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Access to low vision services in a limited resource setting: Profile and barriers

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Background: Visual impairment is one of the most common disabilities that degrade quality of life. Visual rehabilitation services may be limited due to a number of barriers. This present study seeks to identify the common obstacles to access low vision services from patient's perspective and also know reasons for unwillingness to pursue low vision aids.

Methods: All the patients referred to low vision department of Tilganga Institute of Ophthalmology (TIO) during the study period were included. A questionnaire inquiring barriers to access low vision service was adopted, pretested and validated. A complete pro forma was used to collect information regarding demographic profile, best corrected distance and near visual acuities, educational status and occupation and causes of low vision.

Results: Out of 135 low vision patients, 96 (71.1%) were males and 39 (28.9%) were females. The age range was from 4 to 85 years, with a mean of 32.4 ± 21.34 years. 22.96% were bilaterally blind, 65.19% had moderate and 11.85% had severe visual impairment. Retinitis Pigmentosa (20.74%) and refractive error and amblyopia (14.81%) were the most common causes of low vision identified. The reason for unwillingness to use low vision device was not practical enough (50.37%). Lack of awareness (78.15%) was the commonly perceived barrier to access low vision services.

Conclusion: Eye care provider can help to decrease the barriers to access low vision services by educating patients in the early stages of vision loss regarding the effectiveness of low vision rehabilitation and by making appropriate referrals.

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