

Accessing and using information for choosing over-the-counter (OTC) medicines by consumers

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Background

The large number of medicines available on the shelves of pharmacies and the aggressive marketing strategies used by pharmaceutical companies make it difficult to choose over-the-counter (OTC) drugs. This is why the provision and dissemination of reliable, objective information is needed to support informed decision-making and to improve public health.

Methods

We conducted a survey of 238 people (166 women and 72 men) as face-to-face interviews and an online survey. The questionnaire included 10 questions (three open and seven closed). The knowledge of consumers about evidence-based medicine and Cochrane was evaluated in a semi-quantitative way by comparing their responses with the classic definition of David Sackett's evidence-based medicine and the Cochrane definition from russia.cochrain.org. The majority of respondents belonged to the middle and older age groups: 19 to 44 years (82%) and 45 to 59 years (10%). Thirty-five per cent of those surveyed were health workers.

Results

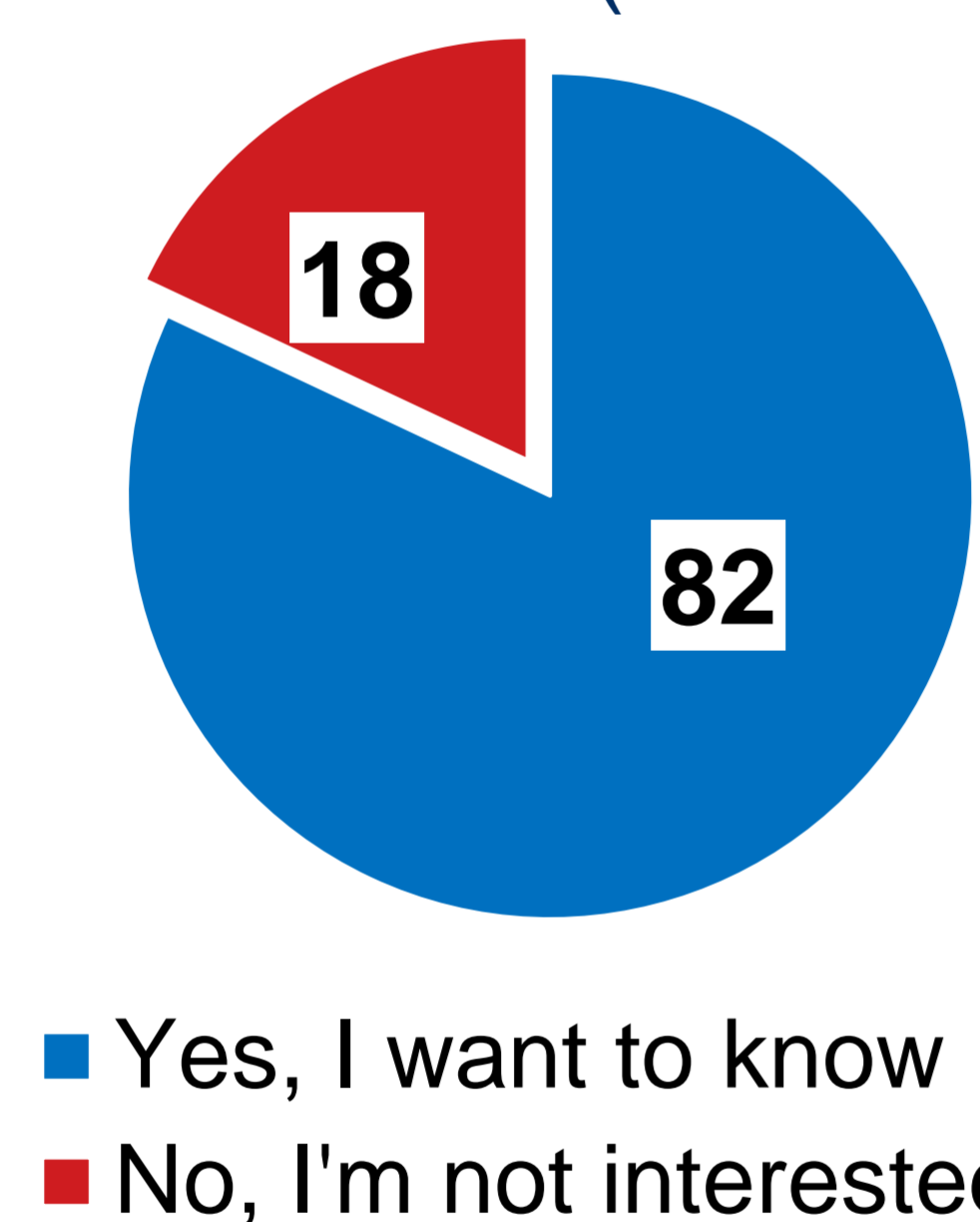
For 58% of respondents the choice of OTC medicines at pharmacies caused difficulties. The main difficulties related to the choice of medicines were: lack of knowledge about the efficacy (85%) and safety (53%) of medicines. The sources of information, which consumers used to select medicines were the doctor's prescription (66%), advice from a pharmacist (30%), Internet (29%), "advice of friends and acquaintances" (16%), "I am a doctor myself" (10%), "advertisements" (7%).

Objectives

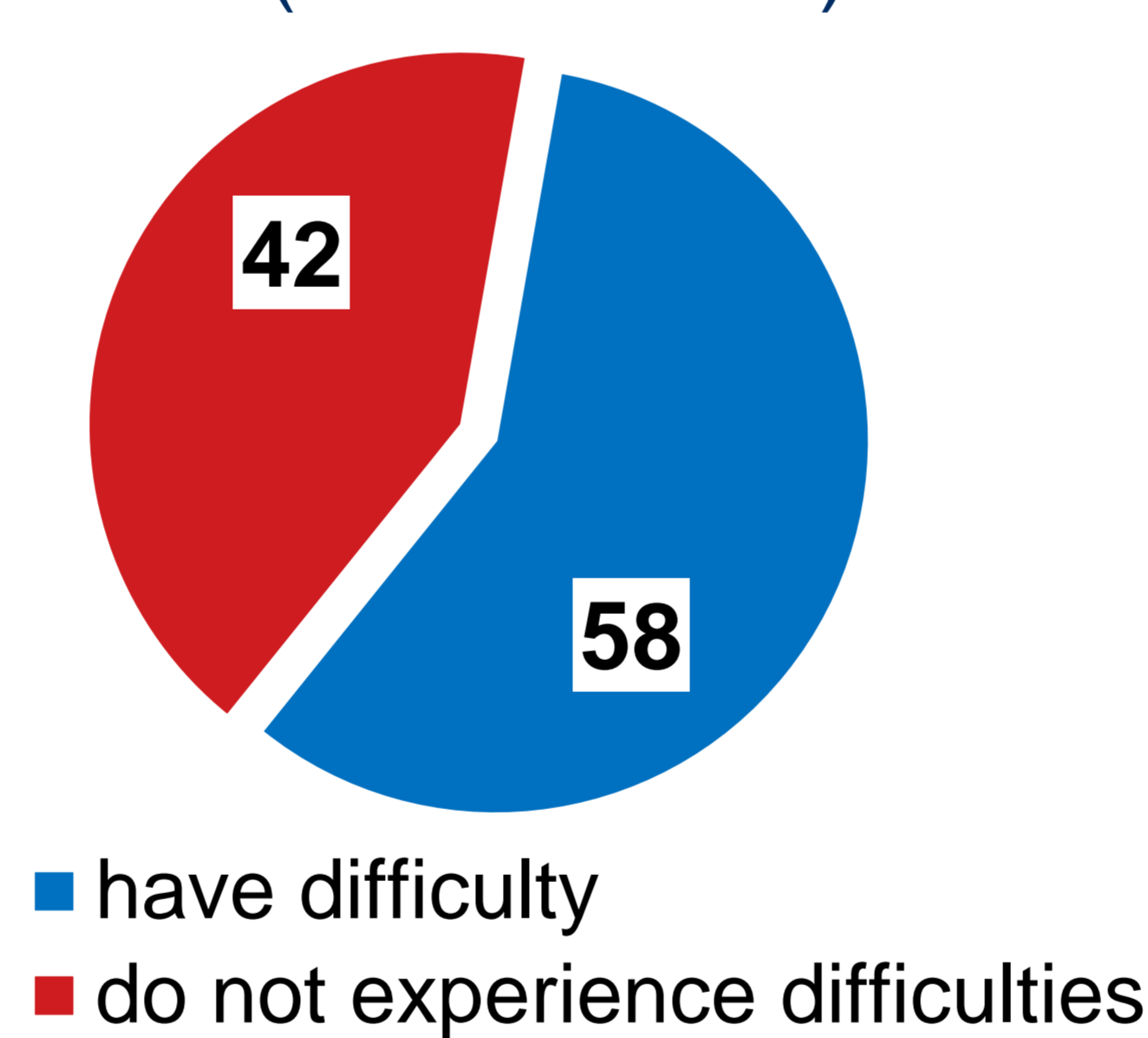
The objective of this pilot study was to examine consumers' knowledge and their attitudes to the problem of obtaining and using information when choosing OTC medications, to provide a rationale for interventions aimed at improving the use of medicines.

The need for additional information about medicines was noted by 82% of respondents. The Internet (websites, social networks, online seminars et al., 58%), print media (11%) were indicated as being the most convenient sources of information.

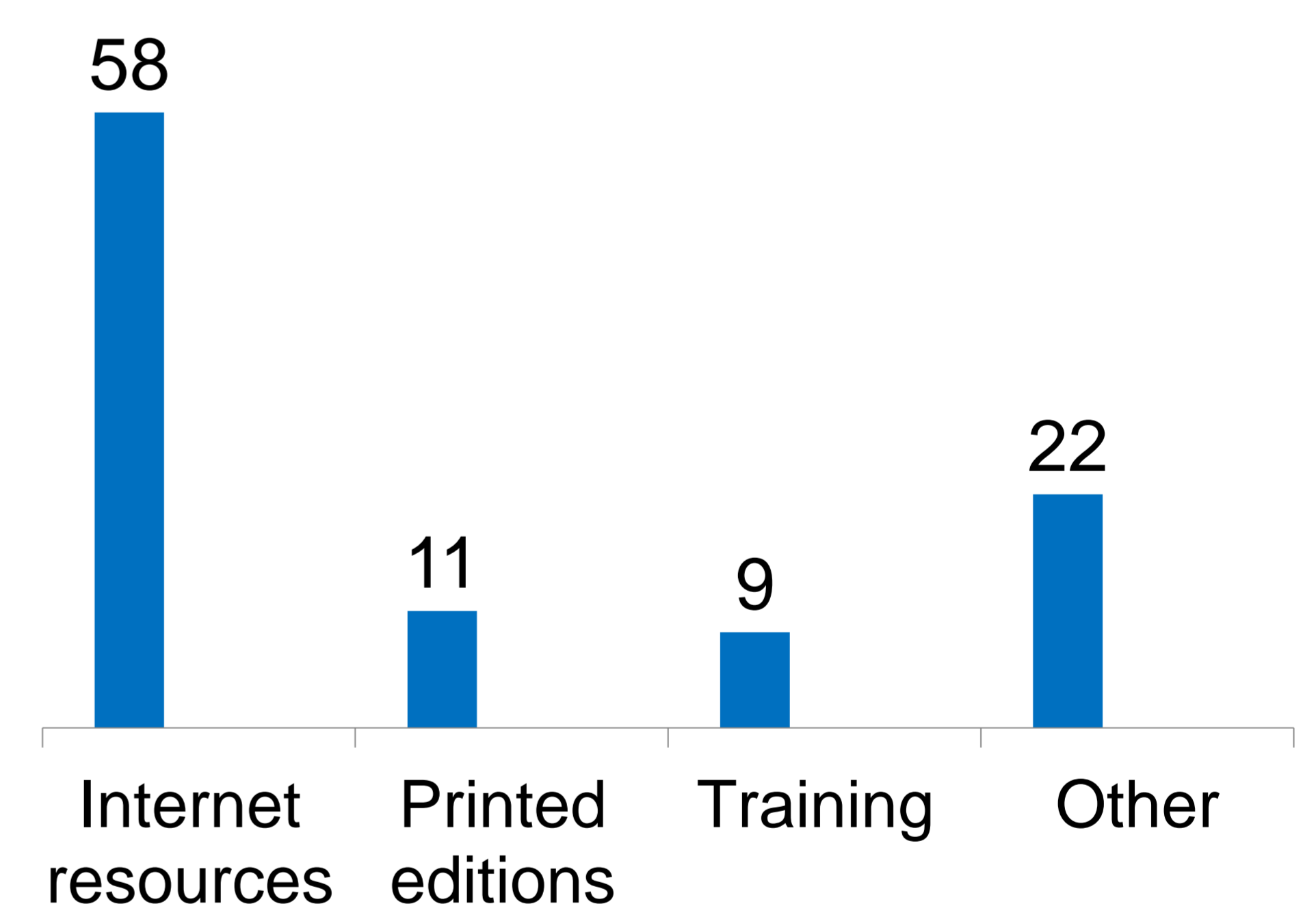
The interest of consumers in obtaining independent information about medicines (% of n = 238)



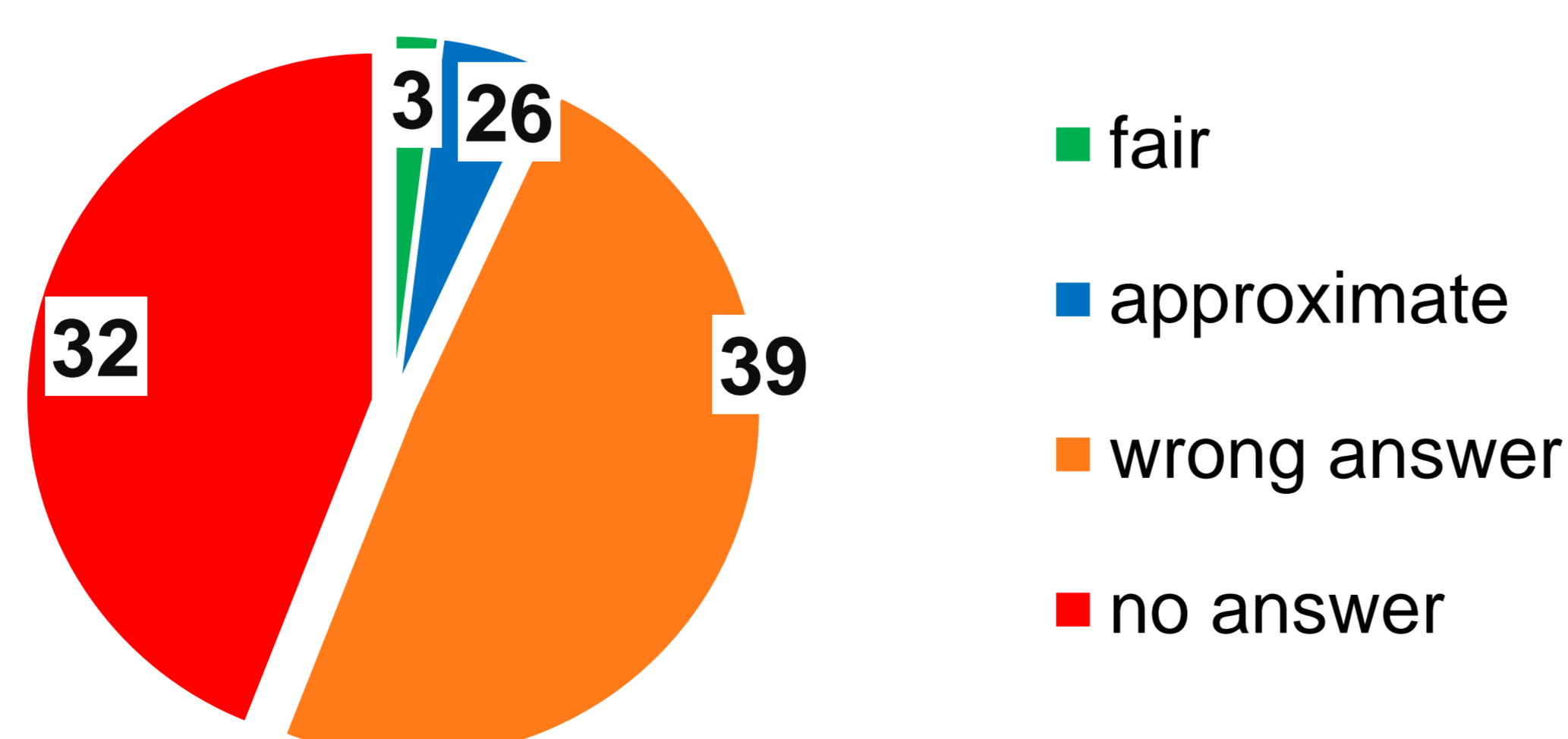
Experiencing difficulties when choosing over-the-counter drugs in the pharmacy (% of n = 238)



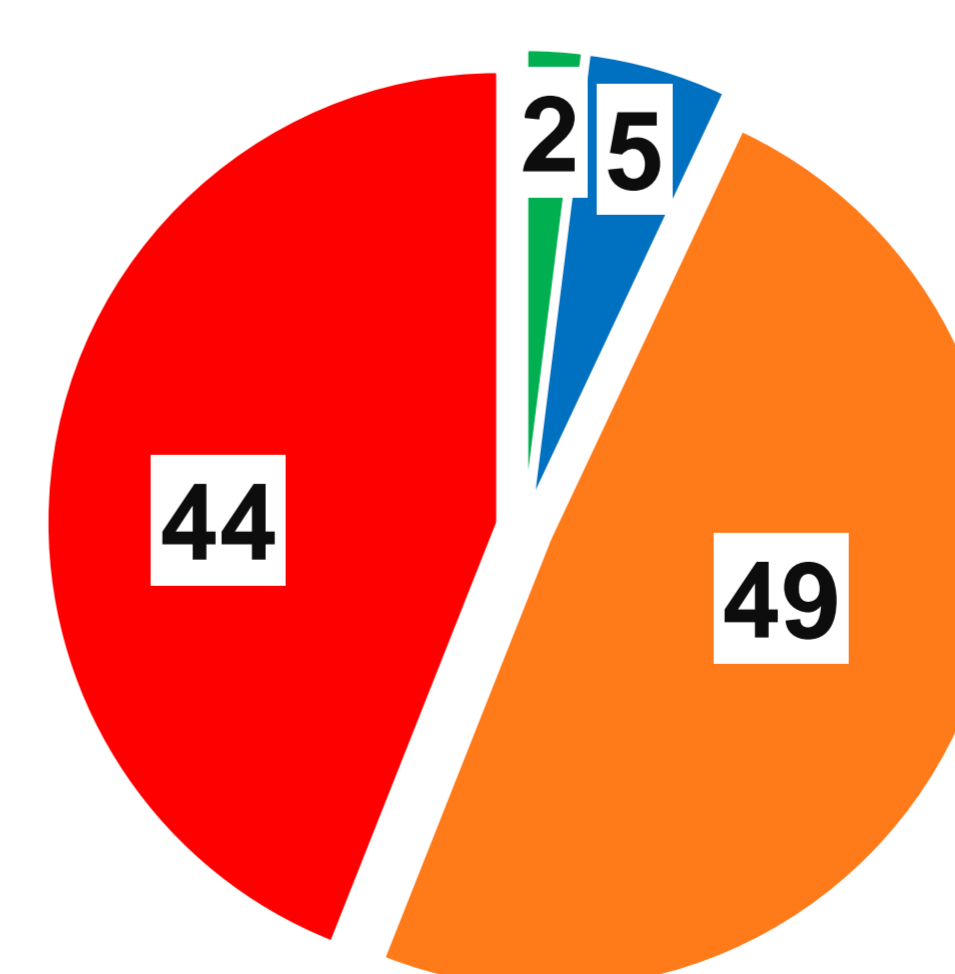
Sources of information about medicines (% of n = 192)



Consumers knowledge about evidence-based medicine (% of n = 238)



Consumers knowledge about Cochrane (% of n = 238)



Conclusion:

The majority of respondents had difficulties with the choice of OTC medicines. Consumers are interested in accessing information about the rational choice of OTC drugs. The Internet is the most convenient source of information about medicines. We found a low level of consumer knowledge about Cochrane, which cries for the need of interventions to increase awareness of Cochrane evidence for informed decisions on medicine choice.