

## Barriers to Cataract Surgery in Peri-urban Regions of Eastern Nepal: An Experience at a Government Eye Department

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### ABSTRACT

**Key words:** Barriers, Cataract, Nepal, Surgery.

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We read the article by Ng SMS et al ‘**Barriers to Cataract Surgery in Peri-urban Regions of Eastern Nepal**’ (Ng et al., 2021) with great interest. First of all, I would like to congratulate the author and co-authors for embarking on research highlighting barriers to cataract surgery among people living in Morang and Sunsari districts of Province One, Nepal. We would like to add a few of our experiences while working in Koshi Hospital, the Eye Department, a tertiary government hospital in the capital of Province One Biratnagar.

Koshi Hospital is one of the oldest hospitals in Nepal, with 130 years old history, and has been providing eye care services for a long time with frequent ups and downs. (Koshi Hospital, 2022). The majority of the population of Morang and neighboring districts like Sunsari depend upon this hospital for their basic health issues.

We have been working in the Department of Ophthalmology of this hospital for the last five months. On average we are attending to 12.4 cases on a daily basis and among them, there

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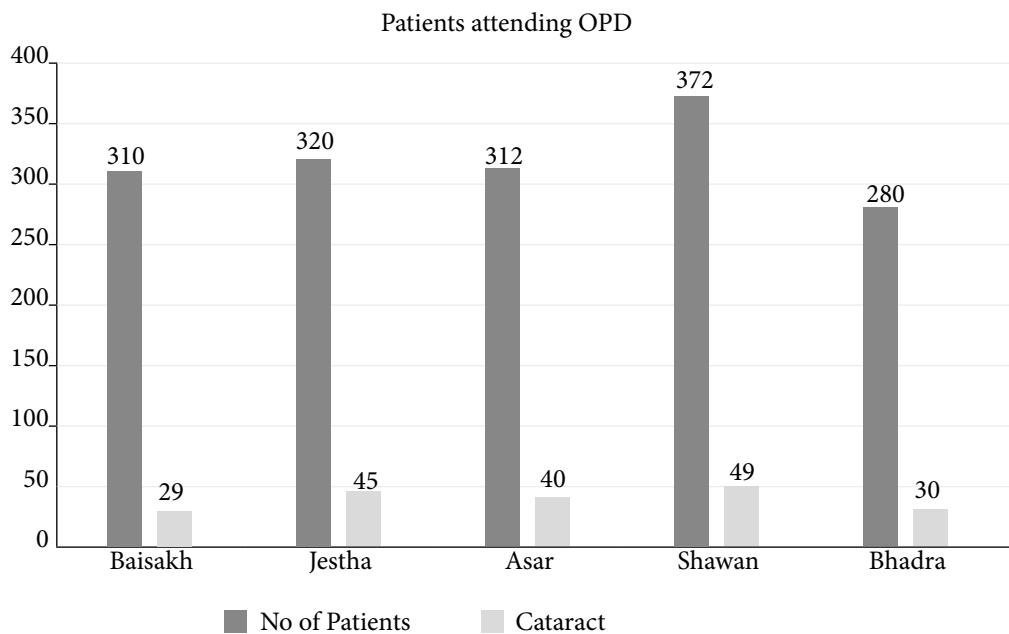
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**Figure 1: Bar Graph showing patients attending OPD in the last five months.**

are 1.6 cases of cataracts that need surgical intervention as shown in figure 1.

In our OPD we are continuously talking with our patients having cataracts regarding the delay in surgery, though it was not a questionnaire based on just a verbal conversation. We are getting almost the same replies from cataract patients as depicted in the study by Ng SMS et al.

#### **Barriers to cataract surgery among patients attending eye OPD of Koshi Hospital**

1. Cannot afford the treatment
2. Unaware of treatment
3. Hospital was too far away
4. Adequate vision in one eye
5. Fear of operation

6. Waiting for winter
7. Waiting for the cataract to mature
8. Felt that treatment was not necessary
9. Thinking eyeglass will do the work
10. No facility for cataract surgery in Koshi Hospital

Koshi Hospital, being a parent hospital in this region, many patients still depend upon this hospital facilities for their preliminary health check-ups. Looking back at the long history of Koshi Hospital, it was one of the earlier centers to start cataract surgery in the past in our country. Unfortunately, cataract surgery has not yet been resumed and it is a decade now. Hence, it is also proving to be a barrier for the people of this region.

Similarly, a screening camp was held on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022 at Shree Manasewa Ashram, Biratnagar, by Lions/Leos and its allied clubs of Morang and Sunsari districts with technical support from Birat Eye Hospital and Department of Ophthalmology, B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences. In this camp a total of 64 physically, mentally, and socially challenged patients' eyes were screened. Among them, there were 14 cases of cataracts requiring surgical intervention (Agrawal S, 2022). They were barred from cataract surgery because of their mental and social status. They can be operated on under sedation or general anesthesia which is not a routine means for cataract surgery.

Though a lot of giant eye hospitals are being run in this part of Nepal, still patients are deprived of routine eye care services like cataract surgery. So it's high time to integrate eye care services in government hospitals in a more scientific and holistic way. Lack of cataract surgery facilities here at Koshi Hospital Eye Department is also proving to be a barrier to cataract surgery in peri-urban regions of Eastern Nepal.



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