

Abstract:

Purpose: To determine the causes of childhood blindness and severe visual impairment in pupils attending schools for the blind in Burundi in order to assist planning for services in the country. **Materials and Methods:** All pupils attending three schools for the blind in Burundi were examined. A modified WHO/PBL eye examination record form for children with blindness and low vision was used to record the findings. Data was analyzed for those who became blind or severely visually impaired before the age of 16 years. **Results:** Overall, 117 pupils who became visually impaired before 16 years of age were examined. Of these, 109 (93.2%) were blind or severely visually impaired. The major anatomical cause of blindness or severe visual impairment was cornea pathology/phthisis (23.9%), followed by lens pathology (18.3%), uveal lesions (14.7%) and optic nerve lesions (11.9%). In the majority of pupils with blindness or severe visual impairment, the underlying etiology of visual loss was unknown (74.3%). More than half of the pupils with lens related blindness had not had surgery; among those who had surgery, outcomes were generally poor. **Conclusion:** The causes identified indicate the importance of continuing preventive public health strategies, as well as the development of specialist pediatric ophthalmic services in the management of childhood blindness in Burundi. The geographic distribution of pupils at the schools for the blind indicates a need for community-based programs to identify and refer children in need of services.