

Preface

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My initial interest in childhood blindness was triggered by the number of blind and visually handicapped children I encountered at St John Ophthalmic Hospital (SJOH), Jerusalem soon after commencing work there in 1985.

Data on the size of the problem in the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) was absent as also from its neighbouring countries at the time. The unique geopolitical and historical characteristics of each both WB and the GS, with its physical separation geographically after 1948 and the interrupted and constrained links between the two parts after 1976, together with the social, economic differences of the population could have left a different imprint on the pattern of eye disease in each.

The demographic characteristics of the population, the proximity of towns and villages to each other, especially in the GS, made full access to patients and their families feasible which, when combined with a well-established oral tradition of transmitting family history and genealogy throughout the generations, allowed large scale genealogical studies to be made of the recruited patients and families.

The data was initially compiled on special protocol forms and later transferred laboriously onto a database in the UK. Later still it was adopted in line with modified WHO criteria on visual acuities and anatomical and aetiological classifications of conditions

This work has focused on two aspects of childhood blindness; the first is the epidemiology of visual disability and its causations, including the degree of inbreeding and consanguinity; the second is clinical, focusing on the commonest conditions encountered. Detailed clinical findings are spared for separate publications.

The body of the book, therefore, is divided into six parts;

PART I: INTRODUCTION

This includes five introductory chapters on the history, geography and demography of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and some brief information on the demography of the Middle East.

Chapter 1: Aims and objectives of the study,
Chapter 2: A historical preamble on the history of blindness in Palestine and the Arab world,
Chapter 3: Epidemiological methods
Chapter 4: History and geography of Palestine
Chapter 5: The demography of the Arab world with emphasis on the Palestinians.

PART II: LITERATURE SEARCH

This comprises four chapters of literature search of related epidemiological data on:

Chapter 6: Epidemiology of childhood blindness worldwide
Chapter 7: Epidemiology of childhood blindness in the Middle East and North Africa (formerly called the Middle East Crescent),
Chapter 8: Prevention of blindness and VISION 2020.
Chapter 9: Consanguinity.

PART III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 10: Methodologies

PART IV: EPIDEMIOLOGY OF BLINDNESS

Results of the epidemiology of blindness:

Chapter 11: Summary of the results

Chapter 12: Patients and families

Chapter 13: Visual acuities

Chapter 14: Anatomical classification

Chapter 15: Aetiological classification

Chapter 16: Marriage patterns and consanguinity

Chapter 17: Discussion

PART V: CLINICAL CONDITIONS

Chapter 18: Clinical conditions: Epidemiology,
clinical features and discussion

PART VI: APPENDICES

Appendices includes plates, tables of the family sequence in all the families studied and family data and information together with the protocol used and guidance protocol written for nurses, social workers and paramedic.