

# LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN OPHTHALMIC PRACTICES AND THE USE OF AN INTERPRETER TO OVERCOME IT

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## ABSTRACT

**PURPOSE:** The main aim of this study is to evaluate the barriers of language that are faced in different domains of ophthalmic practices and highlight the use of professional interpreter to overcome these barriers.

**METHODS:** This was a descriptive cross sectional study. A questionnaire was designed to collect the opinions of all participants from all areas of Pakistan regarding importance of interpreter in all ophthalmic procedures. Informed consent was obtained by the way of interviewing. Data was analyzed by making graphs and tables.

**RESULTS:** Out of 139 study participants 80 were females and 59 were males. 66.9% practitioners took history with the help of family member of patient and 13.7% with the help of previous record of patient. 82.8% participants encountered patients speaking different languages and 84.1% were in the favor of interpreter in every ophthalmic field. 94.2% thought that interpreter should be multilingual. The result showed that participants agreed the role of interpreter in taking VA is 87%, doing refraction 84.9%, in orthotic procedure 85.6%, in perimetry 90.7% and in low vision 85.6%. 66.2% agreed that satisfaction level of patient was also improved with the help of interpreter. 55.4% professionals agreed and 15.1% strongly agreed that interpreter reduce the time for detailed eye examination. Overall patient compliance rate was best with the involvement of interpreter.

**CONCLUSION:** Language barrier between patient and examiner lead to false identification of diseases and ultimately wrong treatment. So it is concluded that interpreter had main role to overcome language barrier between patient and examiner.

**KEYWORDS:** Language barrier, Ophthalmic practices, Solutions, Interpreter.

## INTRODUCTION

Routine eye examinations are very important. If eye checkups are not performed this will lead to deterioration of eye health and vision cannot be restored. This will badly affect their life style, schooling etc. some people have not enough information that from where get their eyes examined and proper checkup.<sup>1</sup> It takes much time to deal with such patients speaking different language with the help of interpreter. But it provides benefits to practitioner because he can listen to patient's complaints in detail, his or her body language, accent, behavior. Colleagues who speak multiple language can also play role as an

interpreter.<sup>2</sup>

In ophthalmic practices language constraints and use of interpreter is increasing problem throughout the world. Use of interpreter is very important to take the history of patient who cannot speak major languages. However in the past professionals found it very tricky to use interpreter in ophthalmic practices to overcome the language constraints.<sup>3</sup> In this research it is shown that language barriers affect badly quality of eye care services. This problem also occurs in people who change their country or area. So these people cannot be benefited with eye care services in the

absence of interpreter.<sup>4</sup> Optometry is a health care occupation that involves examining the ocular problems and applicable ocular system for defect or abnormalities as well as giving spectacles and selling of the correction of refractive error, traumas, disease of ocular system. In many states this occupation is progressing day by day. It is a huge demand to seek latest technology and instruments for ocular examination and also evaluation of eye problems related to other body diseases.<sup>5</sup> An interpreter in medical care is one who describes and explains the whole procedure of examination to patient with language constraints.<sup>6</sup> Migrated people from one country to another country face problem in speaking English language which make their life style difficult.<sup>7</sup> In some states of America where most of the people are shifted face language constraints. They never learn national language of America and they always want a person who interpret their problem to doctor.<sup>8</sup> Medical training and health awareness is defined as how a common person can understand a disease, how to tackle it, manage it and decide what he should do now. At Hattiesburg place in research when questioning is done with doctors and interpreter we found that language constraints keep bad impact on relation between patient and doctor. In this research it is shown that Hispanic/Latino population is mostly affected due to the difference in language.<sup>9,10</sup>

It is seen that experienced and qualified interpreters and doctors do not find it suitable to use family member of patient to explain the problem.<sup>11</sup> At the end of discussion it was found that language barriers mostly occur when people of different country shifted and health care practitioners had different values. The only solution of language barrier in medical field was interpreter or navigators to provide them detailed examination and complete explanation of medicines. Education and courses should be provided to doctors about interpreter and their role in different fields.<sup>12,13</sup>

The main focus of this study was to identify the language barrier during eye examination in ophthalmology department and different methods and strategies used to overcome these barriers like professional interpreter.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study was descriptive cross sectional study to find out the language barrier in ophthalmic practices and use of interpreter to overcome it. The study place was at College Of Ophthalmology And Allied Vision Sciences in King Edward Medical University. There were 139 professionals from ophthalmic practices of different categories like ophthalmologists, optometrists, investigative ophthalmologists, ophthalmic nursing, from diagnostics who participated in this study. It took 3 to 4 months from September 2020 to December 2020 after the selection of study title. Closed-ended questions were asked in questionnaire to encourage the closed ended answers. 17 questions were in the questionnaire related to language barrier in different procedure of eye care examination like do you think you encounter patients with language barrier in your daily routine? What is your native language? And how you overcome this problem of language barrier? Do you think interpreter should be multilingual? Questionnaire was distributed to all participants. Data was collected and analyzed by making graphs, charts and tables. Frequencies and percentages of results are mentioned. The research protocol was approved by the Ethical Review Board of College of Ophthalmology and Allied Vision Sciences. The study methods adhered to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki for the use of participants in biomedical research.

## **RESULTS**

In table 1 method of history taken by professionals is shown. They take history of patients with different languages mostly with the help of patient's family member and it is 66.9%. Some take it with the help of interpreter. The response rate of

professionals in table 2 is shown. 94 out of 139 agree that presence of interpreter is necessary in ophthalmic practices. 91 agree that they encounter with different languages in their daily routine. 89 and 98 were agreed that interpreter should be present for refraction and Orthoptic procedure respectively. 57.6% were agreed that satisfaction level may be improved if we take interpreter during examination.

**Table -1: Method used for History Taking**

QUESTIONS	Frequency (%)
With the help of professional interpreter	18 (12.9%)
With the help of patient family member	98 (66.9%)
With the help of any previous record of patient report	19 (13.7%)
With the help of any digital instrument	2 (1.4%)
Take history with my own skill	2 (1.4%)

**Table -2: Response Rate of Professionals**

Questions	Agree F (%)	Strongly agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly disagree F (%)	Not sure F (%)
Do you think you encounter patients in your daily routine with language barrier?	91 (65.5%)	24 (17.3%)	22 (15.8%)	–	2 (1.4%)
Do you think role of interpreter is important in ophthalmic practices?	94 (67.6%)	23 (16.5%)	11 (7.9%)	–	11 (7.9%)
Do you think interpreter should be multilingual?	77 (55.4%)	54 (38.8%)	5 (3.6%)	–	3 (2.2%)
Do you think with interpreter you can assess the best corrected visual acuity with accuracy?	94 (67.6%)	27 (19.4%)	10 (7.2%)	1 (0.7%)	7 (5%)
The interpreter can describe the refraction procedure to patient in a better way?	89 (64%)	29 (20.9%)	10 (7.2%)	–	11 (7.9%)
Is the role of interpreter important in orthoptics clinic during various tests (cover, uncover, ocular motility)?	98 (70.5%)	21 (15.1%)	10 (7.2%)	–	10 (7.2%)
The role of interpreter can increase the accuracy of perimetry result by proper guidance	97 (69.8%)	29 (20.9%)	6 (4.3%)	–	7 (5%)
In your opinion can professional interpreter reduce the time for detailed examination?	77 (55.4%)	21 (15.1%)	19 (13.7%)	–	22 (15.8%)
Do you think interpreter can be helpful in low vision person rehabilitation by proper counseling?	87 (62.6%)	32 (23%)	7 (5%)	–	13 (9.4%)
Does satisfaction level of patient is improved by the involvement of interpreter in his/her eye examination?	80 (57.6%)	12 (8.6%)	19 (13.7%)	2 (1.4%)	26 (18.7%)
The interaction of interpreter with patient decreases the patient confidentiality.	50 (36%)	20 (14.4%)	43 (30.9%)	3 (2.2%)	23 (16.5%)

**DISCUSSION**

In this descriptive cross sectional study close-ended questions form was distributed to different professionals of ophthalmic practices to see their response. Ophthalmologist, optometrists,

diagnostic ophthalmologist and ophthalmic nursing were included in this survey with no gender discrimination.

The total participants included in this survey were 139 who were asked self-designed questionnaire containing questions related to barriers in language and contribution of interpreter in different procedure of eye examination who help both doctor and patient by interpreting their languages and safe healthy eye examination occur which leads to effective eye health. Most of the optometrists (86) and ophthalmologist (31) participated in this survey. Contribution of investigative ophthalmologists and ophthalmic nursing was minor.

About 73% of participants used Punjabi and Urdu in their daily practices but they were familiar of different languages. 45% professionals encountered Punjabi and 39% Urdu language in their clinical practices. Majority of the examiners encountered patients with different languages. Saraiki, Pashto, Somali, Persian, Sindhi and Balochi languages were in small number but these languages became a cause of perplexing for examiners during their examination.

This study showed the different ways used by examiners to take medical history if they could not understand patient language. 71% eye care practitioners used patient's family member (parents, siblings and relatives) as interpreter to resolve problem of different languages. 14% participants took patients past ocular history with the help of patient previous records/reports. Some professionals used professional interpreter but not in a significant amount. The proper trainings and sessions for professional interpreter were recommended in this research.<sup>14,15</sup>

In my study 84.1% participants were agreed the need of interpreter in clinical practices which was similar to the above mentioned studies. 82.8% of ophthalmic practitioners encountered patients with language barrier. Language barrier in eye care

practices led to disturbance in eye health and irreversible loss of vision. 94.2% professionals agreed that interpreter should be multilingual and he/she must know different languages and medical terms.

In previous research of Saudi Arabia it was shown that language difference between doctor and patient became a cause of mismanagement of healthcare. Role of interpreter during examination of patient was necessary according to this study. Various methods to overcome the language barrier like language courses and information for healthcare professionals and immigrants were recommended.<sup>16</sup>

The authors of this study were also concluded that interpreters who may be formal or informal were necessary for examination of patients with language barrier in medical practices. Role of interpreter in examination could make procedures helpful by explaining details to patients.<sup>17</sup>

About 70.5% eye care practitioners agreed that professional interpreter reduce the time for detailed examination of patients. Interpreter proved helpful for overall examination. 85.6% participants agreed that in low vision rehabilitation interpreter presence is very important for counseling. 66% agreed that satisfaction level of patient was improved by involvement of interpreter in eye examination. 15% of participants reported that patients were not satisfied by the involvement of interpreter.

In previous research it was mentioned that if interpreter was not involved in examination of patient it results in false identification of problem of patient which ultimately lead to false prescription and satisfaction level of patient is also compromised. Accuracy rate of eye examination is reduced due to barriers such as language difference, values difference and involvement of family member as an interpreter. The role of professional interpreter can eradicate the bias in history taking thus saving time in detailed

examination as it was shown in my research. Qualified interpreter was appointed in healthcare system. The only problem faced during translation process was the deficiency of translator or communication and approach to interpreter companies.<sup>18</sup>

In our study response rate of patient compliance with the help of interpreter was taken by 42 eye care practitioners responded that interpreter could do better in their practices. 52 considered it good, 14 said it excellent and 11 responded that interpreter presence cause patient response best.

## CONCLUSION

Language barrier between patient and examiner lead to false identification of diseases and ultimately wrong treatment. Professionals agreed that they encountered patients speaking with different languages in their daily practices. Most of the professionals said that patient's family members help in taking history to overcome language barriers. It was found that every procedure of patient's evaluation and examination was more convenient with the help of interpreter. Interpreter enhanced the patient-examiner communication, resultantly examination time is reduced and satisfaction level of patient is increased. So it is concluded that interpreter had main role to overcome language barrier between patient and examiner so they must be present in all fields of ophthalmic practices to effectively deal with patients.

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