SESSION 2: Why the Eye: Forum on the Public Health Connection Between Mental Wellness and Vision

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Shifting the paradigm from living with a disability to thriving with a disability
Visual Impairment is ↑

“Some of the limitations of disability stem from the psychological environment rather than physical impairment.”

Older adults with visual impairments more likely to have depression and anxiety

Van der Aa et al. IOVS. 2015.
A higher proportion of persons with visual impairment reported loneliness.

Why does vision loss impact psychosocial health?
“Loss of eyesight described as the worst ailment that could happen relative to losing memory, speech, hearing, or a limb.”

Stigma & Discrimination
Non-inclusive & Inaccessible environments
“I just don’t want to have a perception of limitations.”

“I don’t want people to feel sorry for me.”
“I think it hurts them, because they are targeted as different. They are targeted as not a whole person, as being a lesser person. I do feel that people feel rejected—rejected in general.”

Kumar et al. JVIB. 2022.
Discrimination

Adults with dual sensory impairment experience more frequent perceived discrimination.

1. Being treated with less respect.
2. Others acting as though the person with VI was not smart.

Discrimination

Association of Perceived Discrimination With Emotional Well-being in Older Adults With Visual Impairment

Sarah E. Jackson, PhD; Ruth A. Hackett, PhD; Shahina Pardhan, PhD; Lee Smith, PhD; Andrew Steptoe, DSc

- Older adults with reported VI more likely to report discrimination
- Discrimination $\rightarrow$ higher levels of depressive symptoms & loneliness and lower quality of life

Stigma & Discrimination

Non-inclusive & Inaccessible environments
Vision impaired participate in fewer cognitive activities
Unlike race, ethnicity, gender, and age, disability data are not routinely collected.
Accessibility need requested in 23,510 (9.4%) encounters.

Varadaraj et al. JAMA Netw Open. 2022.
Accessibility Requests

- Mobility: cane, crutches, motorized scooter, walker, wheelchair, stretcher, assistance standing, or transport services
- Sensory: assistance due to visual, hearing or speech impairment
- Intellectual: assistance due to an intellectual/developmental disability
- Other: requiring assistance with filling forms for other reasons, or use of a service animal

- Mobility: 80%
- Sensory: 13%
- Intellectual: 2%
- Other: 6%

55,722 patients
250,932 patient encounters

Varadaraj et al. JAMA Netw Open. 2022.
Standardize data collection for:
• % of patients with a disability
• % of patients with disability-related accessibility need requests
The Disability Dashboards Approach

COVID-19 Vaccine Accessibility Dashboard
• Assessed website accessibility
• # and types of errors
• Health department websites
• 50 states, DC, 5 US territories

Jo et al. DHJO. 2022
disabilityhealth.jhu.edu
“Our results underscore the addressable, yet persistent inequities in the pandemic response for the disability community.”

Jo et al. DHJO. 2022
• Food security is central to health & well-being
• Linked to poor mental and physical health

“Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally-adequate or safe foods”
VI have higher odds of **Food Insecurity**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>No VI</th>
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<td>43</td>
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No VI: Vision Impaired

Ref 2.2 (2.0-2.3)

Food Insecure

Kumar et al. Ophthalmic Epi. 2022.
The Disability Dashboards Approach

SNAP Disability Dashboard
SNAP Disability Dashboard

Total scores (18 pts):
- Flexibility (6 pts)
- Efficiency (6 pts)
- Accessibility (6 pts)

disabilityhealth.jhu.edu

Samuel et al. DHJO. 2022.
Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic
• Older adults with VI ↑ depressive symptoms

• Video calling, but not phone calling, mitigated this effect

• Facial expressions improve bonding by signaling active social engagement

“If the gap exists before a major health crisis, you better believe that that’s gonna become the Grand Canyon when something like this happens to us.”
“Food access was as scary to me, if not scarier than COVID.”
“The paratransit systems in my area will not deliver you or pick you up from a testing site. If you can’t get there on the bus or on your own, you can’t do it.
SUMMARY

↑ anxiety and depression
↑ loneliness and social isolation

• Stigma & discrimination
• Inaccessible environment
“Everyone, if they live long enough, will experience at least 1 eye condition.”
“Disability is part of being human. Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life.”
Accessibility is all our responsibility

- Shift from solely focusing on fixing VI to prevent or cure mental health issues
- Broaden to creating inclusive environments
- ↓ barriers to information, programs, facilities
- Access must be equally effective and integrated
Learn more!

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