

Evitable Blindness



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Opinion

The link between blindness and socioeconomic status has been established. Both in developed and developing world blindness has been associated with poverty. About 39 million people in the world are blind. Out of them about 80% are blind from evitable reasons. Two countries harbor about 42 % of blind people in world. Those are India and China with about 8 million blind people in each country. Even though China a larger blind population, India has more number of blind people per million persons (6.1 Vs 6.7) [1]. Its estimated that about 80 % of blindness is evitable. Frankly about 32 million people in world are not fortunate enough to see because they do not have enough money, or they are not supported by health care systems in their countries.

I would like to present a comparison of blindness statistics in a developed country: United states of America (USA) and a developing country with one of the highest number of blind people in world, India. In USA, 6,833,000 (2.7%) person, non-institutionalized ages 16 through 75+, reported to have a visual disability in 2015. Out of these, people in earning age group 16-64 years, 1,052,500 (29.0%) are below poverty line and about 497,200 (13.7%) are uninsured [2]. Major threats to eye health in North America include chronic conditions such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration, as well as refractive error [3]. Over the next 35 years, Varma and his colleagues project that the number of people with legal blindness in USA will increase by 21 percent each decade to 2 million by 2050 [4].

India alone has 25 % (8.8 Million) of all blind people in world [5]. About 90 percent of the world's visually impaired live in developing countries, and the reason appears to be an extreme dearth of eye doctors. While India needs about 115,000 optometrists, it has only about 40,000, largely because of regulation issues and a lack of training programs [6]. Most common causes of evitable blindness include refractory errors, cataract, trachoma and vitamin A deficiency.

Kirsten et al. speculated that the global direct health cost to eliminate avoidable blindness over a 10-year period from

2011 to 2020 is estimated at \$632 billion per year (2009 US\$). As countries already spend \$592 billion per annum on eye health, this represents additional investment of \$397.8 billion over 10 years, which is \$40 billion per year or \$5.80 per person for each year between 2010 and 2020. This is concentrated in high-income nations, which require 68% of the investment but comprise 16% of the world's inhabitants. For all other regions, the additional investment required is \$127 billion [7].

There is no shortage of money in world. With right intentions, resources should be directed to help the suffering humanity. To put things in perspective, B-2 Spirit, also known as the Stealth Bomber single plane costs 737 million dollars [8]. The price of 2 planes like that should be enough to eliminate all evitable blindness from developing world.

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