

# Knowledge about sexually transmitted infections among a New Zealand university population

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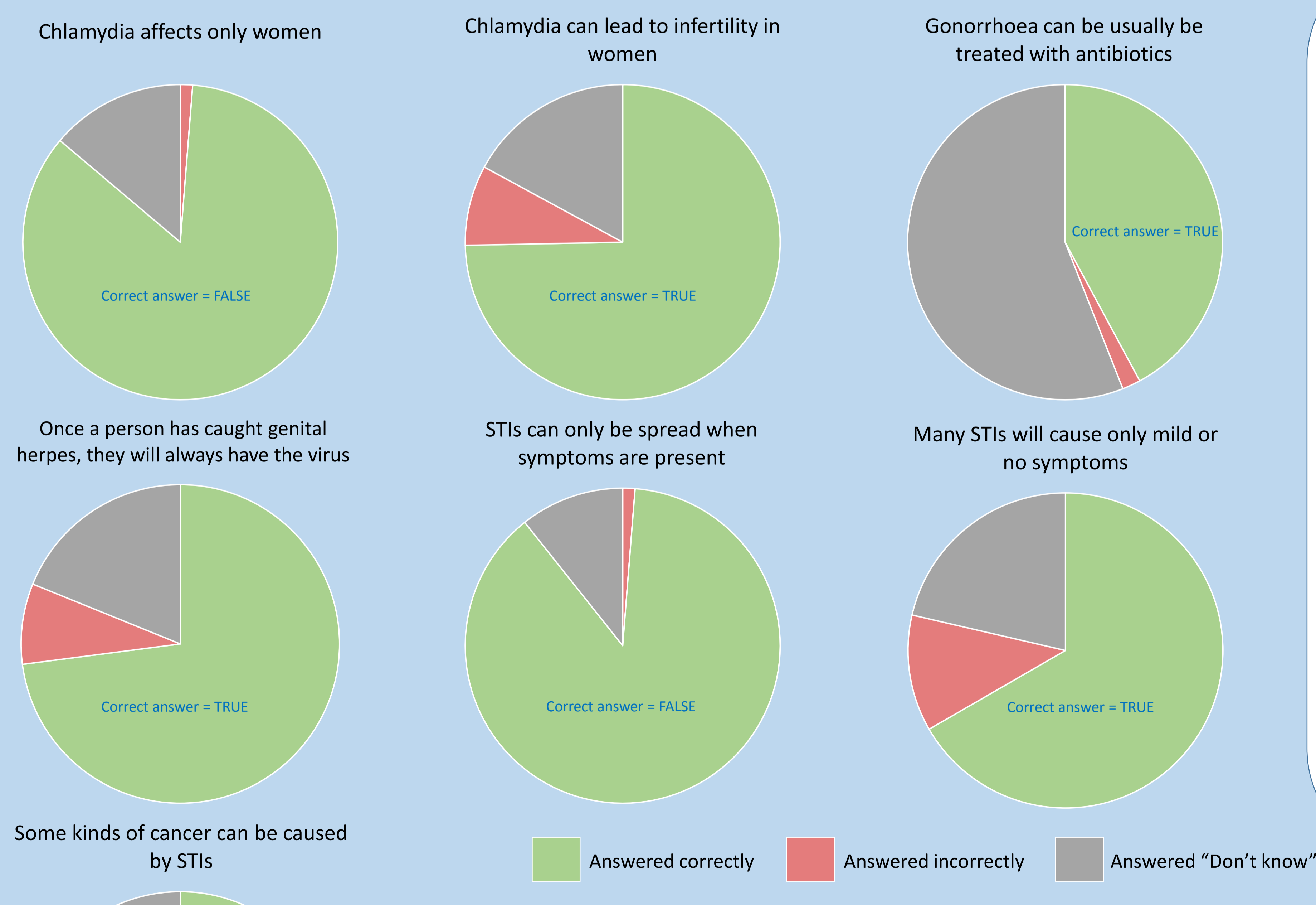
## BACKGROUND

- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have serious health implications, including pelvic inflammatory disease, adverse pregnancy outcomes, infertility, rheumatological complications, cancer, organ damage and death.
- STI rates are known to be high in New Zealand, for example the incidence rate of Chlamydia is almost double that of Australia and the United Kingdom.
- If public awareness about STIs is low, including knowledge about transmission, risk factors, symptoms and treatment, this could be a contributing factor to the high rates observed.
- To date, there has been very little assessment of STI knowledge in New Zealand.

## METHODS

- This analysis is part of a larger study assessing health-seeking behaviour for STI among students.
- A questionnaire-based survey was used to obtain basic demographic information and STI knowledge information from students attending the Victoria University of Wellington Student Health Service.
- Students could self-select to take part by picking up a copy of the questionnaire in the waiting room.
- Seven STI knowledge questions were used, each comprising a statement for which the respondent was asked to indicate 'True', 'False' or 'I don't know'.
- Correct answers were contrasted with incorrect and 'I don't know' answers to give a general overview of STI knowledge in this population.

Figure 1. Pie charts depicting proportion of correct and incorrect answers from 159 respondents for the seven knowledge questions



## RESULTS

- Analysis of the first 159 questionnaires returned showed variable knowledge of STI transmission, treatment and possible consequences (see figure 1).
- Students had a good knowledge of transmission, with 88% knowing that STIs can be spread even when symptoms are not present.
- Knowledge about treatment and potential sequelae was poor, with 58% of respondents indicating they did not know whether gonorrhoea could usually be treated with antibiotics, and 44% indicating that they were not aware that some kinds of cancer could be caused by STIs.

## CONCLUSION

- This analysis indicates that some areas of STI knowledge could be improved in this population. This is important as knowledge can be addressed through public health interventions.