

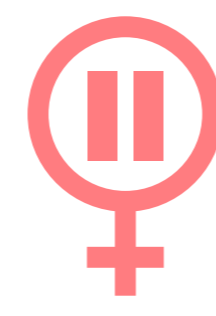
# 'Women's experiences of accessing healthcare services to manage their perimenopause/menopause-related health issues in Ireland'

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## Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines menopause as the permanent cessation of menstruation resulting from loss of ovarian follicular function [1]. For most women, this is a naturally occurring process that can lead to a wide range of health-related complications when appropriate care and treatments are inaccessible. These include, but are not limited to, an increased risk of osteoarthritis, cardiovascular disease, and urinary incontinence [2]. Women spend, on average, up to 40% of their lifespan during and post-menopause [3], which means that services and treatment options should be a high priority of the Irish policy-makers when improving women's healthcare services [4]. However, very little is known about women's experiences of accessing services or treatments in Ireland.



## Aim

To identify women's experiences of accessing healthcare services and treatments for perimenopause/menopause-related health issues in Ireland.



## Ethics

Research Ethics Committee approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin, in July 2023.



## Methods

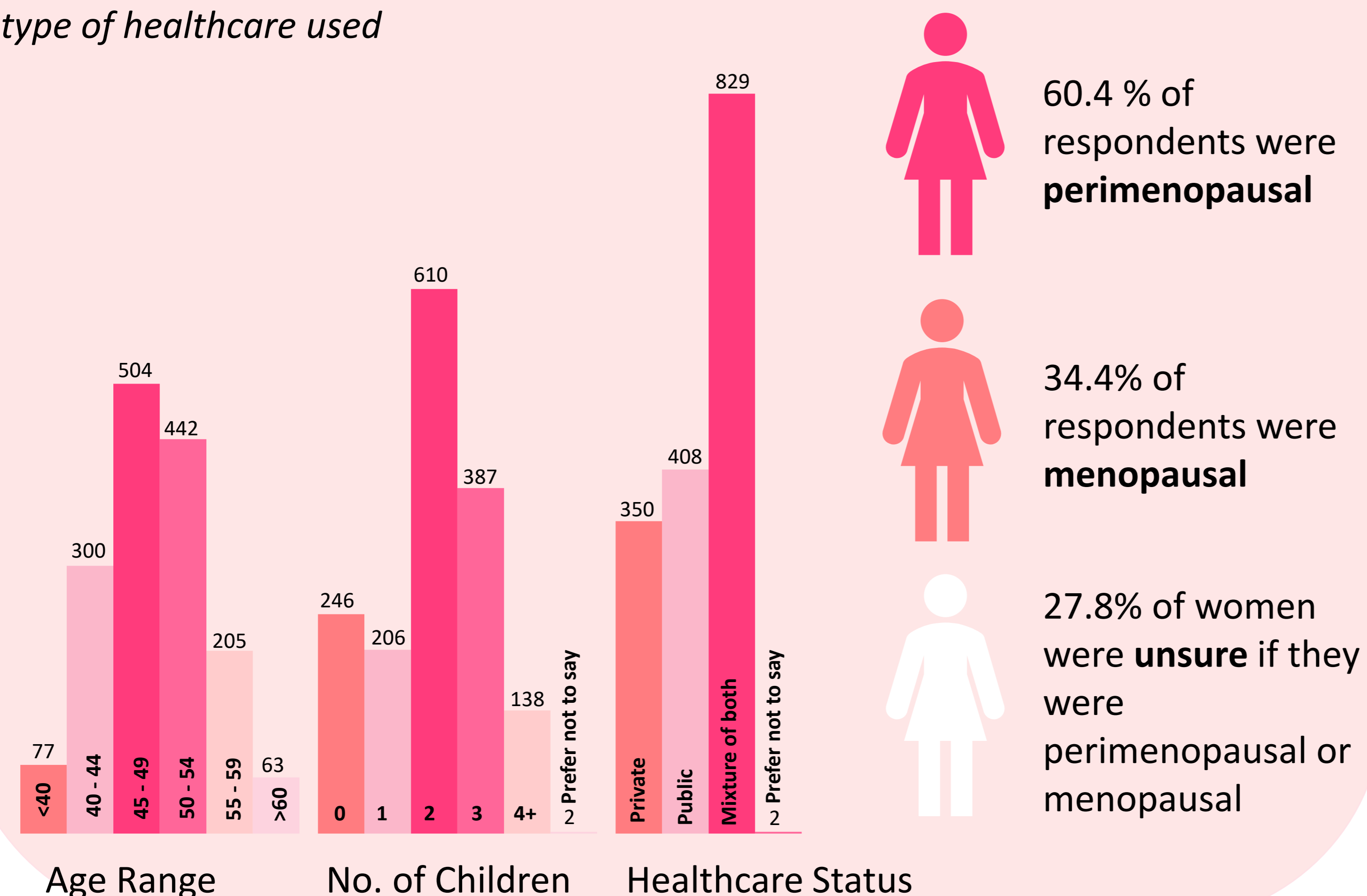
An anonymous semi-structured survey, based on a survey used in the United Kingdom, was modified for use in Ireland [5]. Three women's health platforms agreed to act as Gatekeepers to potential participants and share the study information (cover letter, participant information leaflet (PIL) and consent form and link to the survey) with their users. The 20-question survey was administered via Microsoft Forms.



## Results

A total of 1,597 women responded to the survey. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The 747 qualitative responses to the final open-ended question were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six step thematic analyses. [6]

Figure 1.1 Participants' characteristics age range, number of children and type of healthcare used



## Results

### Accessing services

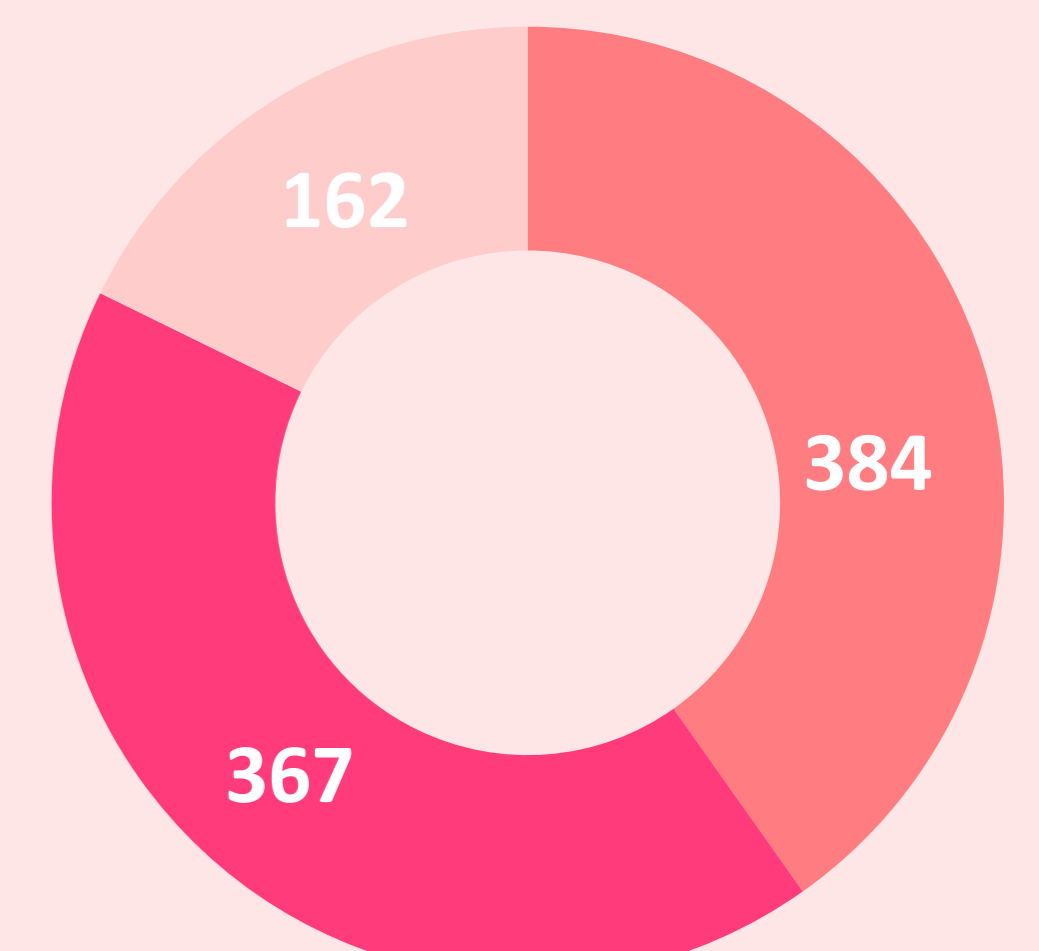
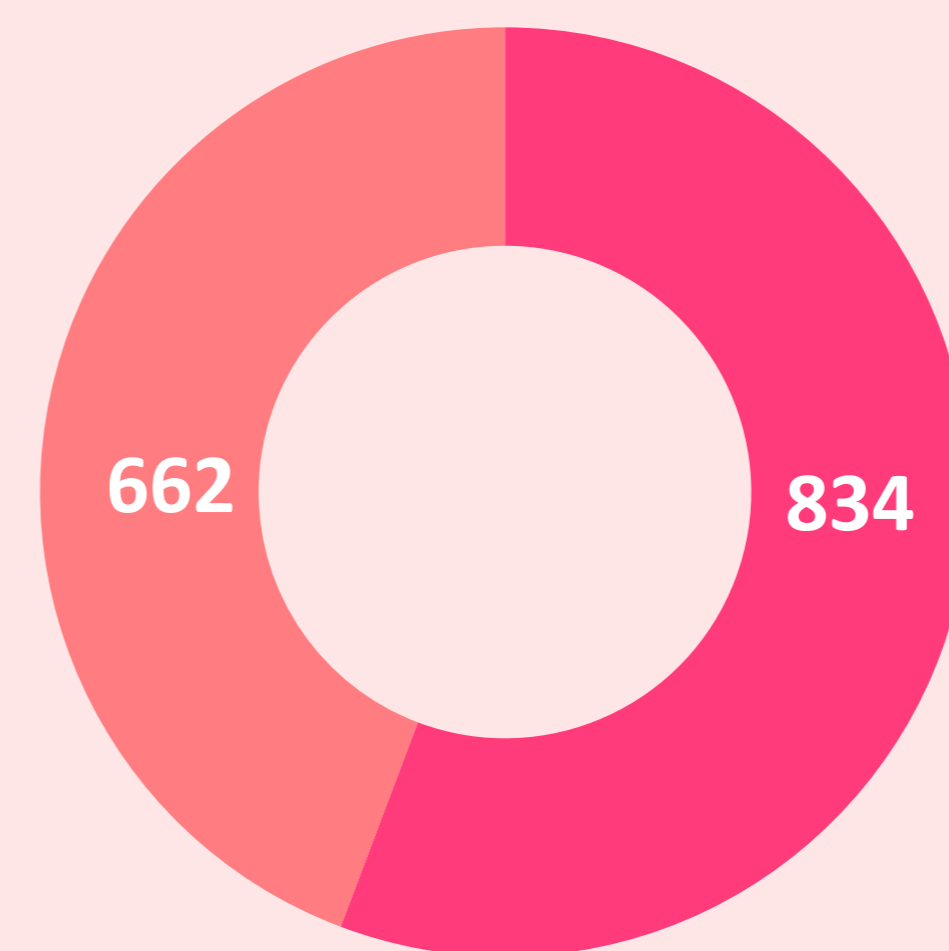
78.5% (n=1250) of women accessed a General Practitioner (GP) for their perimenopause/menopause-related health issues. Only 3% (n=48) of women availed of the public menopause clinics set up by the Government in 2022.

Of the 88.1% (n=1403) of women who accessed services for their perimenopause/menopause-related health issues, 44.3% (n=662) experienced some level of difficulty when trying to avail of these services.

Figure 1.2 Services accessed by women for perimenopause/menopause related health issues in Ireland

Did you experience any difficulties when accessing these services?

If 'yes; what difficulties did you experience - please tick all that apply



■ No ■ Yes

■ Long Waitlists ■ Financial Constraints ■ Other

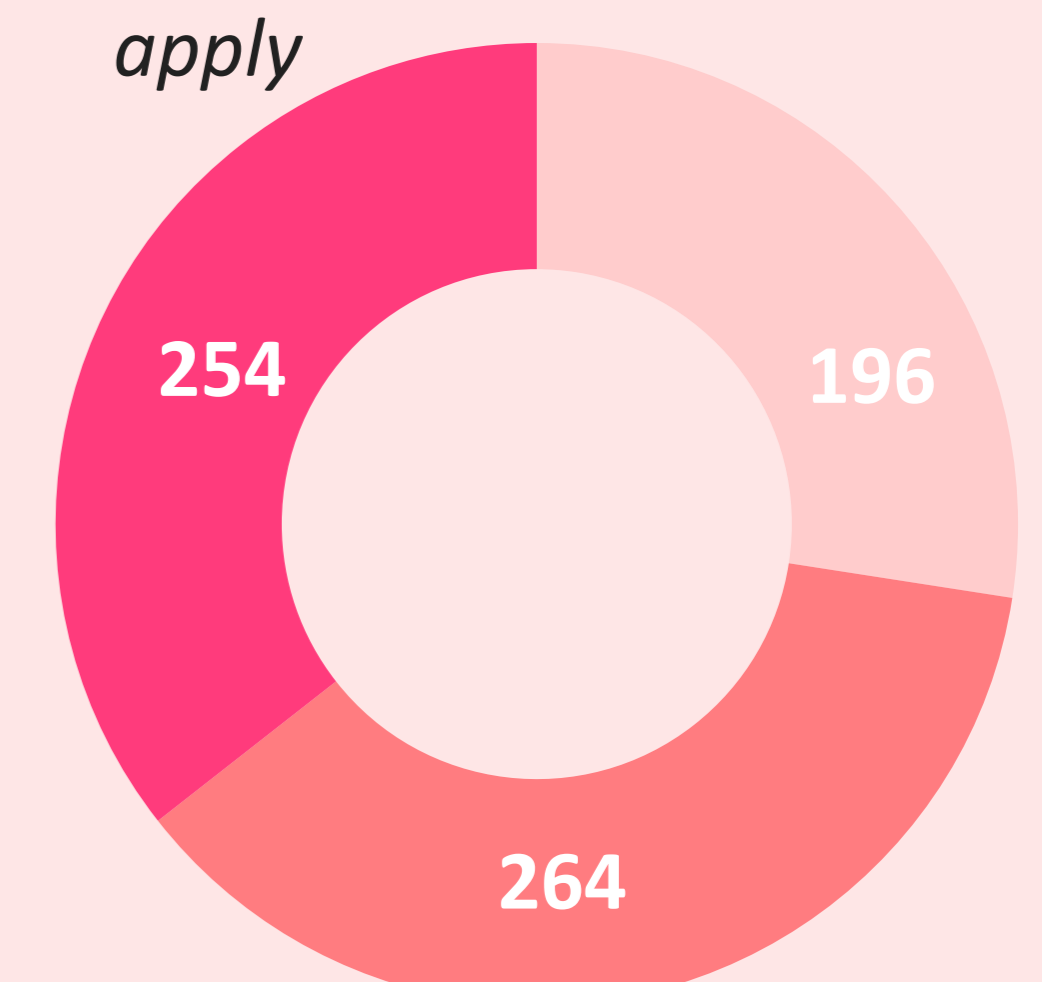
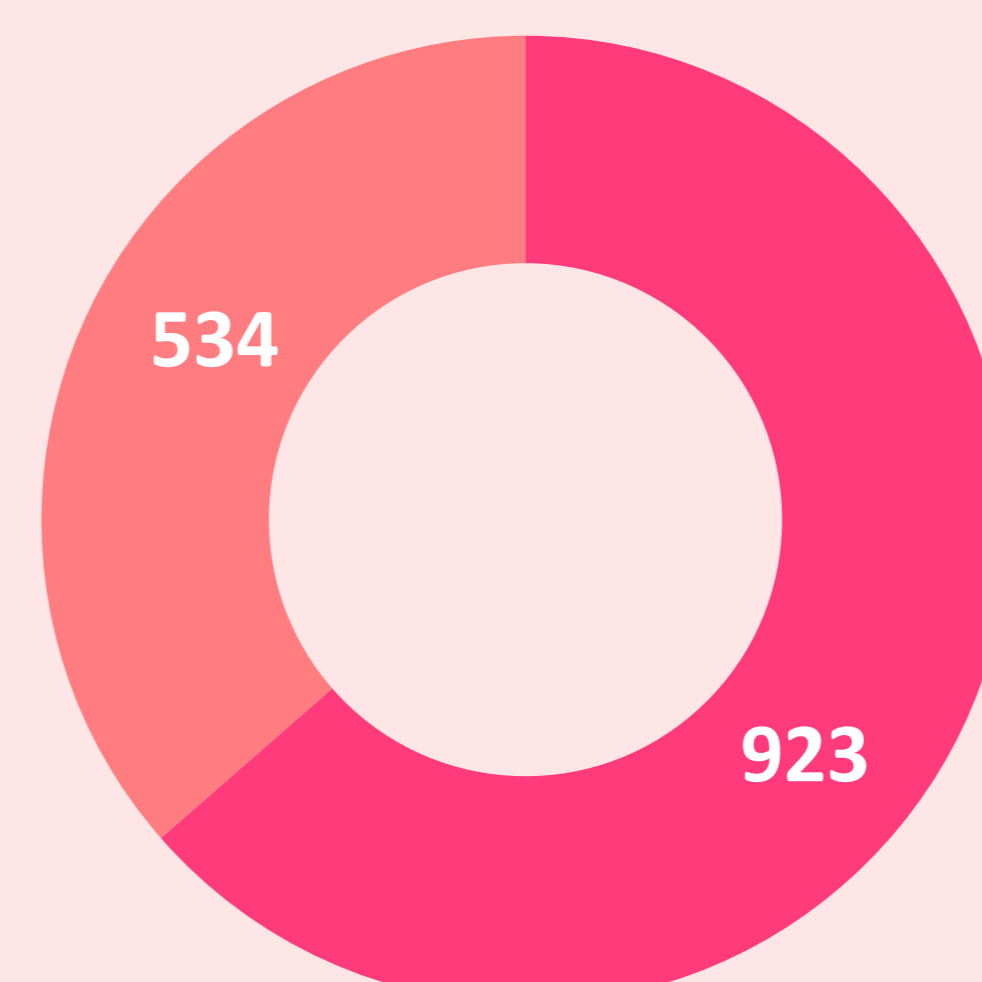
### Accessing treatments

Over one-third of women (37%, n=534) experienced difficulty in accessing treatment(s). Of the women who sought services, 54.8% (n=873) were prescribed Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

Figure 1.3 Treatments availed of for perimenopause/menopause related health issues

Did you experience any difficulties when trying to access these treatments?

If 'yes', what difficulties did you experience - please tick all that apply



■ No ■ Yes

■ Long Waitlists ■ Financial constraints ■ Other

### Qualitative Analyses Themes

General Practitioner lack of education

Lack of consistency in approach to care

Feeling dismissed by doctors

Lack of public information and awareness

## Conclusion

There appears to be a lack of support available to women who are going through the menopause transition in Ireland. The results would indicate that GPs require additional education on menopausal health in order to improve women's overall experiences of accessing services. With regards to treatment(s), a model of care that enables women to access treatments, such as HRT, for free would eliminate some of the barriers currently encountered.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the women who participated in the survey and shared their personal experiences with me. I would also like to thank the Laidlaw Foundation for funding this study and my supervisor Dr Deirdre Daly for her support throughout the project.

## References

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