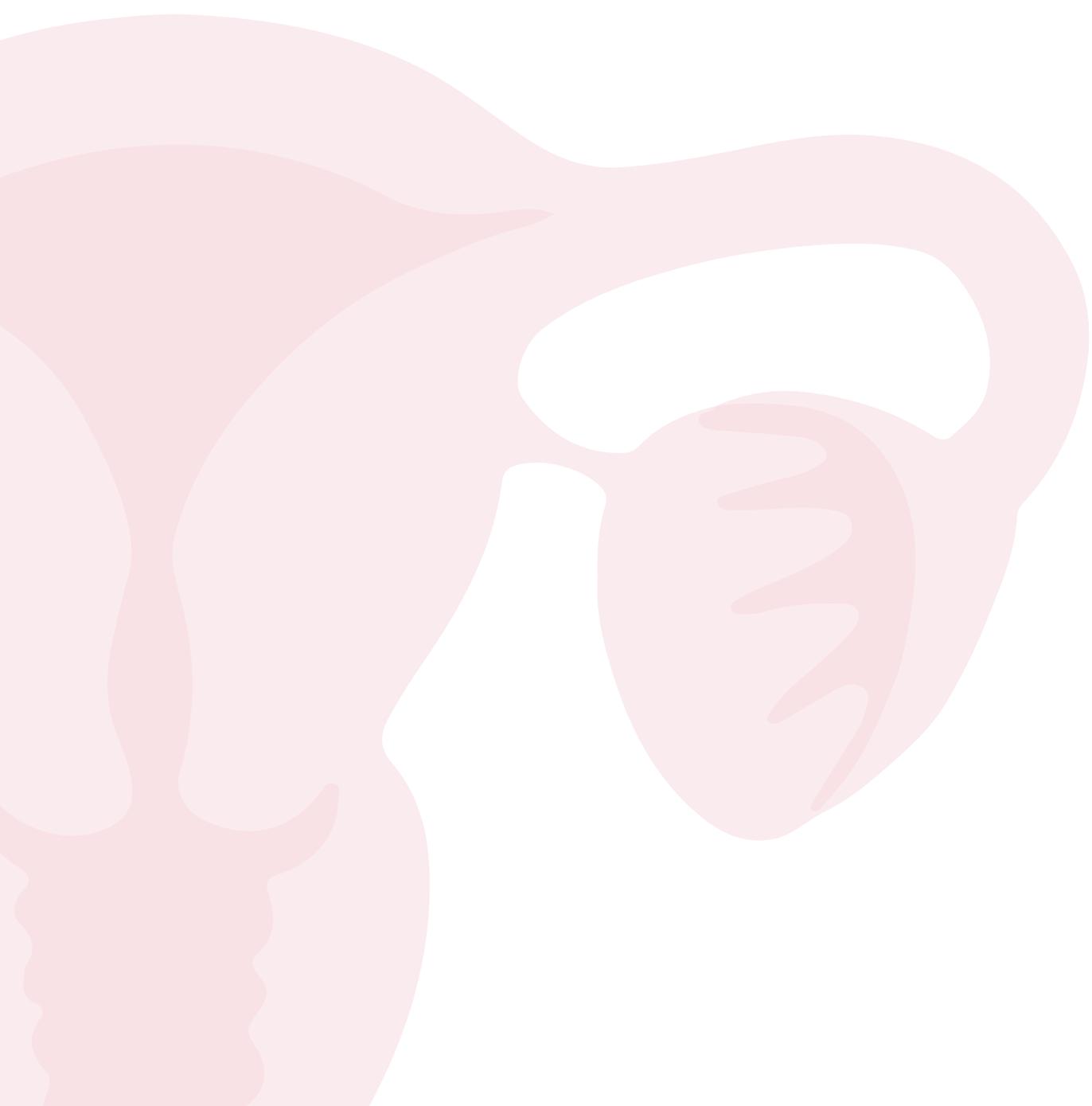
The second interviewee booked her appointment when she was twenty-five, Jones (2020) "I had already had a child, so nothing really phased me after that. I did feel uncomfortable however a doctor has already seen everything and a lot worse, so it did not bother me. However, I do know that if I had not already had children, I would be more worried about it." Both women were asked whether they felt comfortable enough to talk to a family member or nurse about their concerns, both said that at the time they did not want to talk about it, they felt uncomfortable because it is a private part of their life. One said that they wish they had asked for some advice because it would have settled her nerves (Hannah).

To end the interview, both interviewees were asked how important they think getting your routinely smear test is; both women agreed that it is extremely important, and people should be more educated on cervical screenings and cervical cancer. Hughes (2020) "It is extremely important, I put mine off for two years and they ended up finding abnormal cells which could have developed into cervical cancer if not discovered. Being uncomfortable for five minutes and putting your pride aside can and will save your life."



Conclusion

From these interviews, it is clear that women of all ages find getting a cervical screening uncomfortable, whether it is their first or not. From interviewing these women, it is fair to say that getting women to return to the routine check-up is not the issue, it is getting them to go in the first place for fear of the unknown, being embarrassed or uncomfortable. The information gathered shows that these women were not educated about cervical screenings, all they know is that they are important, they are not told why. From these interviews, these women do not like to have a conversation about the procedure of a cervical screening, whether it is with a family member or a professional.



Summary

It is clear that through this research investigation there is an embarrassment that comes with the subject of cervical screenings. Through conducting the different types of methodologies, it is easy to see that there is a pattern of the majority of women that have aided this investigation were afraid to book the test, some waited months, others waited years. The research shows that there is a lack of education within young women and it is a “taboo” topic until you reach the age of twenty-five when you first receive the routine test letter.

Jade Goody is a perfect example of people who made a difference in the number of women booking their cervical screenings. She was a wake-up call for a lot of young women nearly ten years ago.

The survey that was conducted shows evidence of a lack of education. The women who took part in this survey were unaware of how everyday life, bearing children, smoking, consuming the contraceptive pill can increase the risks of cervical cancer. If this was expressed more and was talked about more frequently, would this increase the number of women getting their smear tests?

From the interviews that took place, the women who had been for a cervical screening and the ones who haven't share a common thought, it is the thought of going and the fear of the unknown that is stopping people from booking it. The older women who were interviewed stated that they still get nervous and uncomfortable at the thought of it, however they know the importance and they are not feared with the unknown like they were with their first ever time.

Regarding the assumptions that were made at the beginning of the investigation it is clear that is not just young women that are nervous about cervical screenings. However, it is not getting people back a second time, it is still getting women to book a cervical screening and attend it rather than putting it off. Another assumption made is that people know what can increase the risk of developing cervical cancer. This assumption that was made was incorrect, women, especially young women are unaware of the factors that could eventually cause cervical cancer. Some thought that the HPV vaccine prevents cervical cancer so thought that they did not need a smear test. This once again shows a lack of education within schools and a lack of information available.

It is clear that there are many different routes that could be taken to solve the issue of a decreasing number of women booking their cervical screenings. The original question was "Using graphic design, how can we make women feel more comfortable getting smear tests?" but there is a better more succinct route that could be taken. Some of the questions that would solve the issue would be "How can we break the stigma of cervical screenings within young women by using graphic communication?". There is clearly a stigma around smear tests which makes women avoid booking them. There is also a lack of education around smear tests so a question that would help solve this would be "By using graphic design, how can we educate young women about the importance of having a cervical screening?" Another route that could be taken revolves around doctor's surgeries and their staff. From the research that was conducted it is clear to see that there is, once again a lack of information, but also an embarrassment of talking about it so this question would help combat that concern "By using graphic communication, how can we make sure doctors surgeries and receptionists are equipped to deal with the embarrassment and concerns of cervical screenings?"

Taking all this into consideration, the route that would be the best outcome for this research investigation would be "By using graphic design, how can we educate young women about the importance of having a cervical screening?". This route has been taken because one of the running themes through this investigation was the lack of education from people about the risks and the importance of cervical screenings.

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