AN INVESTIGATION OF VISION PROBLEMS AND THE VISION CARE SYSTEM IN RURAL CHINA

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Abstract. This paper examines the prevalence of vision problems and the accessibility to and quality of vision care in rural China. We obtained data from 4 sources: 1) the National Rural Vision Care Survey; 2) the Private Optometrists Survey; 3) the County Hospital Eye Care Survey; and 4) the Rural School Vision Care Survey. The data from each of the surveys were collected by the authors during 2012. Thirty-three percent of the rural population surveyed self-reported vision problems. Twenty-two percent of subjects surveyed had ever had a vision exam. Among those who self-reported having vision problems, 34\% did not wear eyeglasses. Fifty-four percent of those with vision problems who had eyeglasses did not have a vision exam prior to receiving glasses. However, having a vision exam did not always guarantee access to quality vision care. Four channels of vision care service were assessed. The school vision examination program did not increase the usage rate of eyeglasses. Each county-hospital was staffed with three eye-doctors having one year of education beyond high school, serving more than 400,000 residents. Private optometrists often had low levels of education and professional certification. In conclusion, our findings shows that the vision care system in rural China is inadequate and ineffective in meeting the needs of the rural population sampled.

Keywords: vision problem, vision care, rural China