

RESEARCH NEWS

Worsening eyesight among US adults

JAMA 2012;308:2361-8

The prevalence of poor eyesight that can't be corrected with glasses or contact lenses has gone up in the US. The regular national survey conducted between 1999 and 2002 reported a prevalence of 1.4% (95% CI 1.2% to 1.6%) in adults over 20 years' old. By the 2005-08 survey, prevalence had risen to 1.7% (1.5% to 2.0%), a significant difference that extrapolates to an extra 700 000 US adults with visual acuity worse than 20/40 in the best performing eye.

Age, poverty, and longstanding diabetes were all associated with non-refractive visual impairment in these surveys. Because poverty did not increase between the surveys, and age groups were analysed separately, the authors suspect diabetes is at least

partly to blame for the nation's worsening eyesight. The proportion of adults reporting diabetes for at least 10 years rose from 2.8% to 3.6% between the surveys. The biggest relative increase occurred in people under 40 years (0.3% to 0.7%; $P=0.03$), who also reported one of the biggest increases in non-refractive visual impairment (0.6% to 1.0%; $P=0.09$).

The authors couldn't identify the causes of visual impairment in survey respondents, so they weren't able to explore the contribution made by retinopathy, cataract, glaucoma, and macular degeneration.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2012;345:e8392

© BMJ Publishing Group Ltd 2012