


Awareness Regarding PCOS/PCOD Among College-Going Girls in Rural Maharashtra: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is one of the most common endocrine disorders affecting adolescent girls and women of reproductive age. Despite increasing prevalence, awareness regarding symptoms, complications, lifestyle factors, and mental health impact remains inadequate, particularly among rural populations.

Aim

The present study aimed to assess awareness, perceptions, and health-related practices regarding PCOS/PCOD among college-going girls in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra.

Methodology

A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among college-going female students in Ratnagiri district. A total of 746 participants attended the awareness programme, out of which 343 eligible participants aged 18 years and above completed the informed consent and questionnaire and were included in the final analysis. Data were collected using a self-constructed bilingual questionnaire in Marathi and English. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were used for analysis.

Results

Among participants, 74.6% had previously heard about PCOS/PCOD, while 25.4% had no prior awareness. Only 42% correctly identified PCOS/PCOD as a hormonal disorder, whereas many perceived it merely as menstrual irregularity. Menstrual irregularities and limited healthcare-seeking behavior were also observed among participants. A majority acknowledged the role of lifestyle factors and mental health impact associated with PCOS. Most participants expressed the need for increased awareness regarding reproductive health and PCOS.

Conclusion

The study highlights inadequate awareness and misconceptions regarding PCOS among rural college-going girls. Community-based awareness programs, reproductive health education, lifestyle counseling, and early intervention initiatives are necessary to improve women's health literacy and preventive healthcare practices.

Keywords

PCOS, PCOD, Awareness, Rural Women, College Girls, Reproductive Health, Mental Health, Lifestyle

Introduction:

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) are among the most common endocrine and metabolic disorders affecting adolescent girls and women of reproductive age in India. Recent Indian studies have reported a rising prevalence of PCOS/PCOD, especially among adolescents and young females, mainly due to sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy dietary habits, stress, obesity, and lack of awareness regarding reproductive health (Bharathi et al., 2021; Nidhi et al., 2022). PCOS/PCOD are characterized by hormonal imbalance, irregular menstrual cycles, excessive androgen secretion, ovarian cyst formation, acne, hirsutism, weight gain, infertility, and various psychological disturbances such as anxiety, depression, stress, low self-esteem, and poor quality of life (Patel et al., 2022; Sharma & Mishra, 2023). If left untreated, these disorders may lead to long-term complications including diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, infertility, and metabolic syndrome.

Despite the increasing burden of PCOS/PCOD among Indian females, awareness regarding the disorder remains inadequate, particularly among rural populations and college-going students. Social stigma related to menstrual and reproductive health discussions, poor health education, and limited communication regarding women's health issues contribute significantly to the lack of understanding about the condition and its seriousness (Kaur & Singh, 2024). Many young females fail to recognize early symptoms and often delay seeking medical consultation and treatment, thereby missing opportunities for early diagnosis, lifestyle modification, timely intervention, and prevention of complications (Gupta & Verma, 2021).

The present study aims to assess the basic awareness and understanding of PCOS/PCOD among young college girls, including their knowledge regarding symptoms, treatment approaches, mental health impact, and lifestyle associations. The study also attempts to identify awareness gaps among rural female students and emphasize the importance of early diagnosis and intervention. Furthermore, an informative awareness session on PCOS/PCOD conducted by the author sought to bridge the knowledge gap and encourage timely healthcare-seeking behavior among participants.

Literature Review

Previous studies on Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) have explored awareness, prevalence, lifestyle factors, mental health impact, complications, quality of life, and intervention methods among adolescent girls and women. Different researchers have reported varying levels of awareness and understanding regarding PCOS/PCOD across rural, urban, adolescent, and college-going populations. The reviewed literature highlights that lack of awareness, delayed diagnosis, poor lifestyle practices, and inadequate mental health support remain major concerns associated with PCOS/PCOD.

Alur-Gupta et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to study the prevalence and treatment of mental health conditions among women with PCOS. The review identified increased prevalence of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, body image disturbances, psychosexual dysfunction, and reduced quality of life among women with PCOS. The study emphasized the importance of integrating mental health assessment and treatment into PCOS management. These findings support the present study by highlighting the need to evaluate awareness and psychological impact among young college-going girls.

Pandey and Yadav (2022) assessed psychological distress and emotional challenges among women with PCOS in rural Indian populations. Their findings revealed significant emotional, social, and financial distress among affected women, with many participants experiencing social anxiety and discomfort. The study emphasized the importance of addressing psychological well-being during PCOS management and supports the present study in understanding mental health impact among young females.

Chauhan (2023) studied anxiety, depression, and quality of life among Indian women with PCOS. The findings revealed high prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms among participants, while hirsutism, infertility, acne, and alopecia significantly affected psychological well-being and quality of life. The study emphasized that early identification and management of symptoms can reduce emotional distress and improve overall well-being.

Kose and Ramteke (2022) reviewed awareness and management of PCOS among Indian women and highlighted that most Indian studies mainly focus on prevalence and symptom awareness, while limited attention is given to diagnosis, treatment, and psychological aspects. The authors emphasized that poor guidance and inadequate health education contribute to delayed diagnosis and poor management. The study supports the importance of awareness programmes and health education initiatives among adolescent and college-going girls.

Kharkwal (2023) conducted a qualitative study among undergraduate girls in Lucknow to understand the psychosocial and educational impact of PCOS/PCOD. The findings suggested that PCOS affects emotional health, academic performance, self-confidence, and social interaction among young females. The study highlighted the importance of community awareness, institutional support, and holistic healthcare approaches.

Kar et al. (2021) conducted a study among nursing students in Odisha to assess the effectiveness of structured teaching programs regarding PCOS awareness. The findings demonstrated significant improvement in knowledge after educational intervention, indicating that awareness programs can effectively bridge knowledge gaps among students.

Abeen et al. (2022) conducted a prospective study among adolescent girls in South India to assess awareness and prevalence of PCOS. The study revealed that majority of participants lacked adequate knowledge regarding PCOS, while only a small proportion of affected individuals were receiving treatment. The authors emphasized that awareness-based educational interventions are effective in improving understanding regarding symptoms, treatment, and prevention.

Jahnavi et al. (2024) conducted a cross-sectional study among female adolescents in Hyderabad to assess prevalence and awareness regarding PCOS. Although several participants demonstrated basic awareness regarding symptoms, the prevalence of suspected PCOS cases remained considerably high. The study emphasized the importance of counseling, lifestyle modification, and early preventive interventions.

Selvaraj et al. (2023) conducted an experimental study among adolescent schoolgirls in Tamil Nadu to evaluate the effectiveness of yoga and exercise interventions in reducing PCOS risk. The findings revealed significant reduction in PCOS risk scores among participants who underwent yoga and exercise sessions. The study highlighted the importance of lifestyle modification and physical activity in prevention and management of PCOS.

Mathur and Tiwari (2022) conducted a questionnaire-based study among adolescent girls and young women in the National Capital Region and found that awareness regarding prevalence, complications, and risk factors of PCOS remained inadequate despite participants having heard about the disorder. The study emphasized the importance of healthy lifestyle practices, regular exercise, and timely diagnosis for prevention and management.

Kumar et al. (2023) assessed knowledge and perception regarding PCOS among female college students in Chennai. The findings indicated that participants had moderate awareness regarding symptoms such as irregular menstrual cycles and hirsutism; however, knowledge regarding long-term complications such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases remained poor. The study concluded that educational interventions are necessary to improve understanding regarding PCOS complications and preventive care.

Ghosh et al. (2023) studied awareness regarding PCOS among women in West Bengal and reported that many participants considered menstrual irregularities and menstrual pain as normal conditions, resulting in delayed medical consultation.

The study highlighted poor awareness and misconceptions regarding menstrual and reproductive health among young women.

Pal and Mahapatra (2023) explored the impact of PCOS on mental well-being and self-esteem among Indian women. Their findings identified themes such as emotional stress, poor self-esteem due to weight fluctuations and physical appearance, and the importance of family and social support. The study emphasized the need for psychological care and counseling services for women with PCOS.

Jakhar et al. (2022) conducted a study among college-going females in Haryana to assess awareness regarding PCOS. The findings revealed very poor awareness levels among participants and highlighted the need for awareness programs focusing on prevention, early diagnosis, and timely treatment.

Khan et al. (2023) reviewed the psychosocial and mental health challenges experienced by women with PCOS and reported that anxiety, depression, emotional distress, and body image concerns significantly affect quality of life. The study emphasized the importance of integrating mental health support into PCOS management.

Babel et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review regarding prevalence and risk factors of PCOS among Indian women. The review identified obesity, sedentary lifestyle, menstrual irregularities, and hyperandrogenism as major associated risk factors. The authors emphasized that PCOS remains underdiagnosed among adolescents and rural females and highlighted the importance of awareness programs, early detection, and lifestyle modification.

The reviewed literature indicates that PCOS/PCOD is a growing health concern affecting physical, reproductive, metabolic, psychological, and social well-being among adolescent girls and young women. Most studies reported inadequate awareness regarding symptoms, risk factors, long-term complications, and treatment approaches, especially among rural and college-going populations. Delayed diagnosis, poor lifestyle practices, lack of psychological support, and inadequate health education contribute to increased risk of infertility, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and poor quality of life. The literature further suggests that educational interventions, counseling, lifestyle modification, exercise, and mental health support can significantly improve awareness and management of PCOS/PCOD. Therefore, awareness regarding PCOS is essential for promoting early diagnosis, timely intervention, preventive healthcare practices, and reduction of future complications. The present study aims to contribute toward understanding awareness levels among college-going girls and emphasizes the importance of awareness programs and health education initiatives for empowering women's health and well-being.

Methodology

Study Design

The present study was a cross-sectional descriptive study conducted among college-going female students in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, India.

Study Duration

The study was conducted during the academic year 2025–2026.

Participants

Several colleges from Ratnagiri district were selected randomly for conducting awareness programs regarding PCOS/PCOD. A total of 746 female students attended the awareness sessions. Out of these, 343 eligible participants aged 18 years and above completed the informed consent process and questionnaire and were included in the final analysis.

Inclusion Criteria

- Female college students aged 18 years and above
- Willing to participate in the study
- Participants who provided informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

- Incomplete questionnaire responses
- Participants unwilling to provide consent

Tool for Data Collection

Data were collected using a self-constructed bilingual questionnaire in Marathi and English developed by the researcher. Marathi language was included considering it as the primary language spoken by most participants in the study area.

The questionnaire included items related to:

- Awareness regarding PCOS/PCOD
- Symptoms and complications
- Lifestyle factors
- Menstrual health
- Mental health impact
- Healthcare-seeking behavior
- Preventive measures

The questionnaire was reviewed by subject experts and pilot tested among a small group of students to ensure clarity and understanding. Some questionnaire items had incomplete responses which may influence interpretation.”

Procedure

Prior to data collection, the Google Form link containing the informed consent form and questionnaire was shared with participants. Responses were collected before conducting the awareness intervention to assess baseline awareness levels.

The awareness program was conducted interactively through a structured PowerPoint presentation covering causes, symptoms, diagnosis, complications, treatment approaches, lifestyle modification, mental health impact, and preventive measures related to PCOS/PCOD.

Participants were encouraged to participate actively and clarify doubts during the session.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. The findings were interpreted to assess awareness levels and identify knowledge gaps regarding PCOS/PCOD among participants.

Results

The following section presents the responses obtained from the participants regarding awareness, perceptions, menstrual health practices, lifestyle associations, mental health understanding, and healthcare-seeking behavior related to PCOS/PCOD.

1. Table 1: Age Distribution of Participants

Among the 343 participants included in the study, 205 participants (59.8%) belonged to the 18–20 years age group, 115 participants (33.5%) belonged to the 21–23 years age group, and 23 participants (6.7%) belonged to the 24–27 years age group. The findings indicate that participants were within the reproductive age group where awareness regarding hormonal and reproductive health is highly important.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Age group (years)	18-20 y	205 (59.8%)
	21-23 y	115 (33.5%)
	24-27 y	23 (6.7%)

Table 2: Awareness Regarding PCOS/PCOD

Among the participants, 256 (74.6%) had previously heard about PCOS/PCOD, whereas 87 participants (25.4%) had no prior awareness regarding the condition. The findings indicate that despite increasing exposure to the term PCOS, a considerable proportion of young females still lack basic awareness regarding the disorder.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Heard about PCOS/PCOD	Yes	256 (74.6%)
	No	87 (25.4%)

Table 3: Perception Regarding PCOS/PCOD

Among participants, 144 (42%) correctly identified PCOS/PCOD as a hormonal disorder affecting women's health. However, 191 participants (55.7%) perceived it only as menstrual irregularity, while 5 participants (1.5%) considered it a skin disorder. These findings suggest incomplete understanding and misconceptions regarding the multisystem nature of PCOS.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Best description	A common cold	2 (0.6%)
	A hormonal disorder affecting women	144 (42.0%)
	A menstrual irregularity only	191 (55.7%)
	A skin condition	5 (1.5%)
	A type of fever	1 (0.3%)

Table 4: Menstrual Cycle Distribution Among Participants

A majority of participants, 261 (76.1%), reported menstrual cycles occurring every 25–34 days. However, 20 participants (5.8%) reported cycles occurring every 35–60 days, while 9 participants (2.6%) reported cycles after intervals exceeding 60 days. Such irregularities may indicate possible hormonal disturbances and highlight the importance of menstrual health awareness.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Menstrual cycle length	Less than 25 days	53 (15.5%)
	25-34 days	261 (76.1%)
	35-60 days	20 (5.8%)
	>60 days	9 (2.6%)

Table 5: Awareness Regarding Symptoms of PCOS/PCOD

In the present study, 44 participants (12.8%) reported abnormal hair growth, which may represent a symptom associated with PCOS. While 246 participants (71.7%) denied such symptoms, 44 participants (12.8%) were uncertain regarding symptom identification. The findings indicate the need for better awareness regarding early clinical manifestations of PCOS.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Excessive hair growth	Yes	44 (12.8%)
	No	246 (71.7%)
	Maybe	44 (12.8%)

Table 6: Awareness Regarding Mental Health Impact of PCOS

A majority of participants, 274 (79.9%), acknowledged that PCOS/PCOD can affect mental health. However, 19 participants (5.5%) denied such association and 50 participants (14.6%) were uncertain. These findings suggest the need for improved awareness regarding psychological aspects associated with PCOS.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
PCOS/PCOD affects Mental health	Yes	274 (79.9%)
	No	19 (5.5%)
	Not sure	50 (14.6%)

Table 7: Healthcare-Seeking Behavior Among Participants

Only 141 participants (41.1%) reported seeking medical consultation for symptoms related to PCOS/PCOD, whereas 202 participants (58.9%) had not sought professional advice. The findings indicate gaps in healthcare-seeking behavior and possible barriers related to awareness and accessibility of healthcare services.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Consulted doctor for PCOS/PCOD symptoms	Yes	141 (41.1%)
	No	202 (58.9%)

Table 8: Awareness Regarding Lifestyle Factors

Among participants, 241 (70.3%) acknowledged the role of lifestyle factors in PCOS/PCOD, while 90 participants (26.2%) were uncertain and 12 participants (3.5%) denied any association. The findings emphasize the need for awareness regarding healthy lifestyle practices in prevention and management of PCOS.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Life style changes help PCOS/PCOD	Yes	241 (70.3%)
	No	12 (3.5%)
	Maybe	90 (26.2%)

Table 9: Comfort in Discussing PCOS with Healthcare Professionals

A total of 219 participants (63.8%) reported feeling comfortable consulting healthcare professionals regarding menstrual or PCOS-related concerns. However, 103 participants (30%) expressed uncertainty and 21 participants (6.1%) reported

discomfort in discussing reproductive health concerns. These findings indicate the presence of communication barriers and social hesitation among young females.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Comfortable discussing your condition with a healthcare professional	Yes, very comfortable	219 (63.8%)
	Not comfortable	21 (6.1%)
	Somewhat comfortable	103 (30.0%)

Table 10: Prior Experience Regarding PCOD/PCOS or Menstrual Treatment

Regarding prior treatment experience related to PCOD/PCOS or menstrual concerns, 94 participants (27.4%) rated their experience as 1, 41 participants (12.0%) as 2, 87 participants (25.4%) as 3, 60 participants (17.5%) as 4, and 61 participants (17.8%) as 5 on the rating scale. The findings indicate varying levels of treatment experiences among participants.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
prior experience towards PCOD/PCOS or Menstrual Treatment?	1	94 (27.4%)
	2	41 (12.0%)
	3	87 (25.4%)
	4	60 (17.5%)
	5	61 (17.8%)

Table 11: Need for Spreading Awareness Regarding PCOD/PCOS Among Girls

A majority of participants, 314 (91.5%), reported that awareness regarding PCOD/PCOS should be increased among girls, whereas 24 participants (7.0%) believed that additional awareness was not necessary. The findings indicate a positive attitude toward reproductive health awareness among young females.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Need for spreading awareness about PCOD/PCOS in girls	Yes	314 (91.5%)
	No	24 (7.0%)

Table 12: Physical Activity among Participants

Regarding engagement in physical activity such as exercise, yoga, or walking, 30 participants reported never engaging in physical activity, 44 participants reported engaging daily, 81 participants reported participating a few times a week, and 129 participants reported engaging rarely. The findings indicate irregular physical activity practices among a considerable proportion of participants.

Variables	Responses/options	n (%)
Do you engage in physical activity (Exercise, yoga, walking, etc.)?	Never	30 (%)
	Daily	44 (%)
	Few times a week	81 (%)
	Rarely	129 (%)

Table 13: Dietary Changes for Menstrual or Hormonal Health

Regarding dietary modifications for managing menstrual or hormonal health, 101 participants reported actively following dietary changes such as low sugar or balanced diets, 96 participants reported not following any dietary changes, while 87

participants reported following such practices only sometimes. The findings indicate varying levels of awareness and adoption of healthy dietary practices among participants

Actively follow any dietary changes (Low sugar, balanced diet, etc.) to Manage menstrual or hormonal health?	Yes	101 (%)
	No	96 (%)
	Sometimes	87 (%)

Discussion

The present study assessed awareness, perception, lifestyle practices, and healthcare-seeking behavior regarding PCOD/PCOS among college-going girls in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra. The findings revealed that although a majority of participants had previously heard about PCOD/PCOS, comprehensive understanding regarding its symptoms, complications, mental health impact, and management remained inadequate among several participants. Similar findings have been reported in previous Indian studies conducted among adolescent girls and college students, which highlighted insufficient reproductive health awareness and misconceptions regarding PCOD/PCOS.

The study found that many participants perceived PCOD/PCOS mainly as menstrual irregularity rather than a hormonal and metabolic disorder, indicating incomplete understanding regarding the condition. Menstrual irregularities and symptoms such as abnormal hair growth were also reported among a proportion of participants, suggesting possible hormonal disturbances and the importance of early screening and timely medical consultation. Similar observations have been reported in earlier studies emphasizing the need for awareness regarding early symptoms and complications associated with PCOD/PCOS.

A majority of participants acknowledged the association between PCOD/PCOS and mental health, supporting previous research that identified anxiety, stress, depression, and reduced quality of life among affected women. Participants also demonstrated awareness regarding the importance of lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, yoga, and physical activity in management of hormonal health. However, irregular engagement in physical activity and inconsistent dietary modifications were observed among many participants, indicating gaps between awareness and actual health practices.

The findings further revealed comparatively low healthcare-seeking behavior among participants despite experiencing symptoms related to menstrual or hormonal health. Hesitation in discussing reproductive health concerns and uncertainty regarding consultation with healthcare professionals were also observed, particularly reflecting the continued influence of stigma, lack of communication, and limited reproductive health education in rural settings.

An important finding of the study was the highly positive attitude toward spreading awareness regarding PCOD/PCOS among girls and women. The majority of participants supported the need for increasing awareness, highlighting growing willingness among young females to openly discuss reproductive and hormonal health concerns. Overall, the findings emphasize the urgent need for community-based awareness programs, reproductive health education, lifestyle counseling, psychological support, and accessible healthcare services for adolescent girls and young women, especially in rural areas.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that awareness regarding PCOD/PCOS among rural college-going girls remains insufficient despite increasing familiarity with the condition. Limited understanding regarding symptoms, hormonal and mental health impact, lifestyle factors, complications, and treatment approaches was observed among participants. Menstrual irregularities, inconsistent physical activity, irregular dietary practices, and comparatively low healthcare-seeking behavior were also identified among several participants.

Although many participants recognized the importance of lifestyle modification and mental health in PCOD/PCOS management, hesitation regarding medical consultation and gaps in reproductive health awareness were still evident. At the same time, the majority of participants expressed a positive attitude toward spreading awareness regarding PCOD/PCOS among girls and women.

The findings highlight the urgent need for community-based awareness programs, reproductive health education, lifestyle counseling, psychological support, and accessible healthcare services for adolescent girls and young women, particularly in rural areas. Improving awareness regarding PCOD/PCOS may contribute toward early diagnosis, healthier lifestyle practices, timely medical consultation, and prevention of future reproductive, metabolic, and psychological complications among women.

Limitations of the Study

The present study was limited to selected college-going girls from the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the wider female population. The study focused mainly on awareness assessment and did not include clinical diagnosis of PCOS/PCOD. Data were collected through self-reported questionnaires, which may be affected by response bias. Future studies should include larger sample sizes from diverse populations such as school students, rural women, urban females, and working women to obtain broader understanding regarding awareness, lifestyle factors, and mental health impact of PCOS/PCOD.

Ethical statement:

Informed consent was obtained from all participants above 18 years of age before participation. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of responses was maintained.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Funding Statement

This study did not receive any external funding.

Author Contribution

The author independently designed, conducted, analyzed, and prepared the manuscript for the present study.

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