

Cataract blindness – The magnitude, intervention and evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Cataract Blindness is defined as visual acuity $<3/60$ in the better eye due to cataract. It is a global burden requiring intervention. In 2023, Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness (RAAB) surveys were conducted in the Eastern and Sarawak regions of Malaysia to assess eye care service performance following the introduction of mobile cataract programs. **Materials and Methods:** Using multistage cluster sampling, residents aged 50 and above were examined for visual acuity and causes of impairment. Of 10,184 enumerated subjects, 9,709 were examined, with high response rates in both regions. **Results:** Findings revealed significant improvements since the 2014 National Eye Survey (NES II). Blindness prevalence decreased from 1.4% to 0.8% in Eastern and from 1.6% to 0.6% in Sarawak. Severe visual impairment also declined. Untreated cataract remained the leading cause of blindness, though cataract prevalence dropped at most surgical thresholds. Good post-surgical visual outcomes (VA $\geq 6/12$) increased, and effective Cataract Surgical Coverage (eCSC) rose by 13.8–19.2% in Eastern and 18.6–23.8% in Sarawak. Notably, gender disparities in cataract surgical coverage observed in 2014 were no longer evident in 2023. **Conclusion:** These improvements suggest the success of mobile cataract services and quality surgical initiatives. However, further coordinated efforts are needed to meet the WHO's target of a 30% increase in eCSC and to continue reducing avoidable blindness nationwide.

Keywords: Cataract, RAAB, CSC