

Dietitians’ Perspectives on the Nutritional Management of Infantile Colic and Constipation

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1. Introduction

- Colic and constipation occur in ~50% of infants, with prevalence between 3-40% for colic and 3-27% for constipation⁽¹⁻³⁾.
- Aetiology is multifactorial with nutritional and non-nutritional therapies existing⁽⁴⁻⁶⁾.
- 'Comfort' formulas (specifically targeted for the dietary management of colic and constipation) are classified as Foods for Special Medical Purposes (FSMPs) under Regulation (EU) 609/2013 and Delegated Regulation (EU) 2016/128 and should be used under medical supervision in accordance with the legislation⁽⁷⁻⁸⁾.
- Despite this, ‘Comfort’ formulas are readily available in retail outlets ⁽⁷⁻⁸⁾.

Aim: To investigate the knowledge, attitudes, practices, and beliefs of dietitians in Ireland regarding the dietary management of colic and constipation, its diagnostic criteria, and ‘Comfort’ formula use.

2. Methods

- Ethical approval:** UCD Undergraduate & Taught Masters Research Ethics Committee (UTMREC-25-33-BELLO-OMAHONY-BROWNE).
- A Rapid review was conducted to inform on the literature in this area followed by a cross-sectional survey of Irish Dietitians (Figure 1)
- Inclusion criteria included consenting qualified dietitians in Ireland

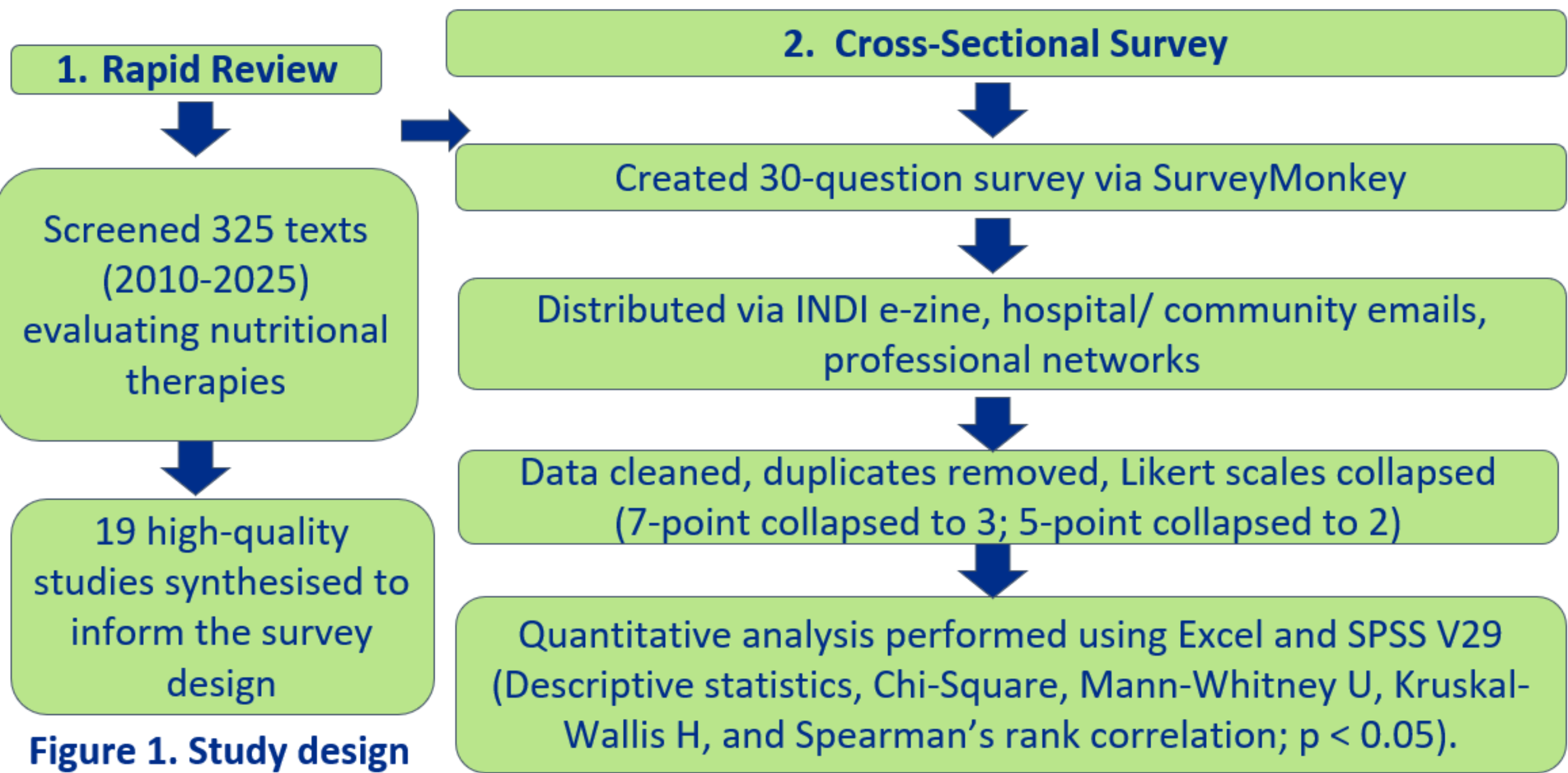


Figure 1. Study design

3. Results

Participant characteristics

- The survey had n= 56 respondents once n=4 duplicates were removed. Not all respondents completed the survey (Table 1)
- The respondents were experienced with ~50% having <10 years experience (Table 1)
- Over half reported holding a specialisation, with a quarter being paediatric specialists (Table 1)
- The majority indicated that colic and/or constipation comprises less than a quarter of their caseload (Table 1)
- The most common workplaces reported were inpatient and community settings (Table 1)

Table 1. Characteristics of the survey participants

Characteristic	Response	n =	Response percentage (%)
Dietitians	CORU-Registered	56	100
Work setting	Inpatient	22	40.0
	Community	16	29.1
	Outpatient	4	7.3
	Academic	4	7.3
	Private	3	5.5
	Inpatient/outpatient 50/50	2	3.6
	Industry	2	3.6
	Public health	1	1.8
	Self-employed/academia 50/50	1	1.8
Years of experience	10+	27	48.2
	5-10	10	17.9
	2-5	11	19.6
	1-2	8	14.3
Specialisation	Non-specialised	26	46.4
	Specialised	30	53.6
	Paediatrics	15	26.8
	Other	15	26.8

Knowledge

- Paediatric specialists were significantly more likely to report feeling well informed about FSMPs on the Irish market for infants than those who are not (p= 0.049)
- When asked 'In general, do you feel well informed about FSMPs for infants on the Irish market?', the majority responded ‘Yes’(Figure 2)
- When asked about information sources on FSMPs; Professional bodies (60.4%, n=32/53), Conferences (52.8%, n=28/53) and the HSE (47.2%, n=25/53) featured most predominantly
- 73.4% (n=41/56) reported not conducting their own secondary or independent research on infant FSMPs

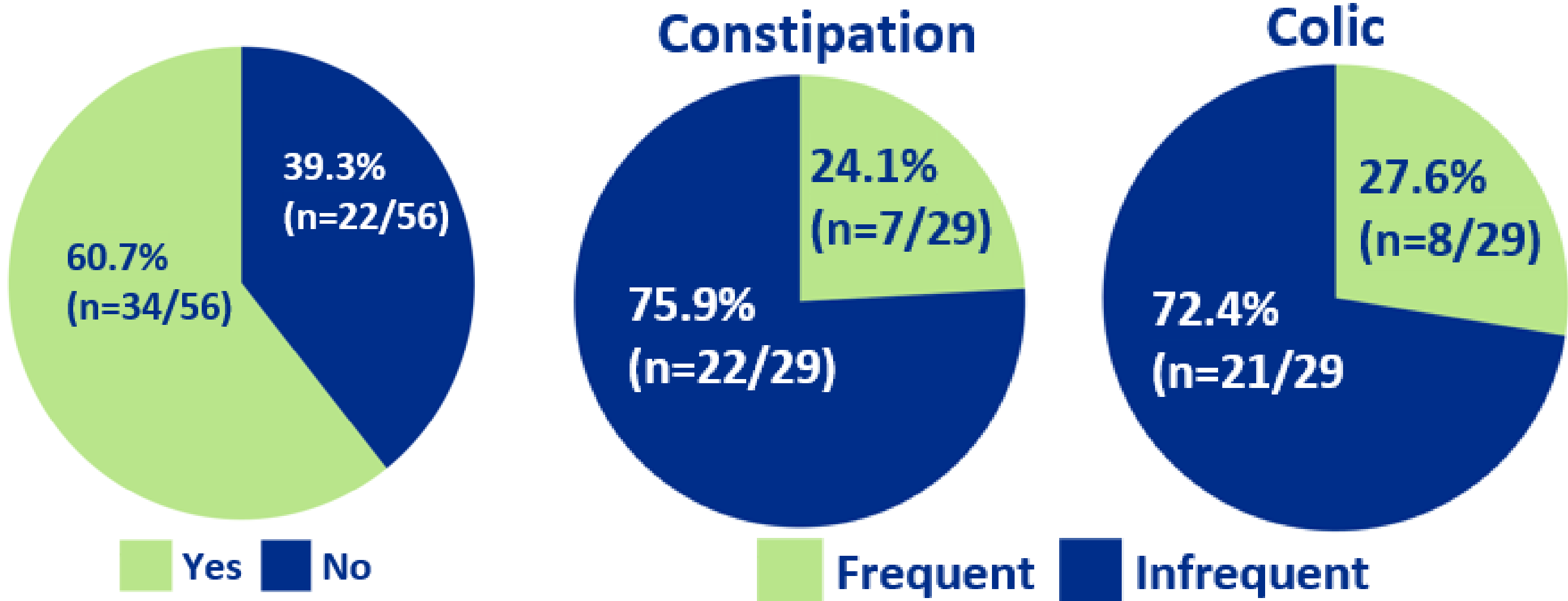


Figure 2. FSMP knowledge

Figure 3. Attitudes and practices of Irish dietitians

Attitudes & Practices

- Approximately two thirds of respondents cited infrequent recommendation of ‘Comfort’ formulas for dietary management colic and constipation (Figure 3)
- Respondents reported frequently encountering infants being given FSMPs without prior professional guidance for colic (61.2%, 22/36) and constipation (55.5%, 20/36)
- When asked about non-nutritional management approaches 96.4% favoured parental reassurance and/ or education for colic (n=27/28).
- While, 75% favoured laxatives and/or fibre for constipation (n=21/28)

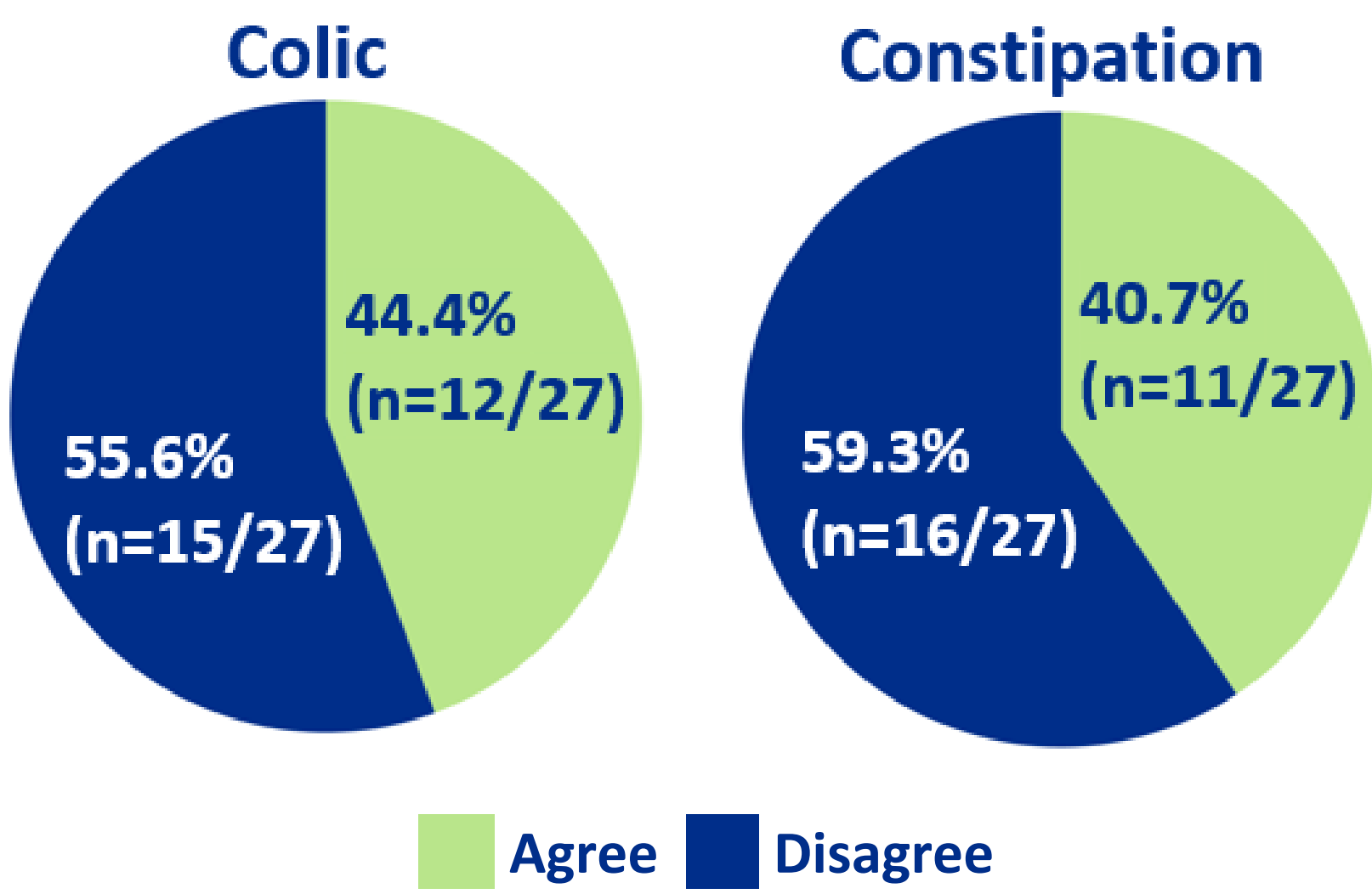


Figure 4. Comfort formula effectiveness

Beliefs

- The majority disagreed that ‘Comfort’ formula are effective in managing colic or constipation (Figure 4)

Awareness of regulatory requirements of FSMPs

- The majority (n=22) were aware that all FSMPs on the Irish market must be notified to the FSAI

4. Conclusions

Conclusion:

- This study provides insight into Irish dietitians’ knowledge, attitudes, practices, and beliefs regarding the use of FSMPs for infants for the dietary management of colic and constipation
- Dietitians favour non-nutritional management over recommendation of ‘Comfort’ formulas revealing a divide between the regulatory requirements for the use of FSMPs to be under medical supervision and carer initiation of FSMP for infants

Limitations:

- Small sample size (n=26-56) relative to Irish dietitian population (n=1,425)
- Potential self-selection bias from participants with interest in paediatric nutrition.
- Low clinical exposure, with over half of respondents reporting these conditions make up only 0-10% of their caseload
- Quantitative survey design lacked open-ended questions to capture deeper qualitative reasoning behind clinical choices

Recommendations:

- Enhanced guidance, parental education, and further research is warranted to understand FSMP usage and to support evidence-based management