

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome: An Uncommonly Known Plight

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Dear Sir,

Through this respected journal, I would like to bring attention of the readers towards the level of awareness of Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) among general public in Karachi. PCOS is a common endocrine disorder among women of reproductive age, diagnosed by the presence of menstrual irregularity, hyperandrogenemia and multiple cysts in the ovary that are visualized on transvaginal ultrasound¹.

A pilot survey was conducted in January 2019 at a public health event using bilingual short survey forms asking women if they were aware of PCOS, its symptoms and its complications; specifically, infertility. A total of 111 women responded out of which 59 (53%) were aware of PCOS and its symptoms. Fifty-two (47%) out of 111 were not aware of PCOS or its symptoms. (Table 1).

They were later provided information through awareness sessions and brochures. No data was collected about the social or educational status of the women responding to the questionnaire and further research in this regard is required.

The infertility rate in Pakistan is 21.9% and PCOS is known to be the second most common cause for infertility in Pakistan with a frequency of 38.5%². Another study showed a prevalence of 40.1% among infertile women in Pakistan³. This

alarmingly high prevalence of PCOS may be attributed to the fact that it is not easy to diagnose, owing to multiple and variable symptoms. A study published in 2011 showed that out of 391 female students, 7.7% were diagnosed as cases of PCOS, which shows that PCOS is an underdiagnosed endocrine disorder⁴. Another reason for this is the lack of awareness of our population regarding PCOS, its symptoms and its complications. A study published in 2014 showed that only 10% of the study population from Karachi were aware of PCOS while prevalence rates of the symptoms were as follows; Hirsutism (36%), Oligomenorrhea (9%) and amenorrhea (3%)⁵. This lack of knowledge may be attributed to the inability to identify and recognize the symptoms of this disease by women themselves. As a consequence of this, most of the women consult a gynaecologist only when PCOS presents as infertility.

Table 1. Survey results out of 111 responses

Questions asked	Yes	No
1. Do you know what PCOS is?	59 (53%)	52 (47%)
2. Are you aware of symptoms of PCOS?	Yes 47	No 12
3. Do you think this disease causes infertility?	Yes 48	No 11

An increase in the awareness rate among general public in Karachi from 10% in 2014 to 53% in 2019 may be a step towards increased recognition of symptoms by women and may increase the diagnosis and treatment of PCOS much before it presents as infertility. Further research, however, is needed to establish this relationship and also to assess if and how this may decrease the prevalence of PCOS among infertile women, thereby bringing

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the overall infertility rate down from the current 21.9%.

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