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Al-Quds University

Causes of Visual Impairment and Blindness amongst
Patients Attending a Community Mobile Clinic in the
West Bank

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M.Sc. Thesis

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Causes of Visual Impairment and Blindness amongst
Patients Attending a Community Mobile Clinic in the
West Bank.

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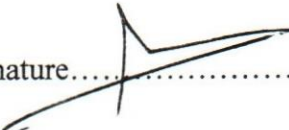
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Causes of Visual Impairment and Blindness amongst Patients Attending a Community
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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis submitted for the degree of Master in Public Health is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis (or any part) has not been submitted for a higher Degree to any other university or institution

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ABSTRACT

This study was initiated to examine causes of visual impairment and blindness amongst patients attending a community mobile outreach clinic run by the St John Eye Hospital- Jerusalem.

A quantitative approach was used to collect data on patients' ocular health, level of knowledge and accessibility to eye care and demographic characteristics.

The target population consisted of 301 subjects who attended six randomly selected outreach mobile clinics. In total 235 patients met the selection criteria and formed the study sample. In addition to data collected from medical examination, a structured interview with the client was administered to collect relevant data.

The results of this study clearly indicate that un-operated cataract remains the main cause of visual impairment and blindness in Palestine. Poor accessibility to eye services is also evident and mainly due to financial hardship and unavailability of the service in the patients' area of residence. The elderly population appears to suffer most as many blinding eye diseases affect this age group.

This study highlights the need for prompt intervention both at an institutional level (St John Eye Hospital) and a national level to address the mounting need for an essential eye care especially in the rural and remote areas.

الملخص

قامت هذه الدراسة لفحص أسباب ضعف البصر والعمى عند المرضى المراجعين للعيادات المتنقلة للعيون التابعة لمستشفى سانت جون - القدس .

استخدم أسلوب البحث الكمي لجميع المعلومات عن الصحة البصرية ، مقدار المعرفة وسهولة الوصول إلى الخدمات الصحية للعناية بأمراض العيون ، وكذلك جمعت المعلومات عن الصفات الديموغرافية للمرضى.

الفئة المستهدفة من الدراسة تكونت من ٣٠١ شخصا الذين عوينا في ٦ عيادات متنقلة اختيرت عشوائيا . ٢٣٥ مريض استوفوا شروط الاختيار وكونوا عينة الدراسة . بالإضافة إلى جمع المعلومات الطبية ، أجريت مقابلات منظمة مع الأفراد لجمع المعلومات المنشودة .

نتائج هذه الدراسة بينت بوضوح أن مرض الساد ما زال يشكل السبب الرئيسي لضعف البصر والعمى في فلسطين .

صعوبة الوصول إلى الخدمات الصحية للعيون كانت واضحة في هذه الدراسة ويعود ذلك لصعوبة الأحوال المادية وكذلك عدم توفر الخدمات الصحية لرعاية العيون في منطقة سكن المرضى . وتبين من الدراسة أن فئة كبار السن هي الفئة الأكثر تضررا وذلك بسبب شيوع أمراض العيون في هذه الفئة العمرية .

هذه الدراسة توضح بجلاء الحاجة إلى التدخل العاجل على مستوى المؤسسات الطبية (مستشفى سانت جون للعيون) وكذلك على المستوى الوطني لسد الحاجات المتزايدة لمرضى العيون ، وخاصة في المناطق الريفية والناحية .

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ABBREVIATIONS

LASER: Light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation.

NGO: Non governmental organization

UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Work Agency

PA: Palestinian Authority

SJEH: St John Eye Hospital

WHO: World Health Organization.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem was founded in 1882 in order to provide eye care to people of the Holy Land. Since then the hospital has been the main provider for primary, secondary and tertiary eye care for Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

On average, the hospital treats 40000 patients every year and carries out around 4000 major eye operations, (St John Eye Hospital, 2001).

The hospital's Outreach Mobile Clinic was established in 1980 to provide primary eye care to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. On average, around 4000 patients are seen through this clinic. However, over the last two years this mobile clinic has been the main provider for eye care for many Palestinians who are unable to reach the hospital. The clinic is held twice weekly in areas of perceived needs in the north, middle and south of the West Bank.

Patients attend the clinic with various eye disorders ranging from simple allergic conjunctivitis to intra ocular foreign bodies resulting from plastic or rubber bullets.

Problem Statement

According to the World Health Organization (2000), there are around 150 million people with significant visual disability of whom almost 38 million are blind. It also indicated that the majority of these exist in developing countries. Furthermore, it has been argued that almost 80% of these cases of blindness are due to avoidable and or curable eye conditions.

In Palestine, in the last 20 years there have been no studies that examined such issues in details. However, the Palestinian Population Census (1997) indicated that there were 6727 people with visual disabilities. This places the prevalence of visual disability in Palestine at around 0.26, far lower than even industrialized countries. This may reflect shortcomings in the organization and categorization of visual impairment by the census. One therefore can not rely on such data estimates on the determinations and prevalence of blindness and visual impairment in Palestine.