Abstract

Few data on the incidence of blindness in Germany are available. We analysed causes of legal blindness for the region Württemberg-Hohenzollern (population 5.5 million) in order to help fill in this gap. Material and Methods: Population-based investigation on the incidence of legal blindness (visual acuity <1/50) based on materials from the social services. Age-dependent blindness incidences were modelled via logistic regression models. Results: 647 blind persons were newly registered in 1994 (blindness incidence 11.6/100,000). The blindness incidence is moderate in infants (4.5/100,000) and decreases further during childhood. At the age of 20 years, the incidence again rises to the former level and remains relatively constant. After the age of 60 years, the incidence increases sharply: 5-year odds ratios are 1.76 (CI: 1.68-1. 85) in women and 1.72 (CI: 1.60-1.84) in men. The blindness incidence is higher in women, 15.6/100,000, compared to 12.2/100,000 in men. The major causes of blindness are: macular degeneration, 3. 92/100,000; diabetic retinopathy, 2.01/100,000; glaucoma, 1.6/100, 000; high myopia, 0.77/100,000; optic atrophy, 0.68/100,000; central nervous system-triggered blindness; 0.56/100,000, and tapetoretinal degenerations, 0.52/100,000. Discussion: Due to monetary incentives for the blind persons, social service files offer accurate and complete data. Besides macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy are major causes of blindness. Thus, this study suggests further blindness prevention activities for diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma