

Knowledge and attitude towards children's eye care among parents of young children admitted to the paediatric wards of Teaching Hospital Jaffna

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Background and objective: A child's vision develops until they are between six and seven years of age. Early identification and correction of eye-related problems are essential to prevent future complications. This study assessed knowledge and attitudes towards children's eye care among parents of young children (≤ 5 years) admitted to the paediatric wards of Teaching Hospital Jaffna.

Methods: A hospital-based descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among parents of young children (≤ 5 years) admitted to paediatric wards of Teaching Hospital Jaffna. Systematic sampling was used and data were collected through an interviewer administered questionnaire. Knowledge was scored (out of 21) and attitudes were analyzed through a Likert scale. SPSS-26 was used for analysis. Independent t-test, one-way ANOVA and chi square test were used to determine the factors associated with knowledge and attitudes (critical level 0.05).

Results: The response rate was 87.5% (400/457). Three-quarters of the sample were mothers (75.3%) and the majority were educated at least up to A/L (60.5%). Mean age was 32.3 (SD 6.5) years. Common sources of knowledge on eyecare were social media (55.8%), newspapers (39.8%) and doctors (36.0%). Mean knowledge score was 14.4 (SD 3.2) out of a total of 21. Age, education level, employment and having a child with an eye problem were associated with knowledge score ($p \leq 0.05$). Younger parents, those educated beyond A/L, employed parents and those who had a child with an eye problem, had higher knowledge scores. Over half the sample were not aware that vision should be assessed at birth (54.3%) and squint could lead to permanent vision loss (56.3%). In terms of attitudes, two-thirds (67.5%) believed that eye assessment is not needed unless there are symptoms, while a third (32.3%) saw squint as a cosmetic issue. Attitude was associated with education where caregivers with higher levels of education were more likely to have positive attitudes ($p \leq 0.05$).

Conclusion and recommendations: There are significant knowledge and attitude gaps on children's eye care among parents. Parents with higher education level are more likely to have better knowledge and positive attitudes. Public health messaging regarding regular eye assessments via social and other media may help to address gaps in knowledge and attitude among parents and caregivers.

Keywords: Childhood visual impairment, Early detection, Knowledge, Attitude, Primary care