

SIS Community Research about Women's Health

NHS Sussex commissioned SIS to contribute to the second phase of insight gathering to find out ***“What do Women in Sussex want from Women's Health Services?”***. This will inform the development of the NHS Sussex Women's Health Implementation Plan.

An Arabic Speaking SIS Bilingual Community Researcher (BCR) interviewed 5 Arabic Speaking Service Users using a guided conversation to explore

- what matters most to them in terms of their health and wellbeing
- their experience of accessing services including barriers, enablers and satisfaction
- their opinion about what NHS Sussex should prioritise in their planning

The Arabic speakers were largely satisfied with the care they received from a range of NHS services including from their GP, from screening programmes and healthy lifestyle services, with one commenting that things were much better than in her home country.

The main changes that participants would like to see were:

- translations of information about health conditions and appointment letters
- improved health education and information and healthy lifestyles
- boys and men should be educated about women's health issues
- reduced waiting times for appointments with specialist services
- issues relating to periods e.g. irregular or heavy bleeding and pain, should be taken more seriously
- language or gender based healthy lifestyle sessions e.g. sports, activities, briefings

Methodology

SIS reviewed information provided by NHS Sussex ICB about

- the [National Women's Strategy](#)
- the proposed Women's Health Hub model
- the [National Survey results](#)
- the health issues affecting women
- the existing insights gathered by NHS Sussex ICB from women in other marginalised communities e.g. experiencing homelessness, disabilities, neurodiversity etc

We used this review to design a guided conversation, in collaboration with the Arabic Speaking BCR, for use with SIS Arabic Speaking Service Users. Theme's from phase 1 of the insight gathering were incorporated into the questions to explore whether they were also important to Arabic speakers.

SIS used it's database of 800+ Arabic Speaking Women interpreting service users to identify potential participants and invite suitable individuals to take part. Participants were offered a Reward and Recognition voucher in return for their engagement. The BCR shortlisted 5 participants for interview.

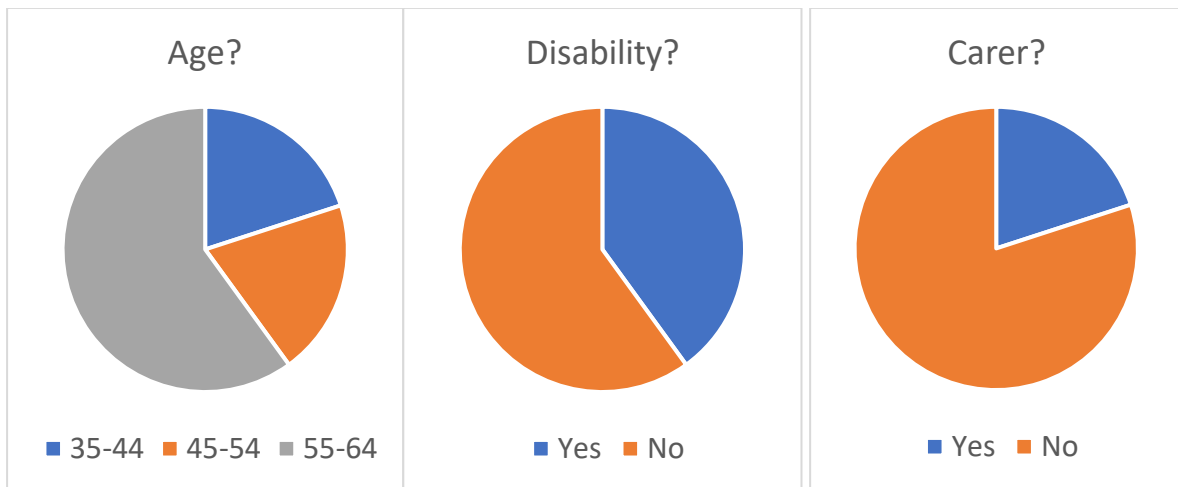
In order to protect the confidentiality of individuals from a small, tight knit language community, we decided not to use a focus group approach because participants may not have felt comfortable discussing personal issues. The draw back of this approach is the inability to share ideas prompting further more indepth discussions on topics of agreement or contention.

The BCR set up individual interviews with participants and used the guided conversations to direct bespoke tailored conversations to explore the opinions, experience and interests of each individual. The BCR reported their findings via Survey Monkey.

A summary of findings has been translated into Arabic for the participants.

Results

Demographics



100% straight and identified with gender assigned at birth

General Questions

How do you usually access information about and treatment for women's health issues?

It was challenging to access information because of language and literacy barriers. There were several references to getting help from other people. However, there was fairly good knowledge of available resources such as NHS (and other) websites, GP surgeries, printed materials, leaflets etc.

I cannot read, I ask people with experience.

I don't have any available access to information related to my health issues due to the language.

How could access to information and treatment be improved for you and/or women from your community?

There was general consensus that information should be available in their first language (Arabic for these women) whether that is printed information, group sessions within the community, via ESOL classes or recorded videos.

I have seen most health professionals giving or suggesting additional information through online links or on a printed support. When they know this is available they also provide it in Arabic. I hope this is the practice everywhere.

Further issues were identified with English appointment letters not being understood and the Service User being discharged from the service because they hadn't taken the required action.

What matters most to you regarding women's health?

There were a few common themes

- health education
- early diagnosis
- health lifestyles e.g. healthy eating, active life, self care,

Other issues mentioned

- mental health
- sex education for young women and girls

What do you think should be the role of boys and men in women's health

This question was prompted in particular by the phase 1 feedback from Gypsy, Roma and Travellers who highlighted a cultural separation between men and women.

There was strong agreement that boys and men need to be educated about women's health issues so that they could understand and discuss issues, support and care for women in their families, support women to get care and treatment and be understood.

If boys and men are educated on women's health, this will help them to understand and support better their sisters, wives, mothers or any female family member.

The participants did not comment on any cultural separation, a need for privacy or secrecy or stress that health practitioners for women should be women. However, this final point has been raised by SIS Service Users in previous consultations.

Experience of Women's Health Services

The background literature review had highlighted various area of Women's Health that may be a priority focus

- periods and menstrual health
- gynaecological conditions
- contraception
- cervical and breast cancer screening
- fertility
- pregnancy and birth

- menopause
- healthy living
- mental health
- chronic health conditions

SIS asked a set of questions about each of these areas

Have you needed health information or treatment about this issue?

Were you able to access NHS services?

Which services did you / are you accessing?

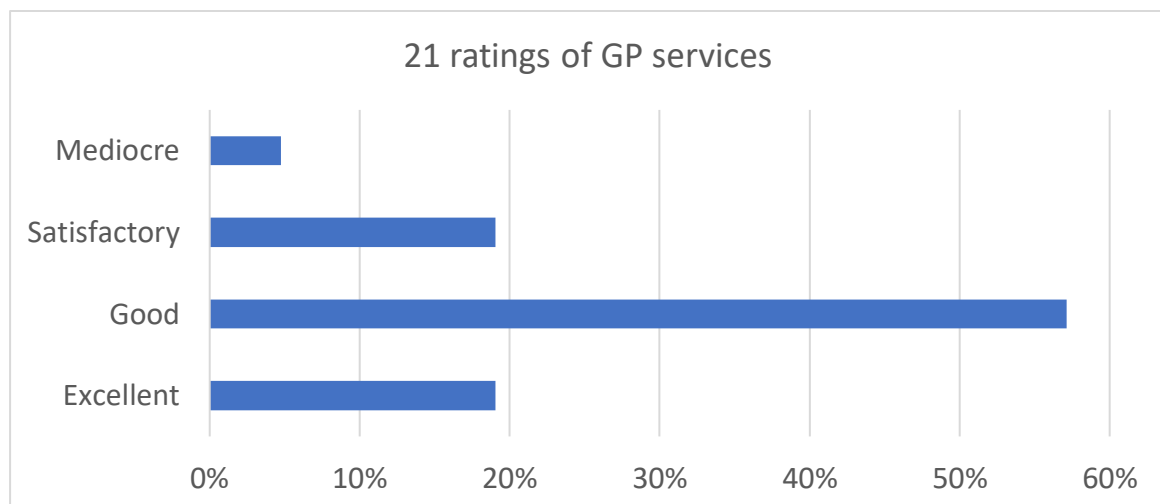
How would you rate the service you received / are receiving?

Were there any difficulties or barriers to you accessing this service?

What could be done to improve services?

Not all topics were commented in details.

GP surgeries are the first port of call for nearly all issues and satisfactions levels with GP services were general good with one mention of challenges to secure an appointment.



Sometimes I cannot book an appointment easily with my GP but they always ask me to call in a week time or ask me if I want to see another available doctor.

There were a few mentions of specialise services e.g. Park Centre Breast Screening Clinic, Wellbeing Service, Physiotherapy but complaints about long waiting times for specialist services and one mention of difficulties accessing appropriate interpreting

Although, I get the interpreting service most of the times but sometimes an interpreter is not booked or when they are booked, I don't get the right dialect

Periods

Issues were reported to the GP but securing investigation into irregular periods, heavy bleeding and pain was difficult. Participants didn't feel that their issues were taken seriously and women were expected to live with the burden of difficult periods.

I suffer from regular period pain which was diagnosed as normal by the GP and not investigated. Growing up, I was always suffering from period pain. I never understood why I should suffer every month. I wish if there were information available on anything which could help a part from taking pain killers, like alternative medicine, diet etxc

There were very few examples of people being seen by specialist services

I was never referred to see a gynaecologist in the first two years of my registration with the GP, especially that I had fibrosis and I was worried.

Contraception

No participant had experience of this services but one comment said

Thinking of my daughters, I would like them to be informed about this service before they need to access it. Either through the school nurse or in information session at the surgery.

Cervical and Breast Cancer Screening

Participants had all received centrally generated invitations to screening which were seen as being efficient and showing good customer service. However, the invitation letters and follow up results information was all in English making it difficult to use.

I have now no knowledge, advice or information about what is next. I cannot remember I was given any information. I will need information in Arabic.

Menopause

This topic saw the greatest engagement from the participants. Most were complementary about the attitude, information and treatment from their GPs.

I saw my GP when I started having hot flashes and other symptoms. My GP was very supportive, she explained how the menopause could affect women's bodies and make them uncomfortable due to the hormonal changes. I was given the choice to use hormonal replacement treatments but I was also explained their side effects.

One participant was not satisfied with their GPs response but did not know and was not told about the Specialist Menopause Clinic.

I started having signs of menopause, I saw my GP but I was not satisfied about how I need to deal with it. I need some advice, if this is not the role of the GP maybe a specialist nurse could support me to go through this unknown journey.

Healthy Lifestyles

Participants were complementary about the BHCC Health Lifestyles Team and SIS Bilingual Social Prescribing Service

I was given information through Sussex Interpreting Service about where to join some group activities, sport groups and venues to help me with weight loss and healthy living. They directed me to the right services in the community.

There were requests for specific language and gender based services and/or sports and lifestyle sessions to be made available.

It will be good if women have easy access to more groups or sport activities within their community, with support in Arabic, to help with their healthy living.