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Causes of irreversible unilateral or bilateral blindness in the eastern province Saudi population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Purpose: To determine the causes of irreversible unilateral and bilateral blindness in an eastern province of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Methods: This observational exploratory cross-sectional study evaluated patients with irreversible unilateral or bilateral blindness using a non-probability sampling technique which was done in a major referral hospital of the eastern province, in Dammam city. Saudi Patients were enrolled if they had <0.05 (3/6 Snellen acuity) vision in the better eye after correction bilaterally, or visual field of 10-15° around fixation in the better eye. The same was done in unilaterally blind eye patients. The primary investigator excluded treatable cases of blindness such as refractive error, cataract and corneal pathology, occurring after age 5 years. Also keratoconus and recent vitreous hemorrhage (<6 month duration) and operable retinal detachment.

Results: A convenient sample of 100 consecutive unilaterally or bilaterally blind patients comprised the study sample. The mean age of the study sample was 54 ± 2.26 years. The male-to-female ratio was 4:5. The most common cause of blindness in an eye (eyes) was glaucoma in 30%. 78% of the patients had unilateral blindness. Deep amblyopia (11%) turned up to be almost the second most common cause of unilateral blindness occurring mainly in the left eye 10/11.

Conclusion: Glaucoma is the most common cause of irreversible blindness in one or both eyes. Although underestimated (due to old corneal scarring and other causes) amblyopia is likely to be the second most common cause of blindness in an eye the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. Deep amblyopia occurs more frequently in left eye.

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