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Prevalence and causes of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana

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Worldwide more than 415 million people have diabetes. This number is expected to double by 2035. According to International Diabetes Federation (IDF), there were 266,200 cases of diabetes in Ghana in 2015, with total adult population (20-79 years) being 13,880, with the prevalence of diabetes in the same age group in Ghana being 2%. The prevalence of visual impairment and blindness in diabetic patients is on the rise worldwide and more specifically in Ghana. Diabetes is among the leading causes of visual impairment in many developed nations. Diabetic retinopathy, as one of the complications of diabetes, has been found to be the leading cause of visual impairment among adults aged between 20-79 years. Diabetic retinopathy results from damage to the capillary walls of retinal blood vessels due to chronic hyperglycemia. This damage may lead to aneurysms, rupture of which results in retinal hemorrhage, ischemia and micro-infarctions that lead to vision loss. DM affects most of the organs of the body including the eye. Almost all parts of the eye may be affected including the extra ocular muscles, intraocular lens, the optic nerve, and the retina. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness between the ages of 20-79 years and individuals with diabetes are 25 times more likely to become legally blind than individuals with no diabetes. There is not enough information available on the causes of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes in Ghana. Visual impairment has broad implication on ocular health care because of its potential for causing disability, suffering and loss of productivity. Early detection and treatment of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes, especially with the use of spectacle intervention is essential to maintain full functional activities. It is the lack of available data on the causes of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes and its impact on the society and other activities that arouse my interest to investigate into the topic; Prevalence and causes of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes. The main objective of the study is to determine the prevalence and causes of visual impairment among persons with diabetes in Ghana. The specific objectives are: To determine the prevalence of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes in Ghana; to determine the magnitude of visual impairment caused by uncorrected refractive error; to establish the relationship between disease status and visual impairment; and to predict the age and gender distribution of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes in Ghana. To determine these specifics, the author conducted a study. It was revealed that, uncorrected refractive error was the leading cause of visual impairment among persons living with diabetes (31.7%), followed by cataract 16.2%, corneal opacity 3.0%, and retinopathy 3.0% and other 3.3%. The overall prevalence rate was 58.5%. The results of this research will provide guidelines for stakeholders in the health sector in terms of policy formulation and allocation of resources. The study will help heads of health institutions to add a mandatory eye examination to the health assessment plan of all persons living with diabetes who visit their various health centers. Furthermore, the study will provide a comparable data to facilitate the planning of further studies into this area and add to existing knowledge.

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