Visual, musculoskeletal and balance symptoms in people with visual impairments

av

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Abstract

Background: Worldwide, about 300 million people have some kind of visual impairment (VI). Most people with VI are in the older age range, as visual deficits increase with age. It is not unusual that people with VI suffer both from neck pain or scapular area symptoms and reduced balance, which they consider to be symptoms of old age. However, their symptoms may not be attributable to age, but rather to poor vision.

Aims: First, to identify associations between visual, musculoskeletal and balance symptoms in people engaging in near work every day and in people with VI. Second, to design and validate a suitable instrument for gathering information about visual, musculoskeletal and balance symptoms in people with VI. Third, to explore differences in perceived symptoms between VI patients and people with normal vision in cross-sectional studies and by following a group of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) patients in a longitudinal study. Fourth, to identify the most specific predictors of higher levels of visual, musculoskeletal and balance symptoms.

Methods: A specific instrument was developed: the Visual, Musculoskeletal and Balance symptoms (VMB) questionnaire. Patients with VI were compared to an age-matched reference group with normal vision in three different studies in order to detect differences in self-reported symptoms between the groups. In addition, a follow-up was conducted in a group of AMD patients.

Results: Patients with VI reported higher levels of VMB symptoms than controls, and this increased over time. Visual deficits and the need for visual enhancement increased the risk of VMB symptoms.

Conclusion: People with VI run a potentially higher risk of VMB symptoms than age-matched controls.

Keywords: Visual impairment, musculoskeletal symptoms, balance symptoms, visual enhancing aids, age-matched controls.

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