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Prevalence of polycystic ovary syndrome in a representative community sample: Challenges across the lifespan

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Statement of the Problem: Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) affects up to 18% of women, and is the most common endocrine disorder in women, generating health problems across the lifespan. It has been more than 10 years since the last self-reported prevalence data were obtained regarding PCOS in an Australian population. To date, many studies assessing PCOS prevalence have been subject to selection bias, as they based on designated clinic populations (e.g. those seeking fertility treatment) or on age cohorts. There are few recent representative community-based studies involving women across the lifespan, which makes it difficult to assess the current burden of PCOS in the community.

Methodology: In 2015, using a representative population survey of 1527 female respondents aged 15 years and over in South Australia, we assessed the self-reported prevalence of PCOS, as well as other self-reported chronic disease and mental health symptoms which may affect PCOS.

Findings: A total of 85 women (5.6%) self-reported PCOS. The highest prevalence occurred in women aged 35 to 44 years (9.1%, 95% CI 6.0-13.4). There were no differences in sociodemographic characteristics between with PCOS compared with those who did not report PCOS, however women with PCOS were significantly more likely to be obese and have other chronic conditions.

Conclusion & Significance: We describe the prevalence of self-reported PCOS in a representative community sample, across the lifespan, in relation to demographics, other chronic health conditions and risk factors. This will contribute to better understanding of the community distribution of PCOS.

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