The differing understanding of cervical screening among white women and women from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community

Annual statistics from the NHS Screening Programme reveal the age and location of women who do not attend screening when invited. However, these statistics are not broken down by ethnic origin. It is widely accepted that people from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background are harder to reach and so less likely to access health programmes. To understand the barriers to screening for BAME women the charity commissioned research with YouGov that looked into cervical screening uptake and knowledge about cervical cancer within BAME communities, and comparing this to responses from white British women.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1179 white women aged 25-65 and 1177 BAME women aged 25-65. Fieldwork was undertaken between 30th June - 7th July 2011. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the two groups.

Key findings include:

- A third more BAME women of screening age (12%) compared to white women (8%) said they had never attended a cervical screening appointment

- 70% of Asian women aged 20-65 knew that screening is a test to check cells from the cervix to find pre-cancerous abnormalities against 91% of white women aged 20-65

- 53% of BAME women aged 55-65 think screening is a necessary health test against 67% of white women aged 55-65

- Almost half (45%) of white women would be comfortable talking to a male GP about cervical screening but only 28% of BAME women agreed

- Twice as many BAME women as white women said better knowledge about the test and why it is important would encourage them to attend (30% against 14%)

The survey revealed that there needs to be further education within the BAME community about what cervical screening is and why it is so important. Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust continues to target these communities with activities such as such as BAME workshops in 2013 and 2014 for local organisations to gain understanding and resources on how to encourage cervical screening uptake amongst minority groups in their communities. We are also working with the NHS Cervical Screening Programme to develop better data so we can identify and target non-attenders.

In 2015 we launched a new video resource called ‘Your Guide to Cervical Screening (smear test)’ which is aimed at raising awareness of cervical screening to women with low literacy from a BAME background. Find out more about this resource here: http://www.jostrust.org.uk/about-cervical-cancer/cervical-screening-smear-test-and-abnormal-cells/film-your-guide-cervical

Below are the most significant results of the survey:
### Have you heard of cervical screening (also known as a smear test)?

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<tr>
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<th>BAME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, I've not heard of it</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but I'm not sure what it is</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, and I know what it is</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>99%</td>
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### Which, if any, of the following do you think cervical screening is?

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<th>Option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A test for sexually transmitted diseases</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A test to check the health of the womb</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A test to check cells from the cervix to find pre-cancerous abnormalities</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<td>A test to find ovarian cancer</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A test to find cervical cancer</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>51%</td>
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Many of the women who answered with “Other” specified that they would like to have their cervical screening performed in a hospital, privately, or in a female orientated clinic/gynaecologist.

Have you ever been invited to have a cervical screening examination?
Why do you think you have never received an invitation for a cervical screening examination?

- Don't know: 36% (BAME), 25% (White)
- Other reasons: 41% (BAME), 21% (White)
- I don't need it as I've had a hysterectomy: 10% (BAME), 9% (White)
- I don't need it as I've had Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): 0% (BAME), 3% (White)
- I don't think I'm eligible for cervical screening: 21% (BAME), 6% (White)
- I've moved house and have not updated my details with my GP: 12% (BAME), 6% (White)
- I'm not registered with a GP: 6% (BAME), 7% (White)

When you were last invited to have a cervical screening examination did you respond to the initial invitation?

- Can't recall: 3% (BAME), 2% (White)
- No, I didn't book as a result of seeing the initial invitation: 25% (BAME), 20% (White)
- Yes, I booked a cervical screening appointment when I received the initial invitation: 72% (BAME), 77% (White)
You said you didn’t book as a result of seeing the initial invitation to have a cervical screening examination, did you receive reminders after your initial invitation?

- Can't recall: BAME 6%, White 5%
- No, I didn't receive any reminders: BAME 23%, White 22%
- Yes, I received reminders but did not book an appointment: BAME 37%, White 44%
- Yes, I received 4 or more reminders and booked after this: BAME 5%, White 3%
- Yes, I received 2 or 3 reminders and booked after this: BAME 14%, White 11%
- Yes, I received a reminder and booked after this: BAME 15%, White 14%

You said you didn't book as a result of seeing the initial invitation to have a cervical screening examination, did you receive reminders after your initial invitation?
Which, if any, of the statements do you agree with about the letter you received inviting you to attend cervical screening?

- It was informative
- It was clear and easy to understand
- It stressed the importance of having the screening
- It didn't really explain what it was for
- I didn't understand what I was supposed to do
- It did not seem relevant to me
- Can't recall
- None of these
- I didn't read it

Thinking about the invitation that you received for cervical screening...

Do you think that the letter and any other material you received (i.e. pamphlet, leaflet etc.) included too much, too little or about the right amount of information about cervical screening?

- Can't recall
- Too little information
- About the right amount of information
- Too much information

BAME
White

- Can't recall: 14% (BAME), 17% (White)
- Too little information: 12% (BAME), 9% (White)
- About the right amount of information: 72% (BAME), 73% (White)
- Too much information: 2% (BAME), 1% (White)
Which, if any, of the following types of information would make you more likely to act on an invitation and book an appointment for a cervical screening?

- Not applicable - there isn't any information that would make me more likely to act on an invitation
- Don't know
- Other
- Information relevant to me
- Case studies of women from my ethnic community that have had the screening
- Case studies of women from my age group that have had the screening
- Information on a local radio show
- If I was sure that I could be screened by someone from the same ethnic background as me
- Simpler information with more images
- More detailed explanation of what the risks are if I don't have the screening

*Percentages shown in the chart.*
When was the last time that you attended a cervical screening?

- Can't recall: 2% (BAME), 9% (White)
- Never: 4% (BAME), 12% (White)
- Longer than 10 years ago: 2% (BAME), 5% (White)
- Within the last 8 to 10 years: 2% (BAME), 2% (White)
- Within the last 6 to 7 years: 2% (BAME), 3% (White)
- Within the last 4 to 5 years: 7% (BAME), 8% (White)
- Within the last 2 to 3 years: 30% (BAME), 30% (White)
- Within the last year: 14% (BAME), 18% (White)
- Within the last 6 months: 15% (BAME), 14% (White)

And approximately how many cervical screenings have you had in your life time?

- Can't recall: 10% (BAME), 9% (White)
- 21 or more: 2% (BAME), 3% (White)
- 16 to 20: 2% (BAME), 3% (White)
- 11 to 15: 4% (BAME), 11% (White)
- 6 to 10: 19% (BAME), 19% (White)
- 3 to 5: 30% (BAME), 34% (White)
- 2: 16% (BAME), 16% (White)
- 1: 14% (BAME), 14% (White)
- 0: 7% (BAME), 7% (White)
Which, if any, of the following are reasons why you have ever delayed or not been to a cervical screening after being invited? If you have never delayed or not been to an appointment please choose the “not applicable” option.

- Not applicable - I've never delayed/not been to a cervical screening after being invited: 45%
- Don't know: 3%
- Other reason: 10%
- I found it hard to book an appointment at a convenient time: 11%
- I couldn't get time off work: 6%
- I was worried about what the results would say: 3%
- I couldn't get childcare: 2%
- I am lesbian and so don't need it: 0%
- Cervical screening is frowned on in my culture/community: 0%
- Cervical Cancer is rare in women of my ethnicity: 0%
- I don't think it is important: 2%
- I would prefer not to know if anything was wrong: 2%
- I presumed that nothing was wrong with me: 3%
- I was worried it would be embarrassing: 13%
- I was worried it would be painful: 14%
- I forgot all about it: 8%
- I kept putting it off/did not get around to going: 16%
Many of the women who answered with “Other reason” clarified in the comments that they had been pregnant at the time, were dealing with other health issues, were too embarrassed/felt uncomfortable about it, had had a hysterectomy or are sexually inactive.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable - nothing would encourage me to attend an appointment</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing that the person carrying out the test is properly trained</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing that if I wanted the person carrying out the screening would be of the same ethnic...</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to take time off work to go</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More knowledge about the test and why it is important</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More choice of where to have the screening (i.e. Different clinics to my GP surgery)</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended hours at my GP surgery</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Many of the women who answered “Other” clarified in the comments that they would feel more comfortable if they were sure that a female health professional would perform the screening instead of a male. Some women also noted that nurses should be trained to address any issues prior to the exam.
Which, if any, of the following would you be comfortable talking to about cervical screening?

- Male GP: 28% comfortable
- Male nurse: 18% comfortable
- Female nurse: 34% comfortable
- Female GP: 78% comfortable
- Male family member: 7% comfortable
- Female family member: 39% comfortable
- Male friends: 8% comfortable
- Female friends: 45% comfortable
- Male religious leader: 2% comfortable
- Female religious leader: 7% comfortable
- Male community worker: 5% comfortable
- Female community worker: 24% comfortable
- Other: 3% comfortable
- Not applicable - I wouldn't feel comfortable talking about cervical...
Thinking now more specifically about Cervical Cancer... Which, if any, of the following do you think can cause it?

- Don't know: 26%
- Other: 2%
- Multiple sexual partners: 41%
- A genital infection: 28%
- Smoking: 15%
- It is hereditary: 22%
- The human papillomavirus (HPV infection): 49%

In the comments of this question many women said that they think cervical cancer is caused by early sexual encounters.