

University of Wales Trinity St Davids

Masters of Arts: Outdoor Education

Research Methods in Health, Outdoor Education and Physical Literacy: BMOE7014

Assessment 2: Academic Poster

How is menstruation experienced and perceived by individuals who access the outdoors?

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AI Acknowledgement statement:
I acknowledge the use of the AI tools listed below. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

AI Tool (with url)	Date used	Why did you use this tool	Example prompt(s)
https://chatgtp.com/	04/05/2026	To create a plan and begin research	Can you help me create a plan for this assessment
	04/05/2026 06/05/2026 07/05/2026	To help summarise wording from project proposal	How would you summarise this?...

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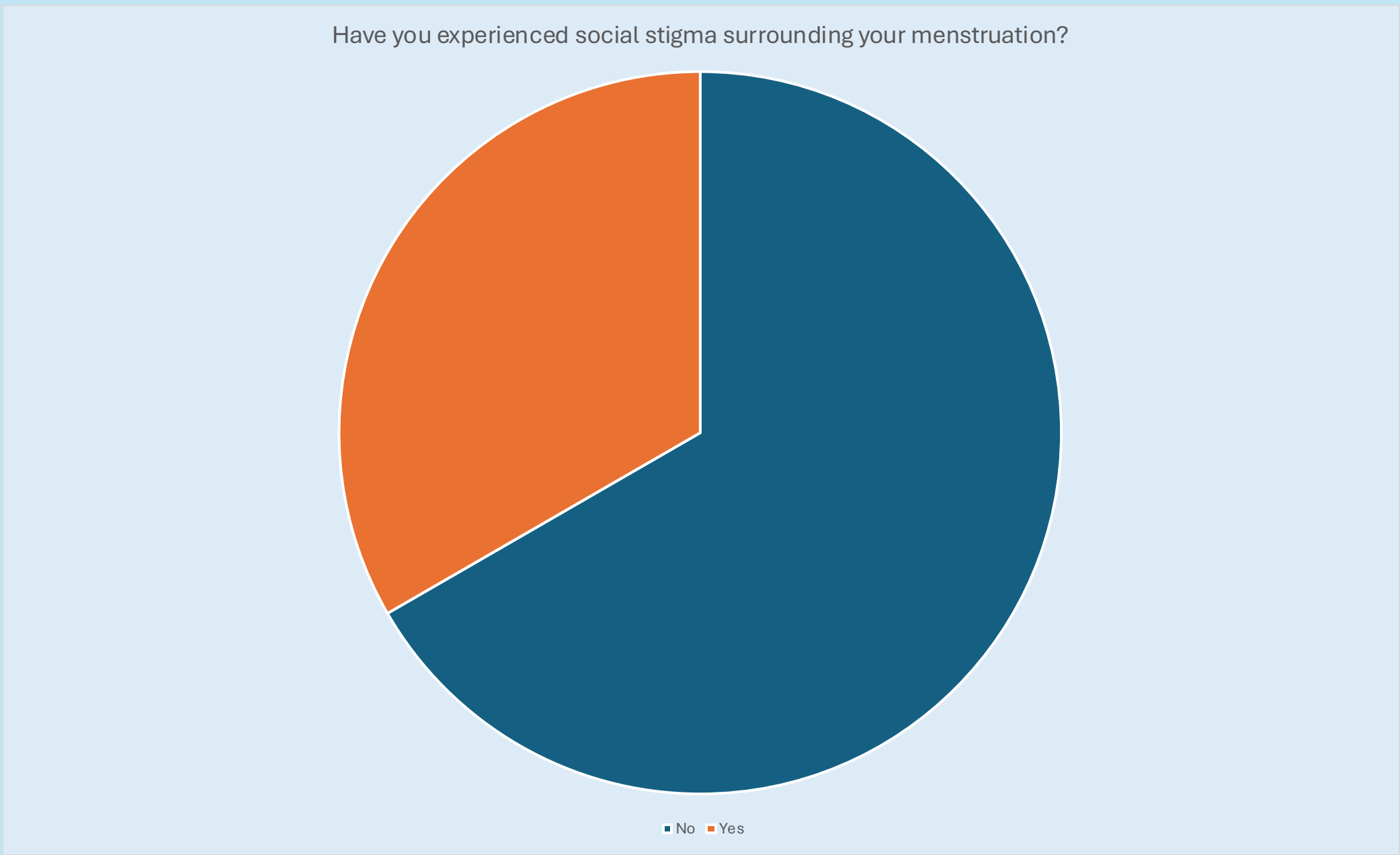
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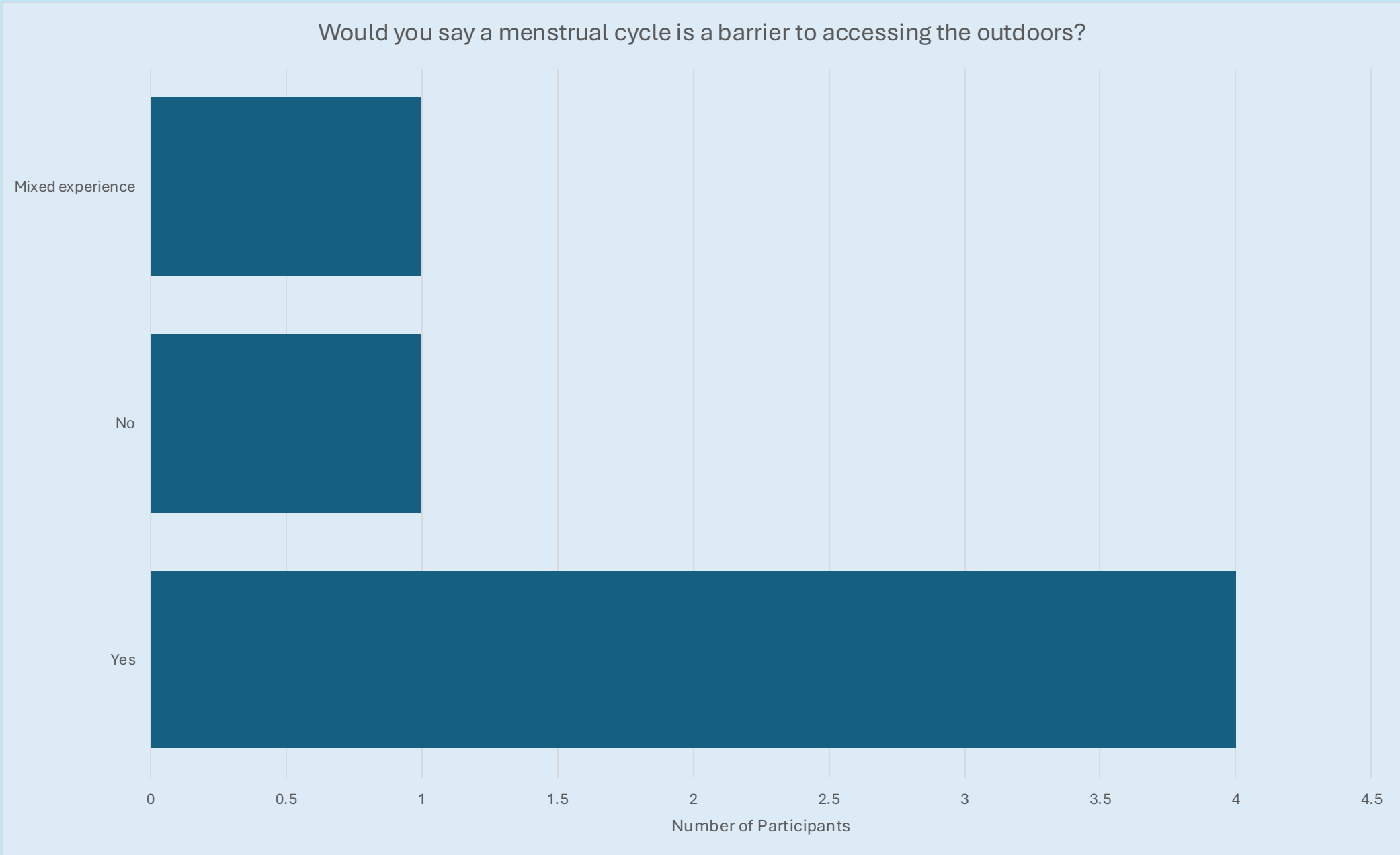
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Alignment of Literature and Research Design

This study draws on literature from outdoor studies, feminist research, and qualitative methodology to justify its research focus and design. While outdoor participation is widely associated with wellbeing (Thompson Coon et al., 2011; White et al., 2019), embodied experiences remain underexplored (Humberstone, Prince and Henderson, 2016). Menstruation, in particular, is marginal within outdoor research despite its potential to shape participation (Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013; Wheaton, 2013; Kissling, 2006). Some literature conceptualises menstruation as socially constructed and stigmatised, often associated with concealment and gendered norms (Kissling, 2006; Bobel, 2010; Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler, 2013). Such dynamics may be intensified in outdoor contexts that prioritise resilience and physical capability (Humberstone, Prince and Henderson, 2016). Emerging research highlights practical and social challenges, including hygiene management, limited facilities, and lack of knowledge or support (Prince and Annison, 2022; 2023; Campano et al., 2024; Lynch, 2023), indicating a clear gap in understanding lived experiences. A qualitative approach is therefore appropriate for exploring subjective meanings (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015), with open-ended questionnaires supporting anonymity (Longhurst, 2003). Thematic analysis enables identification of patterns across experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2013). This design aligns with literature and addresses a recognised gap.

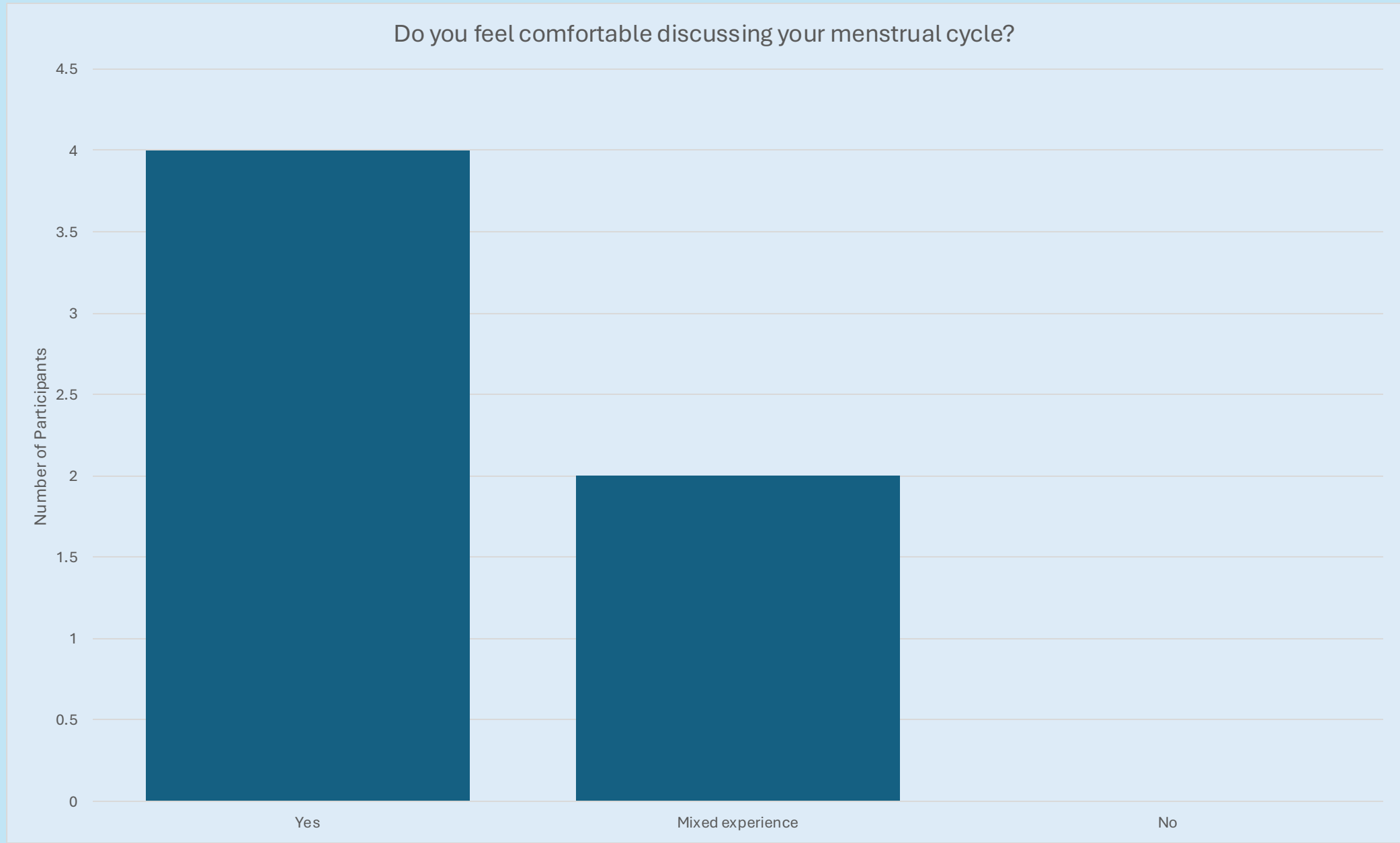


Method

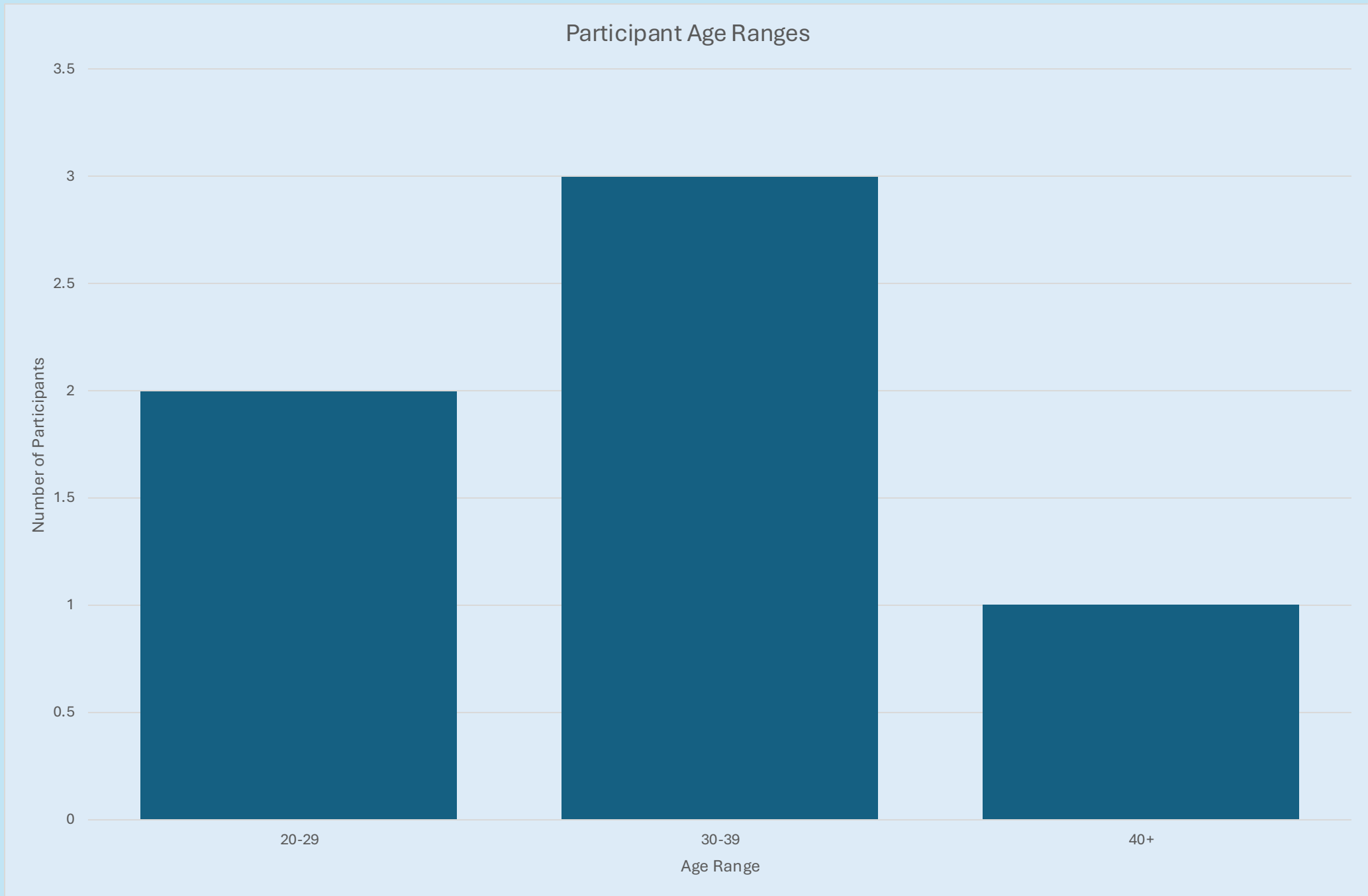
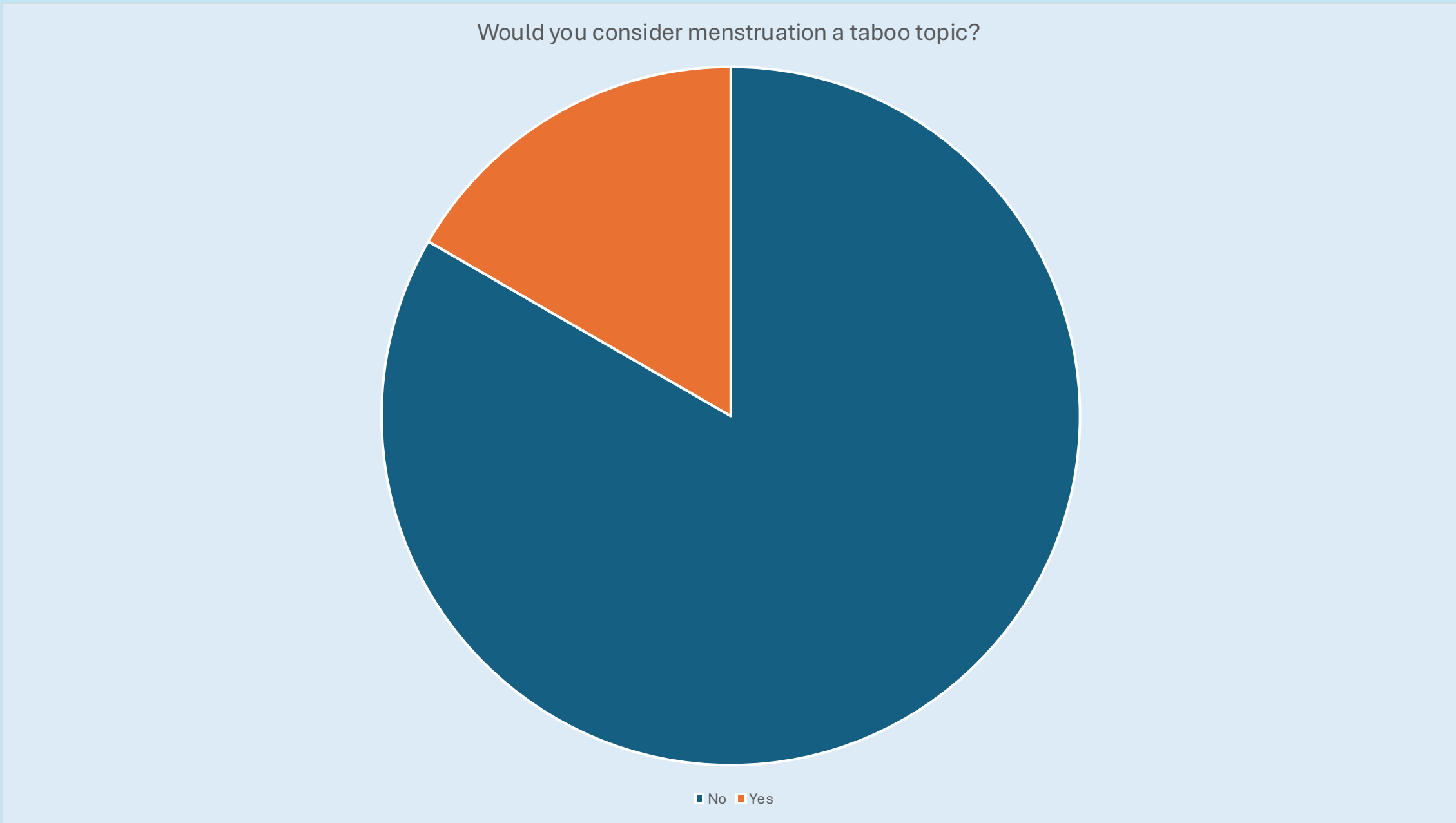
This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how menstruation influences participation in outdoor activities. Data was collected via an anonymous online survey comprising open-ended questions, allowing participants to describe their personal experiences in their own words. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who have lived experiences of the research question. A total of six participants (aged 25–47) contributed responses. Participants represented a range of gender identities (predominantly female, with one agender participant) and varying levels of involvement in outdoor activities, including professional instructors and recreational participants. The survey included questions relating to:

- The impact of menstruation on outdoor participation
- Management strategies in outdoor environments
- Experiences of stigma or social attitudes
- Access to sanitation and disposal facilities
- Suggestions for improving inclusivity

Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation. No identifying information was collected, however ethical approval from the researchers university was obtained and the ethical guidances followed.

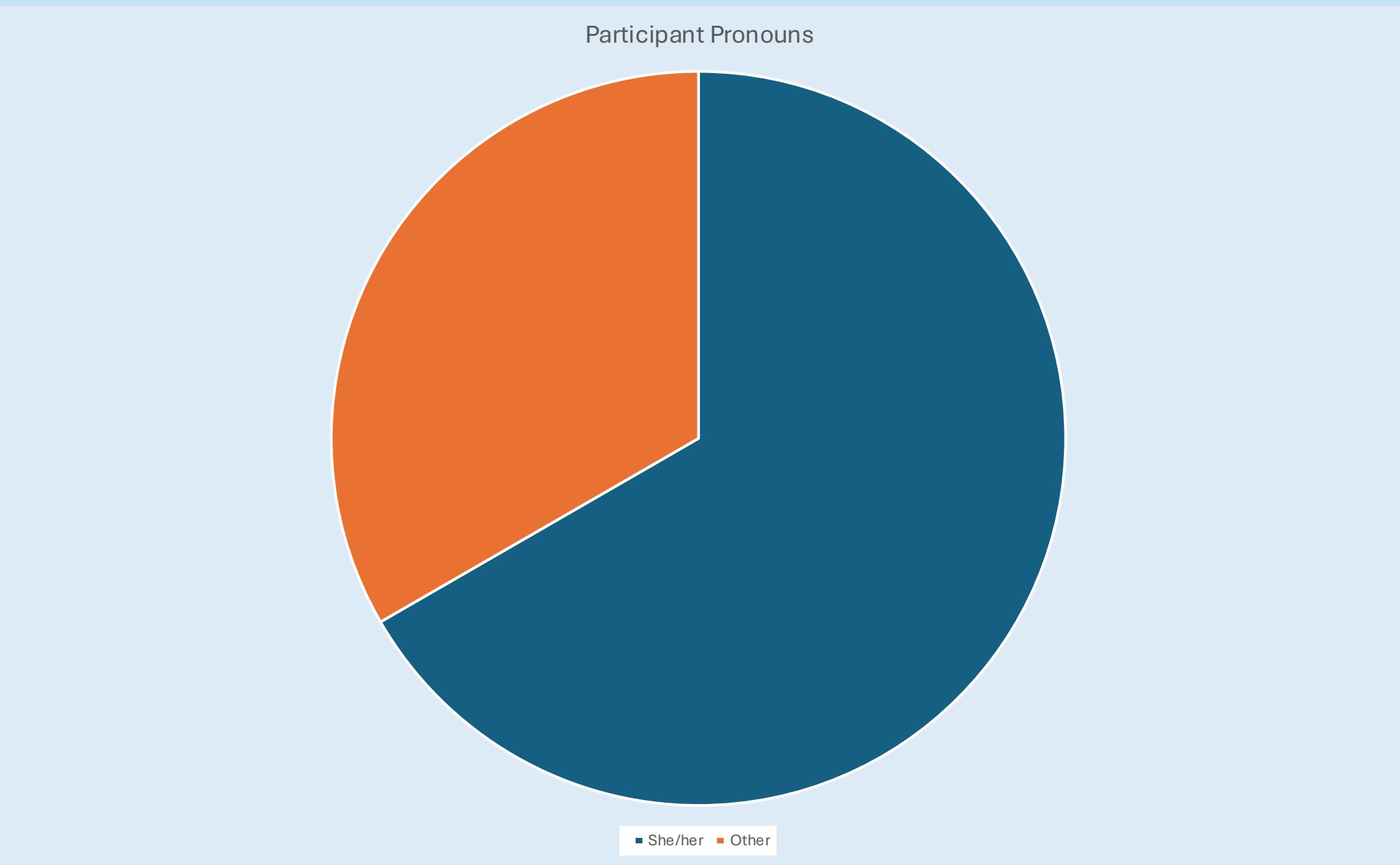


How is menstruation experienced and perceived by individuals who access the outdoors? Morgan Evans	
Results Thematic analysis of the responses led to several themes being exposed between the embodied experiences of menstruating people.	
Theme 1: Menstruation as a Conditional Barrier Across participants, menstruation rarely completely prevents participation, but it consistently modifies, restricts, or complicates engagement. “plan my activities around it” “restrict how far I travel with walking.” “Can limit the time I spend on water and can deter me from climbing in a harness.” “can be a minor or major barrier depending on activity”	Theme 2: Infrastructure Deficit as a Primary Barrier A dominant and concrete issue: lack of appropriate sanitation facilities. Key problems: - No sinks for menstrual cups - Limited or absent toilets - Lack of disposal options Participants adapt by: - Using less-preferred products - Not doing a multi - Carrying waste (e.g., “dog poo bags”) - Planning routes around toilets
Theme 3: Emotional and Cognitive Load Participants describe significant mental effort: - Planning logistics - Anxiety about leaks - Fear of being noticed - Managing symptoms Quotes reflect: “worry that others will be aware” “self conscious if I have leaked” “stressful... facilities are rare”	Theme 4: Embodied Experience Beyond “Cramps” Participants highlight a wide range of symptoms: - Heavy bleeding - Dizziness - Brain fog - Nausea - Mood changes
Theme 5: Silence, Taboo, and Contextual Openness Menstruation was often not openly discussed, particularly in male-dominated environments. However, more open conversations occurred in female or queer spaces. This suggests that stigma is context-dependent rather than universal. “not something that we talked about” “men find the conversation uncomfortable” “not taboo... but not discussed” “more open in recent years”	Theme 6: Self-Management and Adaptation Strategies Participants demonstrate high levels of self-reliance and improvisation, indicating responsibility is individualised, not supported structurally - Layering products (tampon + pad) - Switching products depending on context - Carrying disposal systems (dry bags, ziplocks) - Avoiding trips during menstruation
Theme 7: Early Experiences and Lasting Impact Multiple responses highlight adolescence: - Lack of guidance - Being misunderstood by leaders - Having to disclose menstruation to be taken seriously	Theme 8: Desire for Change – Education Over Infrastructure Alone Interestingly, participants don’t just ask for toilets, they emphasised: - Education for all genders - Awareness in leadership roles - Normalisation of discussion



Data Analysis

Initial analysis was conducted using NVivo to organise and code the qualitative data; however, it proved limited in capturing the nuance and contextual depth of participants’ responses. As a result, a manual thematic analysis was undertaken, guided by the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher engaged in repeated reading of the data to ensure familiarisation, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes across participants’ responses. Analysis considered both explicit content and underlying sentiment, including positive, negative, and mixed experiences. This more interpretive approach enabled a richer understanding of the data, highlighting themes that were not readily identifiable through automated analysis alone.



Conclusion

This study demonstrates that menstruation remains a significant yet often overlooked factor influencing participation in outdoor activities. While menstruation was not typically described as an absolute barrier to participation, findings suggest that it creates multiple and interconnected challenges, including physical symptoms, limited access to appropriate infrastructure, and social discomfort arising from stigma and limited understanding. Importantly, the findings indicate that the central issue is not menstruation itself, but the interaction between menstruating bodies and environments that are not designed to accommodate them. Outdoor spaces and practices continue to reflect an implicit assumption of a non-menstruating “default” participant, thereby placing additional physical, emotional, and logistical demands on those who menstruate. These findings highlight the need for both structural and cultural change. Practical improvements, such as increased access to sanitation facilities and menstrual waste disposal, are essential to improving comfort and accessibility in outdoor environments. At the same time, greater education, open discussion, and the normalisation of menstruation within outdoor and professional settings are necessary to reduce stigma and promote inclusivity. Future research should explore larger and more diverse participant groups and further examine the role of organisational policies, outdoor leadership practices, and infrastructure design in shaping menstrual experiences outdoors. By recognising menstruation as a legitimate consideration within outdoor participation and accessibility, researchers and practitioners can contribute to creating more inclusive outdoor environments for all participants.

