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How does visual field loss in patients with glaucoma correlate with loss of mobility and does this affect depressive symptoms?

Statement of Problem: Glaucoma is, after cataracts, the second leading cause of blindness worldwide. The chronic aspect and the potential irreversibility of visual impairment caused by glaucoma are factors that contribute to increased psychological burden in patients. Several studies have reported that the number of glaucoma patients suffering from depressive symptoms is significantly higher compared with controls.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: The relationship between visual impairment and depression in glaucoma patients could partially be explained by loss of mobility. Especially, patients with severe visual impairment suffer from loss of balance, greater fear of falling and higher actual fall rates. Furthermore, they experience difficulty in crossing roads, stepping up pavements or ascending curbs or even using public transportation. Loss of mobility may often lead to a decline of participation in recreational activities and even social isolation, especially in the elderly, both of which are risk factors for the onset of depression.

Findings: In a population of 139 glaucoma patients from Dutch and Belgian low vision rehabilitation organizations we found that 35% had subclinical symptoms of depression and 6% had an actual major depressive disorder according to the DSM-IV. These percentages are significantly higher than prevalence estimates found in normally sighted peers. Currently, we are investigating the hypothesized mediating role of mobility restrictions on the relation between visual field loss and depressive symptoms in glaucoma patients.

Conclusion & Significance: Depression is highly prevalent in patients with glaucoma which may be explained by the profound mobility restrictions that patients experience.

Biography

Ger van Rens was appointed as the First Dutch Professor in Ophthalmology in Low Vision Research at the Free University Medical Center Amsterdam in 2001. His research is focused on Epidemiology in Ophthalmology, Glaucoma but predominantly on quality of life and outcome of rehabilitation of visual impairment. He (co-) authored more than 85 publications, guided 11 PhD students and is responsible for the training of residents in Ophthalmology at the Elkerliek Hospital, Netherlands. He has served the board of several national Dutch societies, as an Advisory Member of ICO, as a Member of the ICO Resident Curriculum Group and is a Member of the Task-force Group of the ICD-11 of the WHO. From 2008-2014 he was the Chairmen of the International Society for Low Vision Research and Rehabilitation.

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