Commentary: Get your hairdresser’s visual needs right to get your hairstyle right!

Visual task analysis at the workplace helps establish visual standards based on the visual demands required for the job profile. This specialty of Occupational Optometry which represents a core component of occupational healthcare can enhance the productivity of individuals at their workplaces, also ensuring that the workplace is safe and comfortable.

In establishing visual standards, the following two approaches are used as frameworks to establish visual demands and visual competence. Grundy’s[1] famous visual task analysis nomogram proposes a visual acuity standard that is twice the level of minimum visual acuity required for a task estimated using the nomogram based on working distance and the size of visual details pertinent to the task. Bailey[2] has proposed a five-step approach to determining vision standards that involves choosing a method to grade job competence, determining the required visual factors to perform the relevant tasks, estimating vision standards for each visual factor, correlate the visual performance of competence vs incompetent employees, and finally comparing the grading of visual performance to job competency.

Unorganized sector in India encompasses almost 93% of the working population.[3] Rarely, visual demand, visual abilities, and ocular conditions of the workers in the unorganized sectors have been explored. In India, the pre-employment vision standards for Goldsmith were recently established which strikingly pointed out the fact that almost one-half of the study sample did not possess the required visual competence.[4] Studies like this do indicate the gaps in the existing literature and emphasize the need to establish vision standards for various job profiles in the unorganized industry. Hair-dressing and Salon Industry in India is one such sector valued at $3.5 billion as of 2015 and grows 20% annually, where almost 75% of the market is composed of independent stores and small to medium-sized chains.[5] Hair-dressers have unique visual demands that are due to the intense visual tasks that they are engaged in.

The study by Janani et al. (2021)[6] has explored into understanding the visual demands, and abilities of hairdressers to propose vision standards using the frameworks proposed above. In addition, the authors have also conducted comprehensive eye examination to understand the visual profile and common eye diseases. The salient findings from this research paper include the visual acuity cut-off of 6/18 for distance, and near visual acuity cut-off N12 for 40 cm working distance, and N15 for 55 cm working distance being proposed as visual acuity standards for hair-dressers. The paper also proposes vision standards for other relevant visual parameters including amplitude of accommodation, stereopsis, and visual fields. Hair-dressers
are prone for occupational hazards due to exposure to micro-dust and chemicals used in the hair-care process, musculoskeletal disorders due to prolonged standing and shoulder and neck movements. This paper does bring out the common visual and musculoskeletal symptoms experienced by hairdressers, and almost 43% of the study subjects have reported some visual disturbances pertinent to the job, along with visual symptoms such as itching and irritation of eyes, and a wide variety of musculoskeletal symptoms encountered by 35% of the study sample.

This research work also points out the unmet eye and vision care needs of hair-dressers. Almost 67% of the study sample required either new spectacles or a change in the existing prescription, with more than 80% of the spectacle prescriptions prescribed towards managing Presbyopia. Almost 17.7% required referral for management of ocular conditions such as cataract, Glaucoma suspect, retina, optic disc, and corneal related pathologies. Despite optimal refractive correction, the job competency based on the required visual acuity standards was not met by 23 hair-dressers.

When spectacles were prescribed, almost 90% of the hair-dressers reported compliance with 81% of them appreciating the improved visual ability at the workplace. All these findings point out to the need for more eyecare professionals to work towards meeting the unmet eyecare needs of workers in the unorganized sectors. This would ensure making the workplace safer and efficient through creating visual competency standards and profile, raising awareness about occupational eye-related hazards, thus empowering employers and employees to optimize the work environment accordingly. The study also brings out the need to establish vision standards for various job profiles in the unorganized sector throughout India. Further studies are required to understand the vision-related quality of life and the efficacy of interventions and awareness provided in a longitudinal timeframe.

Jameel Rizwana Hussaindeen
Lecturer, Optometry Unit, Department of Surgical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of the West Indies,
Preysal, Couva, Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago

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