

A Comparison of Garbage Collected in Two Limited Income Communities

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ABSTRACT

Garbology is the study of modern refuse in order to gain knowledge and understanding of modern society through material objects through a medium of something that is generally hidden from view: garbage. It is our contention that debris left over by two generationally diverse, yet economically similar, communities may give us insight into how the limited incomes of these two groups are being spent. Our comparison of a collegiate community to a retirement community, we believe, will show that, given a similar level of income, the qualities of life are on opposite sides of the spectrum. By trudging through the refuses of both of these communities, we hope to show that the elderly have more of an emphasis on health care where as the college students may more apt to spending their finite monetary resources on less necessity driven purchases. The ultimate goal of this project would be to provide a comparison of the health related, or personal care products, in the differing communities; this will ultimately give insight into how to help improve the quality of life within the senior citizen community by potentially giving the option for future research into prospective raises in social security or by lowering the costs of health related necessities for seniors. We contend that both of the aforementioned goals, determining similarities as well as consumer choice, will both lend themselves well to the end goal.

OBJECTIVES

By comparing the garbage from two limited income communities, university student dorms and a retirement community, we hoped to determine which community used the highest number of health related personal care products. The purpose of this examination was to determine if the retirement community members would spend more on those products, as was our assertion. If they did, this might indicate that they were spending a higher proportion of their income on health needs. We chose these two communities because they are similar in size, provided easy access to the study materials (garbage), and because the difference in age was marked, being over 62 years of age at the retirement community¹, and an average of 18-24 years of age at the university apartments².

Health Related Products

By Location

Green Hills

- (2) Vitamin Bottles
- (7) Prescription Bottles
- (7) Adult Diapers
- (6) Incontinence Pads
- (1) Aspirin Bottle
- (1) Eye Drops Bottle
- (2) Advil Bottles
- Bandage Changing Supplies

Womack Lane

- (2) Flu Medicine Dose Packets
- (1) Benadryl Dose Packet
- (5) Vitamin Bottles
- (1) Tylenol Bottle
- (4) Feminine Hygiene Products
- (2) Condoms

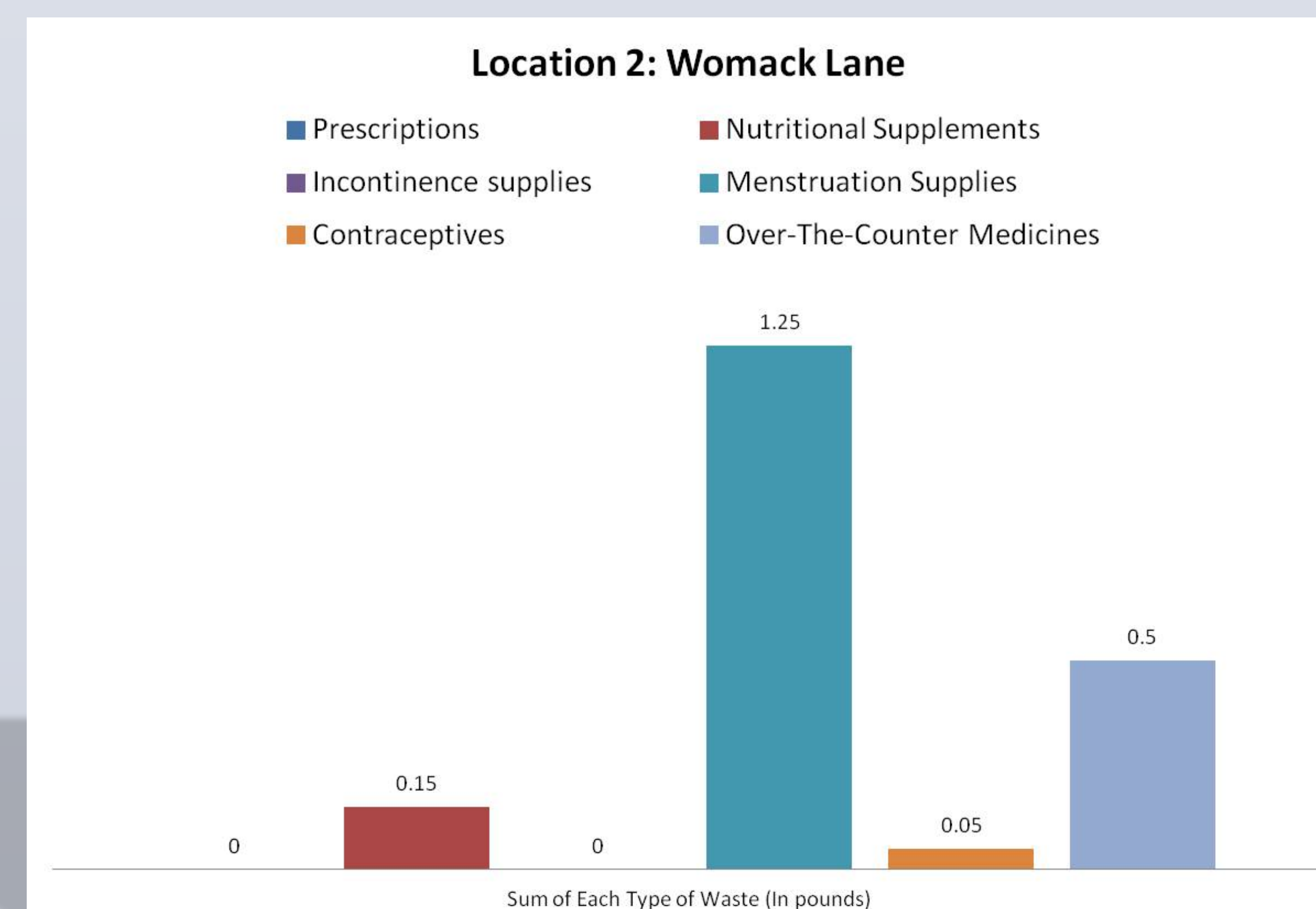
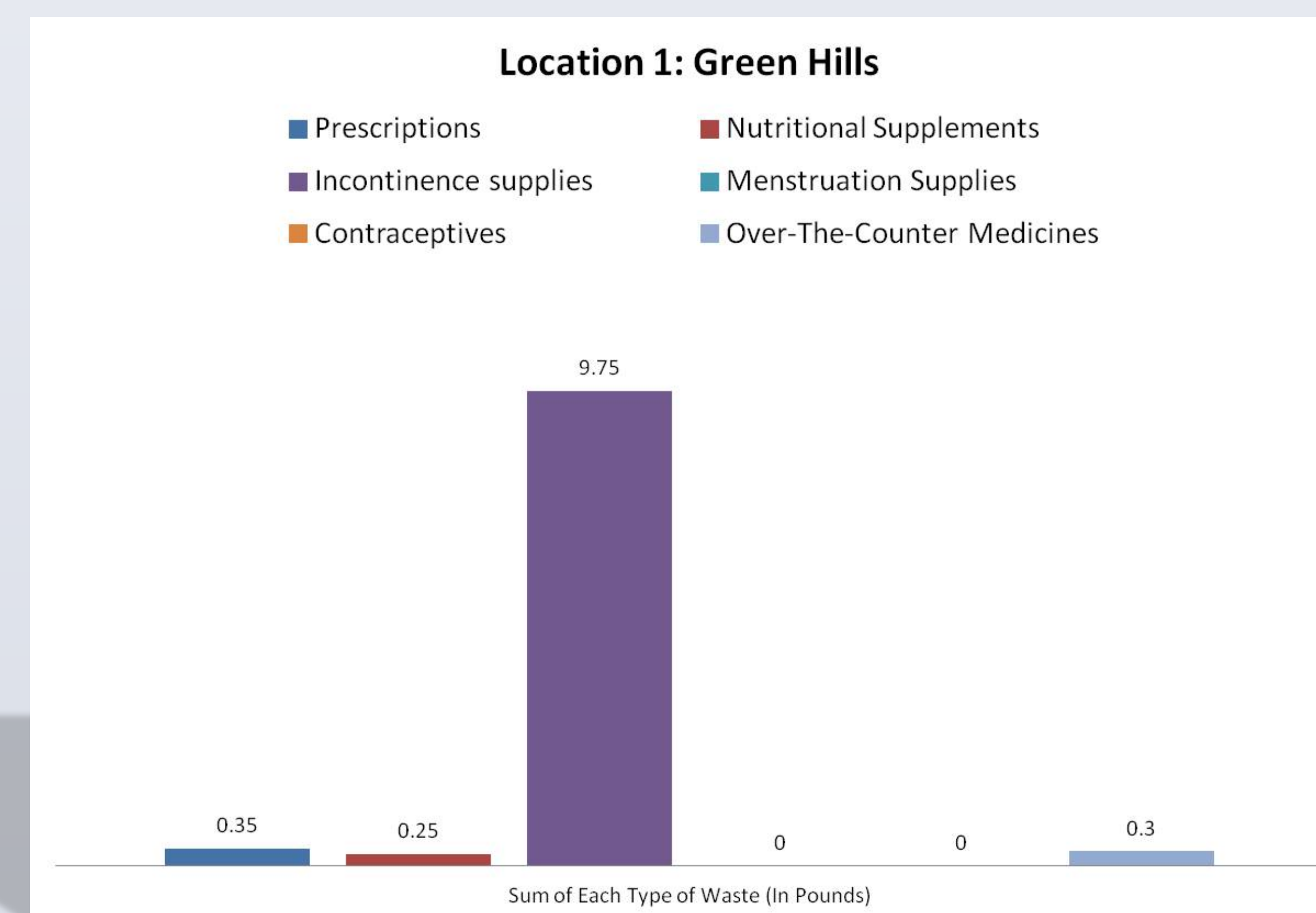
MATERIALS AND METHODS

MATERIALS LIST

~ 66 lbs of garbage from each study site
Latex examination gloves
Leather gloves
10 Plastic buckets (5 gal size)
Generic bathroom scale
Tags, tape, markers
Cardstock log books
Laptop computer with Windows 7 and Microsoft Office installed

Garbage was collected at each site and transported to the study location. Preference was given at collection to bags that were sealed to avoid bias. The sites were processed at different times to avoid cross-contamination. The bags were labeled with tags stating the name of the site and each bag's unique identifier. Each bag was then weighed and the weight was written on the tag. One bag at a time, the garbage was sorted into categories, paying special attention to any health related personal care products. The researchers then entered the contents and weight of each category into a log. Those data were later entered into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis by the researchers.

RESULTS



CONCLUSIONS

From our analysis, these data seem to reflect that health related personal care items did make up a larger percentage of the weight of the garbage from the retirement community site. This suggests that a larger percentage of their limited income may be spent on health care. What we also found to be significant was that the type of product being used varied greatly by site. The university students were more likely to use menstruation supplies and contraceptives, while prescriptions and incontinence supplies made up the bulk of these products used by the retirees. Owing to the age difference, these data are in keeping with what one might expect to find. Further study of the use of health related personal care products by the elderly, informed by our data, would be beneficial and warranted.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS • CONTACTS

We thank our Faculty Advisor, Dr. Tanya Peres from the Middle Tennessee State University Department of Anthropology, for her assistance and guidance with this project.

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