

Needs and Challenges of Correction of Refractive Error among School - Aged Children

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Visual impairment from uncorrected refractive-errors can have immediate and long-term consequences in school-aged children, such as lost educational opportunities, lost an economic gain for individuals, families, and societies, and impaired quality of life. Uncorrected refractive-error is recognized as the principal cause of visual impairment in school-aged children as failure to the treatment of refractive-error in children may lead to Amblyopia which turns into the blindness of the children.

According to WHO, 12.8 million in the age group 5 - 15 years are visually impaired from uncorrected or inadequately corrected refractive-errors, the global prevalence of 0.96%, with the highest prevalence reported in urban and highly developed urban areas in south-east Asia and China.

Major challenges in providing efficient refractive-error services for school-aged children in developing countries are: poor health-seeking behavior; lack of knowledge and ignorance of refractive status among students, parents, and teachers; poor access to screening provision of spectacles concerning affordability and availability; poor wearing rates of prescribed spectacles and negative attitudes and beliefs to use of spectacles.

The most accessible and acceptable way to correct the refractive error in children is to do vision testing program in the schools to identify cases and to provide appropriate services. However, in many developing countries children do not attend school, and they are therefore missed by vision testing programs conducted in schools. This problem can be overcome by the community vision testing approach. Teachers and parents should be taught to look for symptoms and signs which indicate refractive errors.

Most refractive-errors are easily treatable by appropriate refractive correction. Spectacle correction is the appropriate treatment for refractive-error in developing countries. But lack of awareness, stigma, and erroneous beliefs towards refractive errors

has been shown to play a major role in the uptake of services. The attitude towards spectacle use largely varies between rural and urban students and also on the level of parental education. The stigma attached to spectacle use is high in girls as they tend to believe that girl with spectacle is not the best fit for marriage. Restoring sight to children with visual impairment due to refractive-error is not very complex but requires a well-planned system, patience, and a good supply chain of spectacles. Good quality, comfortable, attractive, and fashionable spectacles are essential to ensure continued use of spectacles. Consumers' perspectives should be given high importance when designing refractive error programs. The prevalence of low self-esteem and stigmas of spectacle use among students can be effectively corrected with health and education information through the students who are using spectacles and improving their quality of life.

Vision-testing among school-aged children should not end with the provision of spectacles as it is important to assess the use of spectacles and to evaluate the educational performance resulting from an improved vision in children. A well-coordination among health and education, department and other stake-holders are needed to overcome the challenges in refractive-error services for children.

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