

Psychosocial Implications of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) on Young Women

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ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken with the objective to study the psychosocial implications of PCOS in young women. It looked into the various symptoms associated with PCOS in young women which were namely irregular menstrual cycle, acne, hirsutism, weight gain, and cyst in ovaries and if any that came forward as a repercussion of this hormonal syndrome. This study also aimed at investigating the impact of lifestyle on PCOS. The poor dietary pattern, disturbed sleeping pattern, unhealthy lifestyle, screen time and overexposure to hazardous radiations which has an impact on ovulation become underlying factors that trigger the hormones which further lead to PCOS. The psychological symptoms of PCOS are associated with low self-esteem, social isolation, feeling of inadequacy and this may also trigger the mood swings. The study found out that management of PCOS is possible with a strict adherence to modified diet, exercise regime as it not only helped in management of PCOS but also helped in coping with the psychological symptoms that arise out of PCOS. This study aimed to present an in-depth analysis of the most recent information on the influence of lifestyle changes by taking a healthy diet, regular physical activity, proper sleeping pattern, self-motivation, positive and supportive environment, proper medication as advised by an expert. The study was qualitative in nature and the data obtained was explored under the various themes that emerged through the tools used in the concerned research. A total of 30 participants for google survey form, 15 participants for interview and 3 experts 5 (gynaecologist, endocrinologist and special expert) participated in this research study. A comprehensive thematic analysis of their responses was carried out to further delineate the psychosocial implications of PCOS. The findings suggested that the families showed concern around weight gain as the society body shames girls with more weight than average. This means that body image dissatisfaction is highly associated with low self-esteem of girls diagnosed with PCOS as it would interfere in their future marriage prospects. The poor lifestyle and unhealthy dietary pattern aggravated PCOS without doubt in all the respondents. The primary concern that the families of girls suffering from PCOS had was infertility. This concern further had psychosocial implications on young women as in our culture 'virginity' and 'fertility' are highly regarded in women, especially as they reach reproductive age. Families seem to be supportive in the management of PCOS as they were ready to invest on medicines, cosmetic treatments and expert consultations to help alleviate the psychosocial impact of PCOS along with the emotional support. The findings suggested that PCOS is both hormonal imbalance and lifestyle disorder, but the management of PCOS can be done by the healthy lifestyle modifications including healthy dietary pattern, physical activity, proper sleeping patterns and regular medication as advised by a doctor. It was seen that with consistent efforts from the sufferer, PCOS was a manageable disorder as well as the psychosocial implications too seemed to get better.

Keywords: Psychosocial Implications, Young women, Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

INTRODUCTION

Women of reproductive age frequently suffer from

polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), a disorder marked by abnormalities in sex hormones. Ovarian cysts and hyperandrogenism, or the overproduction of androgens,

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are common in women with PCOS. The fact that can result in infertility and other problems like irregular menstruation. About one out of every five Indian women has PCOS, per a recent study conducted by Apollo Diagnostics Centre. Common symptoms include hirsutism, weight gain, acne, irregular menstruation cycles, ovarian cysts, and androgen production. Numerous psychological symptoms are linked to this endocrine-based condition, which is becoming more prevalent. These symptoms include anxiety, mood swings, body image dissatisfaction, eating and sexual disorders, and general low life satisfaction. Women with PCOS exhibited greater rates of depression, psychological and stress sensitivity, according to qualitative psychological studies. Women with PCOS said they were less happy in their romantic relationships, had lower self-esteem, and engaged in less social activities (Farkas, Rigó & Demetrovics, 2013).

Objectives of the study:

- To find out the psychosocial impact of PCOS on young women.
- To know the perception of factors that lead to PCOS of young women.
- To find out the management techniques for PCOS.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was undertaken with the objective to study the psychosocial implications of PCOS in young women. It further looked into the factors that lead to PCOS in young women. This study also aimed at investigating the impact of lifestyle and various other factors that could lead to PCOS. The study also explores the management of PCOS in the daily lives of girls suffering from PCOS. This study aimed to present an in-depth analysis of the most recent information on the influence of lifestyle changes on the course of PCOS conditions. This study also finds the inter-relationship between the psychosocial implications and lifestyle modifications. The study is qualitative in nature and explores the various themes in the concerned research.

Participants:

For the study, 30 young women with PCOS, 1 Gynaecologist, 1 Endocrinologist, and 1 Special Expert {An accountable team member and emotional wellbeing coach of level up for women company (Women's

Wellness Specialist)}} participated in this research. It was conducted virtually through an online and telephonic medium. The interview with the gynaecologist was conducted at her clinic.

Sampling Technique:

The participants for survey form were chosen by the purposive sampling method. Some of the participants who were known to the researcher were contacted first. The rest were sampled through a snowball sampling method. The participants for the interview were chosen by the snowball sampling method and purposive sampling method. The experts for the interview were chosen by expert sampling. The researcher collected initial demographic details and consent from the participant. The consent for the study was taken with an assurance that all the information they would share will be kept confidential and would only be used for academic and research purposes. The researcher made it clear for the participants to opt-out of the study at any point if they feel so.

Locale of the Study:

The study was conducted on residents of Delhi NCR.

Tool Used for Data Collection:

The present study focused on psychosocial implications of PCOS in young women. Survey google form and interview were the main tools for data collection.

Interview Schedule:

To collect the descriptive data for the study a structured interview was developed to be carried out with young women through a telephonic medium, It was based on the themes-

- What is PCOS?
- Symptoms of PCOS
- Time of Diagnosis
- Physiological Implications of PCOS
- Effect of PCOS on Mental Health
- Perspective of Family and Friends
- Factors affecting Lifestyle modifications
- Channels for PCOS management
- Motivating factors for PCOS management

Google Survey Form:

To collect the generalized data for the study a google survey form was developed to be carried out with young

women through online medium. It was based on the themes-

- What is PCOS?
- Symptoms of PCOS?
- Time of Diagnosis
- Physiological Implications of PCOS
- Effect of PCOS on Mental Health
- Perspective of family and friends
- Factors affecting Lifestyle Modifications
- Channels for PCOS management
- Perspective of Family and Friends

Seeking Consent:

The participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study by me. The consent forms were provided online with an information sheet to young women. The participant's consent was ensured with a suitable explanation given to them through telephonic interaction about the study. The participants were also informed regarding their rights as a participant and contact details for any queries or complaints were provided to them.

Procedure for Data Collection:

- Interviews of young women were conducted through an online and telephonic medium as they were not comfortable to reveal or talk about their personal information face to face. They were more comfortable in the telephonic mode of interview as everyone has their own availability of time. The telephonic interview was conducted owing to their availability and the time chosen by them. The participants were reached out through an online mode. The interviews were recorded after their permission, a few of them agreed some of them didn't. Some of the participants were interviewed after lunch while some were interviewed late in the evening. It took approximately 20-25 min to complete and record the interview.
- Google survey form with all the instructions and explanation regarding research topic and questions were informed prior and then filled accordingly.
- Interview of the gynaecologist being done face to face at her clinic for about 30-35 minutes. Interview of the endocrinologist being done via telephonic medium for about 20 to 25 minutes.

Interview of the special expert being done through a zoom meeting for about 40 to 45 minutes.

Inclusion Criteria:

- The study will be done on young women (18-25) yrs. of age having PCOS.
- Girls residing Delhi-NCR

Ethical Considerations:

All the ethical requirements were fulfilled before the data collection began. The proposal was first presented to the Supervisor. Then it was presented to the Technical Review Board with the presence of all the department faculty members, on whose suggestions the title was changed from adolescent to young women and the endocrinologists is being included in the research study for data collection. Further, the proposal was presented before the Institutional Ethics Committee for reviewing its technical robustness of the proposal. All the consent forms and study information sheets were inspected. The data collection began only after the clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee.

Analysis:

After the successful collection of data i.e., through the interview and Google survey form of all the participants, a systematic analysis of the data was done. Transcripts of the interviews and google survey form were duly completed in a period of one month. Data collected from the transcriptions were closely read to identify meaningful trends and themes. The analysis was done keeping in mind the objectives of the study. The approach employed for data analysis was qualitative in nature. The themes that emerged were organized to identify common patterns and unique features.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed at investigating the factors that lead to psychosocial implications of PCOS. The study was done by taking the perspective of young women (18-25) yrs. of age diagnosed with PCOS and 3 experts (gynaecologist, endocrinologist and a special expert). Taking all the perspectives, it created a holistic understanding towards psychosocial implications of PCOS.

What is PCOS?:

The findings suggests that PCOS is both Hormonal and Lifestyle management Disorder. Though on the contrary the special expert responded that “PCOS is a very misguided term. It is a lifestyle disorder only, which impacts hormones and overall body status. Its diagnosis and treatment can only be done by changing lifestyle patterns. It is very common in South Asian countries because the lifestyle pattern is poor in these countries. After the onset of “corona” it has increased further. Earlier it was found only in teens but now it is found on onset of puberty as hormonal imbalances are early hitting. According to her, 1 in every 4 women is suffering from PCOS”.

Symptoms of PCOS:

The findings suggest the symptoms of PCOS are irregular menstrual cycle, acne, weight gain, hirsutism, cyst in ovaries and mood swings. The gynaecologist and the endocrinologist responded that the symptoms of PCOS vary with individuals, Some common symptoms are irregular menstruation cycle, cyst in ovaries, weight gain issue, acne, hirsutism and androgen production. Special expert mentioned some other symptoms like extreme mood swings, lethargy and body ache.

Time of Diagnosis:

The findings suggest that the most common age of diagnosis of PCOS is in between (17-21) yrs. of age as these are the reproductive years. The experts also stated the same that the adolescent is the age of onset of PCOS. Hence, Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) at this point is critical. It affects 4–8% of women globally, as per the WHO. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research in 2017, the prevalence of PCOS among Indian adolescents is 12.2 percent (ICMR).

Physiological Implications of PCOS:

The gynaecologist explained the variations in the symptoms of PCOS due to increase in male hormone level, it impacts the overall body which leads to various symptoms of PCOS. If seen in totality, 57% of the young women’s body is highly affected by PCOS, 37% of the young women’s body are somewhat affected by PCOS while 6% of young women have no effect on their overall body status.

Effect of PCOS on Mental Health:

This condition, which is on the rise, has a wide range of psychological symptoms *i.e.*, for e.g., depression, anxiety, body image dissatisfaction, eating and sexual disorders, and overall low life satisfaction. Qualitative psychological investigations have shown that women with PCOS had higher rates of depression, psychological and psychosexual illness, and a higher sensitivity to stress than controls. The endocrinologist also believed that mild depression and anxiety is due to body image dissatisfaction, acne and facial hair which are common symptoms of PCOS as reported.

Perspective of family and friends:

The lack of communication with parents is seen as a major problem. The same was echoed by the gynaecologist who said lack of awareness, education, support from parents is the major hindrance to girls talking openly about PCOS. This further aggravates their mental health issues. The endocrinologist added that the main concern of the family’s “Infertility”, in which PCOS is diagnosed at the right time, can be managed in the future.

Factors affecting Lifestyle modifications:

Most of the participants started doing physical activity like walking, started taking proper healthy diet as advised by the dietician and proper medication. Some changed their sleeping pattern of 8 hrs of sleep, started doing gym for proper maintenance of body.

Channels for PCOS management:

The above findings suggest that the majority of the participants refer to various channels for their concern regarding PCOS but doctors do not advise young women to acknowledge social media platforms for PCOS management. The awareness of PCOS is rising day by day but sometimes it influences the audience negatively which creates low self-esteem, helplessness and creates anxiety among young women.

Motivating Factors for PCOS management:

The above findings suggest that the healthy lifestyle modification, timely encouragement and emotional support from experts and family made them feel motivated and encouraged them for consistent treatment. It is really very important to have support and motivation to deal with various symptoms and this reduces the psychosocial impact of PCOS on young women and improves their

self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed at investigating the psychosocial implications of PCOS in young women. This study was carried out to know the psychosocial impact of PCOS on young women, factors that lead to PCOS and the management techniques for PCOS. The findings that have come out from the research study is that everyone defined PCOS by the symptoms they were suffering.

The major finding is that PCOS is both a hormonal imbalance and lifestyle disorder. The main manifestations of PCOS include the following symptoms: weight gain, cyst in the ovaries, obesity, hirsutism, acne, increase in male hormone level and irregular periods. Hence the symptoms of PCOS vary from individual to individual. The symptoms of PCOS may be associated with low self-esteem, social isolation, feeling of inadequacy, self-perception and may also trigger depressive symptoms like mood swings, anxiety, lethargy and uninterested in daily activities. PCOS is a leading cause for weight gain, self-esteem reflected issues as body image is a major contributor to one's sense of self-esteem. Nearly all of the respondents were aware that changing their diet or eating habits can help with PCOS. Despite being aware of dietary changes few participants did not adjust their diet because they found it difficult to stick to the diet or it was not interesting enough, and that dieting took a long time to show improvement. In addition to their fertility drug and oral contraceptive pills, nearly all of the participants agreed to follow a lifestyle modification plan, indicating the need for a multidisciplinary approach to managing PCOS involving doctors and other health care providers focusing on the physical and psychological well-being of subjects with PCOS. Young women today face a lot of pressure as a result of the tremendous competition to succeed in their academic subjects and overall life as such. Unnecessary demands of the competitive world, constant peer comparisons and less family support in some cases all have an effect on young minds, which emerges as hormonal imbalances. Increased screen time, sedentary lifestyles, lack of exercise, and lack of awareness and sensitivity towards PCOS in families are all contributing causes to the alarming rise in PCOS. Excessive use of cell phones and other electronic devices exposes individuals to hazardous radiation, which has an impact on egg production quality further aggravating the

effects of PCOS.

The findings suggest before having symptoms they were not aware of the term PCOS, but gradually by the treatment they got to know about PCOS in detail. It is important for an individual that is being diagnosed with PCOS to get a supportive environment that reduces stress which in turn reduces the symptoms of PCOS. Hence, PCOS is manageable with a mix of many factors. Lifestyle pattern changes were attributed to finding enough time for themselves and to focus on their bodies mindfully in turn. Though as assumed yoga was not a preferred option for PCOS management wherein physical exercises like gymming, emerged as a popular option in lifestyle modifications for PCOS management. By the social media platforms, the awareness of PCOS is increasing day by day but doctor advised them to not to follow any of such platform without their permission as the symptoms and the level of PCOS vary from individual to individual. In the social media they just put on videos with incomplete knowledge and sometimes influence negatively to the audience. This might create a negative impact on their mental health which further leads to low self-esteem. Every PCOS participant had a personal journey to reveal. While being diagnosed with PCOS, they learnt so much about management of lifestyle, their routines, diets which in turn made PCOS easy to understand. Eventually they respected their bodies in this whole process.

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