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Ocular morbidity in children with autism

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Background: Autism Spectrum Disorder is a range of complex neuro-developmental disorders characterized by social impairment; communication difficulty; and restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior. Children on the autism spectrum exhibit variable refractive errors, strabismus, oculomotor dysfunction, and atypical gaze. This project was an attempt at early identification of and intervention for ocular and visual abnormalities in children on the autism spectrum.

Methods: Thirty-six children from four rehabilitation centers in Nepal underwent detailed optometric examinations including refractive, oculomotor, binocular, and disease evaluations.

Results: Visual abnormalities were seen in 24 (66%) children that included myopia, hyperopia, and astigmatism. Strabismus was present in eight (22%) children. Amblyopia was present in 11 (31%) children. Amblyopia due to refractive error and strabismus was present in nine (25%) and 2 (6%) children, respectively. Nystagmus was seen in only one (3%) patient.

Conclusion: The relatively high prevalence of visual disorders in this group would indicate that the visual needs of patients on the autism spectrum must be addressed. The need for early and regular eye examinations is warranted.

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