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Trends in visits of Polish women to the gynaecological office

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Abstract:

Gynaecological examination is one of the most intimate medical procedures. It is also a very important examination and should be performed every year. Women visit a gynaecologist for a variety of reasons, often in case of sudden pain. The aim of the study was to find out the reasons why women they report for visits to the gynaecologist and their frequency. The research was conducted on the group of 1,260 survey respondents. More than half of them visit a doctor each year. The most common reason for visiting a gynaecologist is a preventive visit. Our research confirms that the problem of too rare visits to the gynaecologist is still current. It is important to encourage visits by women who rarely come to the gynaecologist or never visit the gynaecologist.

Key words: gynecologist, gynecological consultations, first gynecological examination, frequency of visits to the gynecologist, reasons for the visit

Introduction:

Gynaecological examination is one of the most intimate medical procedures. This is one of the reasons why it is often associated with anxiety and insecurity. Often, anxiety is also caused by the uncertainty of how the visit and examination will proceed and how to prepare for it. The results of research by Gruszka et al. showed that a visit to the gynaecologist is associated with stress, which is caused by fears, shame and fear of pain or detection of a disease [1]. For this reasons, many women postpone visiting the gynaecologist, and some of them do not decide to go to it at all. The first visit is the most stressful. Most women feel more confident on subsequent visits. An important element of the first visit is that the first contact with the gynaecologist does not cause trauma and negative experience in the woman. That is why the attitude of the doctor during the gynaecological examination is so important. The most expected feature by women is the physician's communication skills and positive attitude towards the patient [1].

Women, regardless of age, wonder when they should see a gynaecologist [2]. Often the reason for the first visit to the gynaecologist is the sudden pain in the reproductive organ or the need to prescribe birth control pills. In the absence of disturbing symptoms, the visit is often postponed [3]. Women's concerns about a gynaecological examination may delay or even prevent them from seeing a specialist, which may have a negative impact on their health.

Purpose:

The aim of the study was to find out the reasons why women they report for visits to the gynaecologist and their frequency.

Material and methods:

The research was conducted on the group of 1,260 survey respondents, who filled out the Internet questionnaire. The study was conducted from 7th July 2019 to 17th September 2020. Participation in the experiment was voluntary. The results were analysed and checked on the basis of scientific literature. The results were statistically processed using for this program Microsoft Office Excel.

Results:

1260 people answered the survey questions. Most of them (85.4%) were between 18 and 35 years old. The largest groups of people lived in the city over 100.000 residents (37.6%) and in the countryside (36.5%). 57.2% of the respondents graduated from a university. The vast majority were sexually active (76.5%) and usually had 1 to 3 sexual partners (62.4%). Three-quarters of them have no children and are not currently pregnant [Table 1].

Variable		N	(%)
Age (years)	18-25	792	62.9%
	26-35	283	22.5%
	36-45	83	6.6%
	46-65	74	5.9%
	> 65	28	2.2%
Place of residence	The city over 100.000 residents	474	37.6%
	The city 20-100.000 residents	222	17.6%
	The city below 20,000 residents	103	8.2%
	Village	460	36.5%
Education	Higher	720	57.2%
	Secondary	480	38.1%
	Vocational	27	2.1%
	Primary	32	2.5%
Sexual active	Yes	962	76.5%
	No	295	23.5%
Number of sexual partners	None	202	16%
	1-3	785	62.4%
	4-10	202	16%
	>10	70	5.6%
Pregnant or having children	Yes	311	24.7%
	No	948	75.3%

Table 1. Characteristics of the study group.

The women were asked when they last visited the gynaecologist. The answers are presented in the diagram [Diagram 1].

When was the last time you visited the gynecologist?

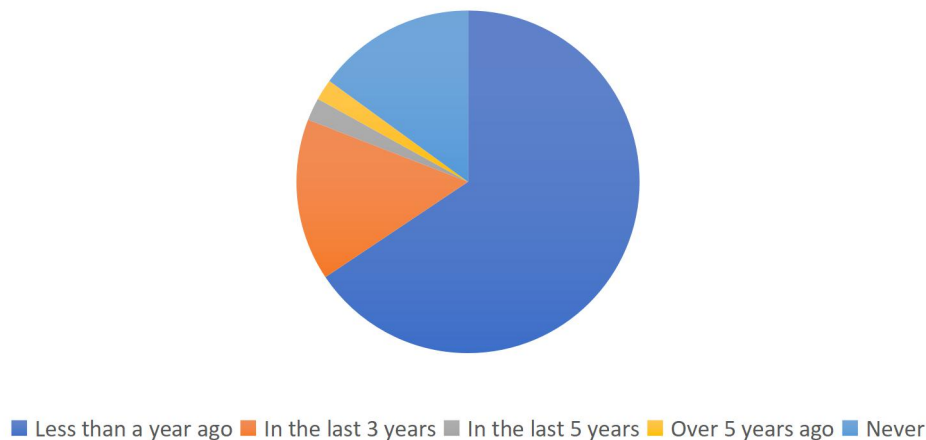


Diagram 1. The frequency of visits to the gynaecologist.

65.5% (n=825) of women declare that they have visited a gynaecologist in the last year. 15.3% (n=193) visited in the last 3 years and 2.1% in the last 5 years. Unfortunately, 2% (n=25) of women visited a gynaecologist more than 5 years ago. What is worse, 15% (n=189) of the respondents have never visited a gynaecologist.

A question was also asked about the reason for the last visit [Diagram 2]. Good information is that the most common reason for visiting a gynaecologist is a preventive visit. For this reason, 58.49% (n=737) of women come forward. 89.6% of women know that a pap smear detects cervical cancer, which may have an impact on reporting for preventive visits. However, a pap smear in the last 3 years was performed by only 65.2% of women.

The purpose of the visit of 20.87% (n=263) of patients was to start or continue contraception. The next reason was menstrual disorders, among others in the form of menorrhagia, irregular or painful menstruation. 11.59% (n=146) of women consult a doctor because of symptoms of an intimate infection. 7.46% (n=94) of women consult a doctor because of suspected pregnancy or because of it. Less common reasons were the treatment of chronic diseases – 1.43% (n=18), pain in the pelvic organs – 1.43% (n=18) and the detection of nodule in the vulvar area – 0.24% (n=3).

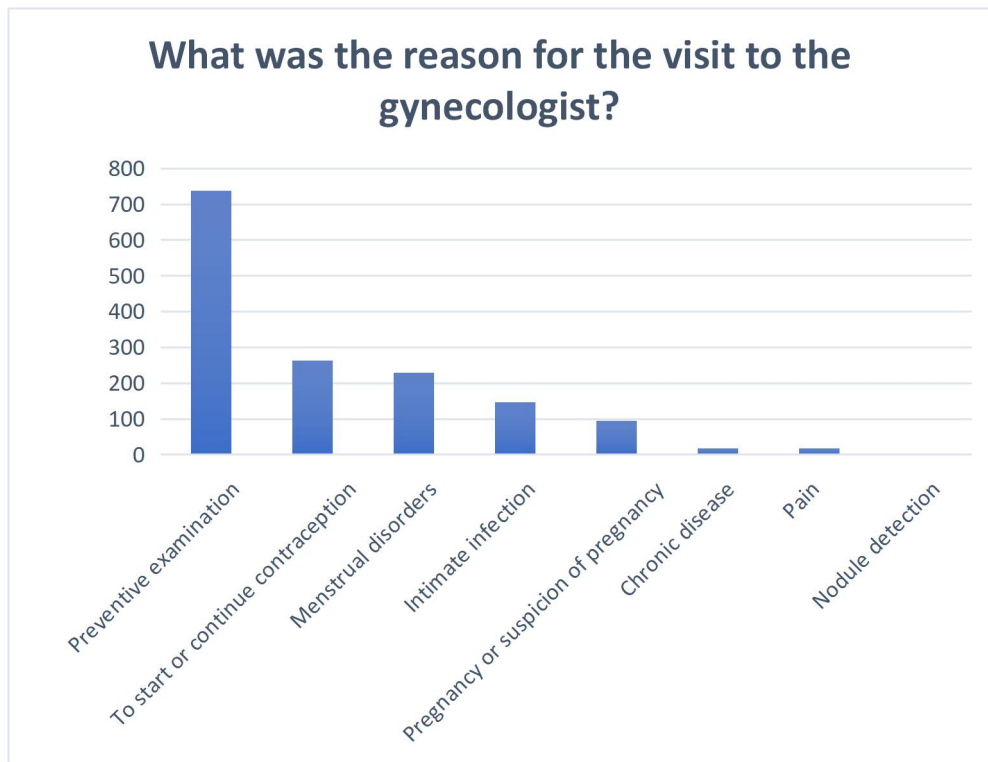


Diagram 2. The reason for visiting the gynaecologist.

Discussion:

Despite the uncertainty and embarrassment of many women, they are increasingly aware of the importance of visiting a gynaecologist. They also more often talk about intimate matters with their friends or ask the gynaecologist with questions.

In their research, Gruszka et al. analysed the reasons why women visit a gynaecologist for the first time [1]. The most common reasons for the first visit to a gynaecologist were disturbing symptoms of the genital organ (33.5% of women) and a preventive examination (33.8% of women) [1]. Interestingly, women living in rural areas usually used gynaecological consultations because of disturbing symptoms from the genital organs, while women living in towns usually used preventive examinations [1]. For 22.1% of women, pregnancy was the reason for the first contact with a gynaecologist [1]. For most women, the most embarrassing is lying on the gynaecological chair, while the most unpleasant - bimanual vaginal examination [1,5,6]. The presence of only a gynaecologist in the office provided the greatest sense of security and psychological comfort during the examination [5].

Studies have shown that younger women visit the gynaecologist more often than older. This is associated with the more frequent need to write a prescription for contraceptive pills, but also with greater awareness of the prevention of diseases of the reproductive organ [1,4]. A gynaecological examination is essential for the early diagnosis of gynaecological cancers. Our study shows that only 65.5% of women visited a gynaecologist in the last year. Other studies on this topic are not consistent. The research by Szymoniak et al. shows that 50% of women came to visits every 6 months, 30% - once a year, 13% less than once every 2 years [5]. 40% of high school students underwent gynaecological examinations more than once a year, and only 6% of university graduates. However, less than once a year, 31% of high school students and 46% of university graduates were examined gynecologically [7]. The research shows that the frequency of visits to the gynaecologist does not depend on the place of residence [1].

Yanikkerem et al. studied reasons for and frequency of consultations at the gynaecological outpatient clinic [8]. Most women (36.7%) report for a routine visit to an obstetrician-gynaecologist (previously diagnosed pelvic problem, such as vaginitis, uterine bleeding, pregnancy or pain). 27.3% of women reported because of chronic pelvic pain. 19.9% came to the appointment because of pregnancy problems. Less frequent reasons for the visit were: abnormal uterine bleeding (15.5%), infertility (3.5%), vaginitis (17.6%) and itching (9.9%) [8]. Most of the women (54.8%) felt anxious about their health during a pelvic examination [8]. 41.8% of patients felt embarrassment about undressing and feelings of shame [8]. 38.3% felt fear of discovery of a pathological condition [8].

The studies by Ulman-Włodarz et al. it shows that 1/3 of women undergo a gynaecological examination once a year [9]. 24% of women are examined by a gynaecologist every 6 months or more, and once every 2-3 years - 13% [9]. 18% of the respondents declared that they had never visited a gynaecologist before [9]. 56% of the respondents visited a gynaecologist at routine examination, 31% had ailments, 13% reported because of the contraceptive they were taking [9].

The studies by Pacewicz et al. shows that the majority (36%) of women last visited a gynaecologist recently, i.e. 1–2 months ago [10]. Half a year and a year earlier, the gynaecological office was visited by 24% and 23% of respondents, respectively [10]. In the CBOS survey from 2002 it was found that in the last year only 46% of the respondents visited a gynaecologist [11]. Women who did not see a gynaecologist in the last year indicated the lack of problems with the reproductive organ as the main reason (83%) [11]. The reason can be seen in the fact that only 16% of women know that in the first stage, cervical cancer often

develops asymptotically [10]. This may have an impact on the rare reporting of preventive examinations.

Conclusions:

Our research confirms that the problem of too rare visits to the gynecologist is still current. It is important to encourage visits by women who rarely come to the gynaecologist or never visit the gynaecologist. It is very essential to make women aware of the need for preventive examinations that can detect at an early stage, e.g. cervical cancer. Embarrassment and fear of visiting a gynaecologist are constantly a serious problem. The woman's experience after visiting the gynaecological office is important in terms of the regularity of subsequent examinations.

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