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# Patients' reactions to further evaluation of abnormal cytological smear tests

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# Cervical Cancer

- Cervical cancer is the 7<sup>th</sup> most common cause of cancer mortality
    - 233 000 women in the world die from the disease each year (Parkin et al., 2001)
  - Cervical cancer is the 9<sup>th</sup> most common cancer in Irish women
    - Annually, approx. 1000 new cases of CIN and 264 new cases of invasive cervical cancer
    - Each year, approx. 107 women die from the disease in Ireland (Campo et al., 2004)
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# Screening For Cervical Cancer

- Cervical cancer is largely preventable
    - Countries with screening programmes have documented declining incidence and mortality rates of cervical cancer (Levi et al., 2000)
    - In Ireland, mortality rates increased during the 1980s and 1990s (Comber & Gavin, 2004)
  - CervicalCheck offers free smears to women aged 25-60 years
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# Patient Experiences of Screening

- Abnormal test results may lead to high levels of anxiety and psychosexual distress and fear of cancer
  
  - Anxiety may influence adherence rates
    - Nonadherence between 10-40% (e.g., Khanna & Phillips, 2001)
  
  - Colposcopy also associated with high levels of anxiety (e.g., Bekkers et al., 2002; Walsh et al., 2004)
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## Methods

- 200 women (age 20-60) previous colposcopy in previous 6-month period
    - Postal questionnaire, with cover letter and stamped addressed envelope (SAE)
    - Reminder questionnaire plus SAE sent after 2 weeks
  - Questionnaire assessed colposcopy-related anxiety, distress, pain; satisfaction with information, desire for information.
    - Also assessed helpfulness of suggested interventions for use during colposcopy
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## Results

- 197 women available for assessment
    - 151 questionnaires returned
    - Response rate 77%
  
  - Demographics:
    - Mean age of respondents: 33.30 (SD = 6.89)
    - 49% married/living as married, 44% single
    - 68% Third level education, 23% Second level education
    - 49% no children, 45% between 1-3 children
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# Reactions To Colposcopy

- 87% of sample reported moderate anxiety
  - 28% reported extreme anxiety
  
  - Reported concerns included
    - Colposcopy outcome (70%)
    - Fear of cancer (65%)
    - The cause of the abnormal smear test (50%)
    - Colposcopy painful (40%)
    - Colposcopy procedure itself (33%)
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## Patient Concerns

- Significantly greater anxiety in women who reported
  - ❑ fear of cancer,  $t(149) = 6.81, p < .001$
  - ❑ concern about the colposcopy procedure,  $t(149) = 3.19, p < .002$
  - ❑ concern about embarrassment  $t(149) = 3.97, p < .011,$
  - ❑ concern about fertility  $t(149) = 2.62, p < .01$

Compared to women not reporting these concerns

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# Experience of Colposcopy

- Pain
    - 30% did not find it painful, 42% found it somewhat painful, and 28% found it very painful
  - Discomfort
    - 52% reported great discomfort, 34% moderate discomfort, 14% reported no discomfort
  - Unpleasantness
    - 43% found it very unpleasant, 36% found it moderately unpleasant, 21% did not find it unpleasant
  - Embarrassment
    - 38% found it very embarrassing, 32% found it somewhat embarrassing, and 30% did not find it embarrassing
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# Colposcopy Anxiety

- Anxious patients reported
  - higher levels of pain  $\chi^2 (2) = 7.78, p = .020$
  - Greater discomfort  $\chi^2 (2) = 18.75, p = .001$
  - Greater unpleasantness  $\chi^2 (2) = 12.43, p = .010$
  - Higher levels of embarrassment  $\chi^2 (2) = 8.17, p = .017$

Than non-anxious patients during colposcopy

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# Experience of Treatment

- 46% of respondents reported treatment for CIN
  - Pain
    - 49% found it very painful, 34% found it somewhat painful, 17% found it not painful
  - Discomfort
    - 62% reported high discomfort, 27% reported moderate discomfort, 11% reported no discomfort
  - Unpleasantness
    - 58% found it very unpleasant, 30% found it somewhat unpleasant, 12% did not find it unpleasant
  - Embarrassment
    - 34% very embarrassing, 37% somewhat, 29% not embarrassing
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## Satisfaction with Information

- 128 (85%) reported receiving the pre-colposcopy information leaflet
  - 63% reported finding it very helpful, 35% found it moderately helpful
  - 75% reported being very satisfied with information received on the clinic day, 23% moderately satisfied, and 2% not very satisfied
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## Helpfulness of Suggested Interventions

- Patients rated on a 7-point scale how helpful they considered each of the following to be
    - Watching a DVD, listening to music, distraction, watching the colposcopy screen, more information, nurse reassurance
  - Nurse reassurance highest rated, followed by more information, distraction, watching colposcopy screen, listening to music, watching a DVD
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## Discussion

- In general, women have low levels of knowledge about cervical screening
    - ❑ 65% of women thought they had cancer on receipt of abnormal smear result
    - ❑ 78% of women believe the purpose of smear test is to detect existing cancer (Walsh, 2006)
    - ❑ Consistent with results from other studies (e.g., Hellsten et al., 2007; Jones et al., 1996; Juraskova et al., 2007)
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## Discussion

- It is clear from this study that patients experience high levels of colposcopy-related anxiety and worry
  - In addition, certain fears are associated with greater levels of anxiety, i.e., fear of cancer, concern about the colposcopy procedure itself, embarrassment, and effect on fertility
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## Discussion

- This is one of few studies to examine levels of pain and discomfort in colposcopy patients
  - Pain subjective: 30% reported no pain, 28% reported high levels of pain. In addition, 52% reported high levels of discomfort
  - These results indicate that women find the colposcopy examination distressing, and levels of pain and discomfort are higher than previously reported (Bennetts et al., 1995; Chan et al., 2003)
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# Implications and Suggestions

- The psychological consequences of attending for colposcopy may be greater than previously thought
  - Currently no agreement among researchers regarding the most suitable type of intervention to reduce anxiety in this patient group (see Galaal et al., 2007)
  - Information-based interventions have largely failed to reduce anxiety (e.g., Byrom et al., 2002; Howells et al., 1999)
  - Focus on interventions during colposcopy
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