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A Qualitative Study on Women's Opinions and Attitudes on Cosmetic Gynecology

Kadınların Kozmetik Jinekoloji Konusundaki Görüş ve Tutumları Üzerine Nitel Bir Araştırma

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
Received: 28.08.2022	<p>Aim: Having become a trend in elective surgery in recent years, cosmetic gynecology refers to all aesthetic interventions in the female genital organs. With the advancement of communication technologies and the increasing use of social media, the issues related to sexual organs, which have been accepted as social taboos, have gained attention by women. Therefore, this study aims to determine the knowledge and opinions of women about cosmetic gynecology. Subjects and Method: Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 women of reproductive age and the audio recorded data were analyzed through content analysis. Results: The data obtained were gathered under five main themes: Defining cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology, reasons for cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology, the effects of vulva-vagina deformities on women, the effects of vulva-vagina deformities on men, status of cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology in Turkey. These themes show that women know that cosmetic gynecology is an aesthetic surgery performed in the genital area and some of these women had some of these procedures done. The reasons for cosmetic gynecology were coded under the headings including aesthetic appearance, sexuality and physical ailments. Women have expressed the effects of genital organ deformations on women as not being able to enjoy sexual intercourse, being disliked by the opposite sex, being disturbed by their appearance, and depressed mood. Being alienated from women, decreased sexual intercourse, and turning to other women were the effects expressed by men. Conclusion: The results show that most of the women had heard of the field of cosmetic gynecology, that genital organ deformities had negative effects on men and women, and that they thought that the field of cosmetic gynecology was a promising profession. It is recommended that well-equipped health professionals provide care and counseling in order to inform women correctly on this issue.</p>
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Makale Bilgisi	ÖZ
Geliş Tarihi: 28.08.2022	<p>Amaç: Son yıllarda elektif cerrahide hızla trend olan kozmetik jinekoloji, kadın genital organlarındaki estetik girişimlerin tümünü ifade etmektedir. İletişim teknolojilerinin gelişmesi ve sosyal medya kullanımının yaygınlaşması ile toplumsal tabu kabul edilen, gündeme getirilemeyen cinsel organlara dair konular kadınlar tarafından fark edilmiş ve konuşulmaya başlamıştır. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma ile kadınların kozmetik jinekoloji hakkındaki bilgi ve görüşlerinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Örneklem ve Yöntem: Bu araştırma niteliksel olarak, üreme çağındaki 15 kadın ile yapılmıştır. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile derinlemesine görüşme yapılarak ve ses kaydı alınarak toplanmış ve içerik analizi yoluyla çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular: Elde edilen veriler 5 ana tema altında toplanmıştır: Kozmetik/estetik jinekoloji kavramını tanımlama, kozmetik/estetik jinekoloji nedenleri, vulva-vajina deformelerinin kadınlar üzerindeki etkisi, vulva-vajina deformelerinin erkekler üzerindeki etkisi, kozmetik/estetik jinekolojinin ülkemizdeki yeri. Bu temalarda, kadınların kozmetik jinekolojinin genital bölgede yapılan estetik cerrahi girişimi olduğunu bildikleri ve aralarında bu işlemlerden bazılarını yaptırınların olduğu belirlenmiştir. Kozmetik jinekoloji nedenleri estetik görünüm, cinsellik ve fiziksel rahatsızlıkları içeren başlıklar altında kodlanmıştır. Kadınlar genital organ deformasyonlarının kadınlar üzerindeki etkilerini cinsel ilişkiden zevk alamama, karşı cins tarafından beğenilmeme, görüntüsünden rahatsız olma ve moral bozukluğu; erkekler üzerindeki etkilerini kadından soğuma, cinsel ilişkide azalma, başka kadınlara yönelme olarak ifade etmiştir. Sonuç: Araştırmada kadınların çoğunun kozmetik jinekoloji alanını duydukları, genital organ deformelerinin kadın ve erkek üzerinde olumsuz etkileri olduğunu ve kozmetik jinekoloji alanının geleceği parlak bir meslek olduğunu düşündükleri belirlenmiştir. Kadınların bu konuda doğru bilgilendirilmesi için donanımlı sağlık profesyonellerinin bakım ve danışmanlık sağlaması önerilebilir.</p>
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Introduction

One of the significant and timely topics of today, cosmetic gynecology (plastic surgery of female genitals) is used to refer to all the plastic surgery attempts in order to change the structure and appearance of the female genitalia without any medical indication (Ostrzenski, 2011; Garcia et al., 2020). Labiaplasty, perinoplasty, hymenoplasty, hudoplasty are among the frequently performed genital plastic surgeries (Smith et al., 2017). Since centuries ago, women have been performing certain appliances such as tattoos, make-up, wearing accessories that would alter their physical appearances with the aims of staying young, and also with the strife for beauty and aesthetic. The demand for surgical techniques that stems from functionality and aesthetical appearance from women have increased with the advancement of medical technologies. In this sense, cosmetic gynecology has been one of the most attractive areas in the last few years (Daşıkan et al., 2019).

Just as all the medical applications, genital surgeries also carry a certain risk of complication. It has been reported in the literature that the incidence of complications is between 3% and 30%, and as complications, fistula formation as a result of infection, hematoma, dyspareunia, localized pain, inadequate wound healing, scarring and even bowel and bladder injury have been reported (Goodman, 2009; Daşıkan et al., 2019). With the increasing popularity of cosmetic gynecology, international obstetrics and gynecology associations have been stating their opinions based on research on the subject. According to the report by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist (ACOG) Committee Opinion (2020), female genital aesthetic surgery is not medically indicated and there is insufficient evidence about its safety and effectiveness. The report also has made important recommendations such as informing women about potential complications (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist (ACOG) Committee Opinion, 2020).

With the increasing use of internet, women are able to access such topics easily through social media and such platforms, and converse about these topics without being considered a taboo. For this reason, women who are not satisfied with the appearance of their genitalia and have sexual problems have become increasingly interested in cosmetic gynecology procedures. In this context, this study aims to define women's knowledge and opinions on the subject, namely, cosmetic gynecology.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

This research consists of patterns of qualitative research and has been designed as a case study. Case studies are studies that are conducted with the illustration of certain event or events, a person or multiple people in order to understand a term, event, phenomenon, or a problem better. In case studies, the focus is on the cause and effect relation over an event, situation, or even a person (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Population and Sample of the Research

The study has been conducted with women who applied to the Gynecology Polyclinic of a state hospital in the south of Turkey between 08.04.2022 and 12.06.2022. Sample of the study are 15 women in their reproductive ages. The number of samples has been determined by criterion-based sampling, which is one of the purposive sampling types. In the literature, it is reported that the sample size of qualitative studies can be determined according to the saturation point of the answers to the research questions, and generally 5-25 people are sufficient (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In order to enrich the data of the study, there has been no restriction on age, education status, employment status, marital status, and status of having aesthetic surgery.

Data Collection Tool

In light of the literature review, a semi-structured interview form was prepared by the researchers in order to gather the participants' views on cosmetic gynecology (Daşıkan et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2020; Hadımlı et al., 2021) Consisting of a total of 16 questions, the interview form have included questions aiming to determine the personal information of the participants and their views on cosmetic gynecology, privatizing questions that enable them to go down to the smallest detail and embody with examples and drill questions that provide in-depth information about the answers given in line with the obtained data. In order to ensure the content validity of the data collection tool, expert opinions have been obtained from two academicians, one specialized in qualitative research and the other in obstetrics and gynecology, and amendments have been made in line with the recommendations. In order to improve the intelligibility and applicability of the interview form, a pre-application (2 people) has been conducted. The pre-application has showed that no changes are necessary to the interview form. Women who have participated in the pre-application have also been considered as samples of the study. In the preparation of the semi-structured interview form, attention has been paid to the principles such as the questions being easy to understand, not being multidimensional and not guiding the participant (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Data Collection

The research data have been collected by the researcher by face-to-face interview technique. While collecting data, the purpose of the research was explained to the women participating, they were informed that the interviews would be recorded on a voice recorder, and their verbal and written consent were obtained. In order to confirm the accuracy of the information given, their answers were repeated to them with the aim of checking whether or not their answers were understood correctly. No time limit has been set for the meetings; instead, the conversations continued until the topic was over, and the interviews ended when the concepts that could address the research questions were repeated. As a result, each interview lasted approximately about 25 minutes. The audio recordings obtained have been transferred to the computer environment, and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data. Content analysis is a scientific approach that allows for the objective and systematic examination of oral, written and other material. Content analysis is also defined as the process of summarizing and specifying the basic contents of the written information and the messages they contain (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). Content analysis process has included transcribing the interview data, organizing the data, identifying meaningful data units, creating an analysis matrix, the analysis process, and reporting the results. While analyzing the data, the names of the students have not been used, and each participant was given a number respectively (P1, P2, ..., P15). The documented data were coded in a similar way and themes were revealed after a code list was created. Then, the qualitative data were digitized by finding how often each code was repeated. In order to increase the internal reliability of the research, the data coding and analysis processes were carried out by two people independently of each other, with the support of the first researcher as well as a qualified expert in the field of qualitative research. Later, the researchers came together and evaluated the relations of the codes with the themes, and the themes were rearranged. For reliability, the coefficient of agreement between encoders was calculated and found to be 0.75. While analyzing the qualitative data, the MAXQDA 2022 program was used.

Ethics Committee Statement

The study has been conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Necessary permissions have been obtained from the Cukurova University Faculty of Medicine Non-Invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee (dated 08.04.2022, 121/85 number/decision no) and the institution where the research has been conducted. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and verbal and written consent was obtained from those who volunteered to participate. In addition, participant numbers were assigned instead of the names of the women interviewed.

Results

Introductory information of women

The data on the socio-demographic, obstetric and aesthetic procedures of 15 women included in the research sample have been summarized below. Seven of the women included in the study are in the 24-29 age group, and eight of them are in the 34-48 age group. Nine of the women are university graduates, the other six are high school graduates, and four of the women are housewives. Again, it has been gathered that nine of the women were married and seven of them had children (Table 1). It has been found that seven of the women participating in the study had aesthetic procedure, among which two had a vaginoplasty and one had a hymenoplasty. Again, 13 of the women have stated that they are willing to have a cosmetic gynecology operation, one of them had not planned to have it done, and the other one had stated that they could have it done if their husband wanted it.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Women

Participants	Age	Education	Occupation	Marital status	Number of children
P1	27	High school	Housewife	Married	2
P2	34	University	Engineer	Single	-
P3	36	High school	Housewife	Married	3
P4	28	University	Teacher	Single	1
P5	29	High school	Nurse	Married	-
P6	24	University	Lawyer	Single	-
P7	35	High school	Hairdresser	Single	-
P8	26	High school	Housewife	Married	2
P9	48	High school	Housewife	Married	3
P10	27	University	Nurse	Married	-
P11	35	University	Teacher	Single	2
P12	28	University	Teacher	Married	-
P13	45	University	Architect	Single	3
P14	40	University	Doctor	Married	-
P15	39	University	Nurse	Married	-

The data obtained from the interviews have been collected under 5 main themes:

- Defining cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology
- Reasons for cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology
- The effects of vulva-vagina deformities on women
- The effects of vulva-vagina deformities on men
- Status of cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology in our country

Main theme 1: Defining cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology

As seen in Table 2, the participant women have been asked to define cosmetic gynecology. Women have stated in their answers that they know cosmetic gynecology as plastic surgery on genitalia.

Table 2. Women Defining Cosmetic/Plastic Gynecology

Theme	Codes	n
Women defining cosmetic/plastic gynecology	Genital aesthetic (n=5)	15
	Vaginal aesthetic (n=5)	
	No knowledge (n=4)	
	A term related to women (n=3)	
	Beauty of intimate area (n=2)	

The examples from women's answers have been listed below:

Participant 1: *I think this word is related to the beauty of our intimate area (laughs).*

Participant 3: *...from what I understood plastic surgery on a woman's body on her genitalia.*

Participant 5: *No I haven't heard of that term. But I know that gynecology is related to women. So I think it's a term related to women as well.*

Participant 14: *It is applied to the vagina, this procedure is done to eliminate this image defect caused by the sagging of the inner and outer lips, then in case of urinary incontinence, I had this procedure done. Due to time, age, and long-term sexual intercourse, sagging occurred and this is done because of these aspects.*

Main theme 2: Reasons for cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology

Table 3 illustrated women's opinions on the reasons for cosmetic gynecology. The reasons for preference of women were coded under the headings of aesthetic appearance, sexuality and physical ailments.

Table 3. Women Opinions of Participant Women on Reasons for Cosmetic/Aesthetic Gynecology

Theme	Codes	n
Reasons for cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology	The desire to be more beautiful/attractive (n=12)	15
	The desire to stay young (n=9)	
	To enjoy sexual intercourse (n=6)	
	To please her spouse (n=6)	
	To be found desirable (n=5)	
	Health issues (n=5)	

The examples from women's answers have been listed below:

Participant 4: *As there will be enlargement with giving birth, enlargement can also be experienced from having too much sexual intercourse or having many lovers... One may be attempting aesthetic gynecology in order to be beautiful and not lose sexiness. What is demanded may be to preserve youth and not lose sexiness. In my opinion, plastic surgery is an aesthetic made for sexual relationships rather than health.*

Participant 6: *It can be done for reasons such as urinary incontinence, increasing desire in sexual intercourse, as demands are made for health and to look more vigorous and better.*

Participant 10: *Since there is a slight change in my genital area because I have intercourse very often, I had plastic surgery in these cases. And I think it's necessary as well... Since men pay a lot of attention to the private area and the breasts, sexuality is very important to them, I think it is very important for us women, too, in order to get some attention and be admired...*

Participant 11: *... We cannot fix things with "I wish's" and because of this the only think I would do to get surgery done and fix it with plastic surgery as much as I can. Believe me, I don't think my husband is at fault either because after vaginal delivery, there was excessive enlargement, sagging, and scars were left on my seams. My children were born a little above normal in weight, which of course affected it a lot...*

Participant 12: *The person can get it done to feel better about themselves, or her husband might not be attracted to her, or it can be done for medical purposes as well. I think a few people around me have had this done because they were having serious problems with their spouses. So of course, when there is some unrest in the house, people may have to have it done because they are unwillingly unhappy.*

Main theme 3: The effect of vulva-vagina deformities on women

Table 4 includes women's opinions on the effect of vulva-vagina deformities on women. According to the women's statements, the codes of not being able to enjoy sexual intercourse, being disliked by the opposite sex, being disturbed by their appearance and depressed mood came to the fore.

Table 4. Opinions of Participant Women on the Effect of Vulva-Vagina Deformities on Women

Theme	Codes	n
The effect of vulva-vagina deformities on women	Incapability of enjoying sexual intercourse (n=9)	15
	Not being desired by the opposite sex (n=6)	
	Not liking their own appearance (n=6)	
	Being depressed (n=6)	
	Urinary problems (n=3)	
	Lack of self-confidence (n=2)	
	Pain (n=2)	
	Incapability of moving comfortably (n=1)	
	Does not affect women (n=1)	

The examples from women's answers have been listed below:

Participant 1: *I think it affects women adversely because sagging affects women in all aspects as well as sexual intercourse. Enlargement can even lead to a decrease in pleasure during intercourse, which can negatively affect both the person and the spouse.*

Participant 6: *... If you want to think about it, for example, we are going to the sea, I wear a swimsuit and there is a bulge in that part of it, it has a bad appearance, that is, it looks very disgusting, and since I was not happy with this situation, I had this procedure done 2 times and I was very satisfied after I had it done.*

Participant 9: *No one wants saggy breasts or a large vagina, it would affect both sexual intercourse and moving comfortably.*

Participant 12: *... There can be low confidence and being uncomfortable with this appearance in women. It looks terrible. The sagging of the inner lips changes the flow direction of the urine while urinating, and it is extremely painful because it is stretched during sexual intercourse, this situation is really a pain for women. There should be plastic surgery done.*

Main theme 4: The effect of vulva-vagina deformities on men

Most of the women considered the effects of vulva-vagina deformities on men as alienation from women and decrease in sexual intercourse (Table 5).

Table 5. Opinions of Participant Women on the Effect of Vulva-Vagina Deformities on Men

Theme	Codes	n
The effect of vulva-vagina deformities on men	Feel strange from women (n=14)	15
	Decreased sexual intercourse (n=12)	
	Turning towards other women (n=8)	
	Inability to enjoy sexual intercourse (n=5)	

The examples from women's answers have been listed below:

Participant 1: *Of course this is a question for men but if I were a man, when I have intercourse with someone whose genitals have drooped and who have grown, I would definitely not enjoy it and this would cause reluctance towards that person after a while, so I would be adversely affected by this situation.*

Participant 2: *Since our men mostly care about sexual intercourse, even a little sagging, enlargement, or darkening can result in men cheating on us because they wouldn't like what they see. At least this is how I think this situation affects men.*

Participant 5: *It negatively affects my partner, does not desire me, and our relationship may fall apart.*

Participant 6: *It would affect adversely sexually. Like I said, no one wants to see their spouses like that, and there can be decrease in sexual intercourse.*

Participants 11: *It can go from arguing to even separation I think. Personally, my husband humiliated me many times because of my breasts and the enlargement of my vagina, and also used the word that if it continues like this, we will break up, and this is really, really not a pleasant situation for a woman, it's very hurtful and very touching.*

Main theme 5: Status of cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology in our country

Most of the women stated that cosmetic gynecology has a promising future and they think that it will gain more value over time (Table 6).

Table 6. Opinions of Participant Women on the Status of Cosmetic/Aesthetic Gynecology in our Country

Theme	Codes	n
Status of cosmetic/aesthetic gynecology in our country	It has a bright future (n=12)	15
	It will become more important with time (n=8)	
	It's widespread (n=6)	
	It's not as widespread as other types of plastic surgery (n=4)	
	Society disapproves of such operations (n=2)	

The examples from women's answers have been listed below:

Participant 1: *I think plastic surgery is very widespread but I haven't heard of cosmetic gynecology as much as I heard of others. Of course, there is a demand from women. But like I said I think the number of women who are affected by their environment and are not leaning towards this practice is not small...*

Participant 2: ... *Although the importance of this profession is not acknowledged at the moment, I think it will be in time. So I think this profession has a bright future ahead. Because the age and fixed opinions are constantly changing and with this change I think the demand from our women will increase and thus, the future of this profession will get better.*

Participant 10: *Sexuality is a need both for women and men. For this reason, us women I think should get some stuff done because involuntarily the body changes and as a result we get some situations we do not want. For this reason, we should get plastic surgery. The future is already very bright, everyone is trying to get everything done now, so it will be very common and widespread.*

Participant 15: *I think the prevalence of aesthetic gynecology practice in our country is too much, so even when I was studying at university, from this situation, from hymen planting, people would ask how old are you to get hymen planting, or how old are you to claim that your vagina is enlarging, or they would say that it was not acceptable for a woman to say that her vagina was darkening or sagging at such a young age. Really, women's demand is incredibly high and I'm shocked by this. The future of aesthetic gynecology will be perfect; it would be very good.*

Discussion

Even though cosmetic gynecology attracts more and more people every day, the research on the topic is very limited. In this study, which has been conducted to determine the knowledge and opinions of women about cosmetic gynecology, it has been revealed that most women know that cosmetic gynecology is an aesthetic surgery performed in the genital area (Table 2) and that some of these procedures (vaginoplasty and hymenoplasty) have been experienced by some of the participants. These results are important in terms of revealing women's awareness of cosmetic gynecology, their demands, and related situations.

While in the past, operations for the female external genitalia were only applied in obligatory cases such as adrenogenital syndrome and ambiguous genital, today, aesthetic operations have come to the fore due to the increasing awareness of external genital organ appearance (Güngör et al., 2011). Many women who are dissatisfied with their genital appearance, feel shame, lack of self-confidence during sexual intercourse, and fear that their partner may develop negative thoughts, turn to cosmetic gynecology designed and focused on sexual satisfaction and attractiveness (Hadımlı et al., 2021). In addition to improving the appearance and function of the genitals, for example, labium minor hypertrophy in women causes irritation, pain and discomfort in physical activities such as cycling (Hadımlı et al., 2021). In a retrospective study of women who had labia minor labiaplasty, it has been concluded that 37% of women wanted surgery for aesthetic reasons, 32% for functional disorders, and 31% for both functional and aesthetic reasons (Giarenis & Cardozo, 2014). Bucknor et al. (2018) have found that 81.6% of women underwent labiaplasty due to aesthetic problems, while the others applied labiaplasty due to discomfort, sexual dysfunction and chronic urogenital infection indications (Bucknor et al., 2018). Most of the women who participated in our study have reported the reasons for cosmetic gynecology as the desire to be more attractive/beautiful, the desire to stay young, to enjoy sexual intercourse, to please their spouse, to be more admired, and to not have health problems (Table 3). In this respect, our study findings are similar to the literature.

A problem in the genital area can cause sexual problems in the person and/or their partner. The deterioration of sexual health can lead to negative consequences on physical, mental, familial and social health (Daşıkan et al., 2019). It has been mentioned that women who achieve the desired appearance and function in their sexual organs with cosmetic gynecology applications feel better and contribute to the increase in sexual self-confidence and sexual satisfaction (Goodman et al., 2010; Giarenis & Cardozo, 2014; İnam & Şahin, 2020). In our study, under the theme of the effect of vulva and vagina

deformities on women, the codes of not being able to enjoy sexual intercourse, being disliked by the opposite sex, being disturbed by their appearance and depressed mood came to the fore (Table 4). As for the effects of vulva and vagina deformities on men, the codes of being alienated from women, decreased sexual intercourse, turning to other women, and not enjoying sexuality have been determined (Table 5). From this point of view, it can be concluded that the basis of cosmetic gynecology demands of women is their desire to look beautiful and to be sexually attractive and that the problems in the sexual and family life of couples are loaded on the female body.

In the field of aesthetic surgery, which aims at the quality of life and satisfaction of individuals, genital surgery applications are becoming more common in the World day by day (Daşıkan et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2020; Hadımlı et al., 2021). With the development of communication technologies and the widespread use of social media, the issues related to sexual organs, which are accepted as social taboo and cannot be brought to the agenda, have been noticed and started to be discussed by women. Although there are many clinics that practice cosmetic gynecology in our country, statistical data on this subject are not clearly known. Our study has revealed that most of the women see cosmetic gynecology as a profession with a bright future and think that it would gain more importance over time (Table 6). We see that the interest in cosmetic gynecology will increase gradually by expressing the problems that women experience in their genital appearance in order to balance their sexual and family lives, along with their instincts to look beautiful and be desired.

A limitation of this study is that it cannot be generalized because it is a qualitative research. Qualitative research generally gives priority to reflecting the views of the participants and explaining the events and facts within their own rules. Another limitation of this study is that the interviews were conducted only with women of reproductive age.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Cosmetic gynecology has an increasing trend throughout the world. As well as enhancing the physical appearance, it benefits people medically, psychologically, hygienically, and socially. This study has revealed that most women have knowledge about cosmetic gynecology; women's aesthetic gynecology reasons are obtaining an aesthetic appearance, sexual problems, and physical ailments. This study has also determined that the participant women think that vulva-vaginal deformations have negative effects on women and men, and they think that the future of cosmetic gynecology is bright. With the increasing demand for cosmetic gynecology practices in parallel with the changing aesthetic perception of the society, it is very important for women to be informed correctly. For this reason, it is recommended that the subject of cosmetic gynecology is included in the in-service training plans of midwives and nurses, who are health consultants, and in the scope of gynecology courses in the training processes.

Ethics Committee Statement

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Conflict of Interests

The authors report no actual or potential conflicts of interest.

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