

PP 10 - Knowledge, attitudes, and practices associated with childhood refractive errors, among parents of preschool children attending a children's hospital in Colombo.

K. L. G. V. M. Wijesena¹, W. L. P. S. P. Wijesinghe¹, N. N. Wijesuriya¹, M. M. Dissanayake^{1*}

¹Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo. Sri Lanka.

Introduction: Amblyopia is a disorder of the eye due to a dysfunction in the normal process of visual development. A common cause for such dysfunction is uncorrected refractive error, where the eye cannot form a sharp image on the retina. Studies show that the prevalence of unidentified refractive errors in Sri Lanka is more than 10% in school-aged children. Often, long standing refractive errors are diagnosed incidentally later in life. However, progression to amblyopia has often occurred by this time and treatment may not be effective. Therefore, early diagnosis of childhood refractive errors is important, ideally before 5 years of age, where interventions are most effective. In this regard, parents' knowledge, attitudes and practices play a decisive role in determining the visual outcome of a child.

Methodology: A descriptive cross-sectional study, involving 202 parents having a child below 5 years of age, was carried out in the out-patients' department (OPD) of the Lady Ridgeway hospital in Colombo. The study subjects were recruited by systematic sampling of patients attending the OPD. Data was collected using an interviewer-administered questionnaire.

Results: Most of the respondents had a good knowledge on screening facilities (96%) and treatment options (92%). Attitudes of parents on screening for refractive errors were positive in general. In contrast, a majority (71%) of the respondents had never taken their child to an eye check-up. The level of education of respondents was the only factor significantly associated with the level of knowledge (p value <0.05).

Conclusions: Unsatisfactory practices of parents on screening for childhood refractive errors despite the good knowledge and attitudes suggest that a mandatory eye screening program is necessary to reduce the prevalence of unidentified childhood refractive errors in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Refractive errors, screening, parents, knowledge

*Email: madhuwanthi@anat.cmb.ac.lk