

Public willingness for accessing teleconsultation services for eye care

Dear Editor,

Teleconsultation (TC) evolved mainly to reduce distance barriers and to provide quality medical care.^[1,2] With the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety dimension for the patient and the practitioner also got included. While approximately 78% of ophthalmologists are utilizing TC after COVID-19,^[3] it is not known if patients would be willing to utilize these services. We undertook an online survey for electronic gadget usage and as a part of it also wanted to understand the public's willingness toward accessing teleconsultation services. Only the latter results are discussed here within the scope of this letter. The study protocol was approved by the institutional review board and was in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Table 1 summarizes the development of the survey.

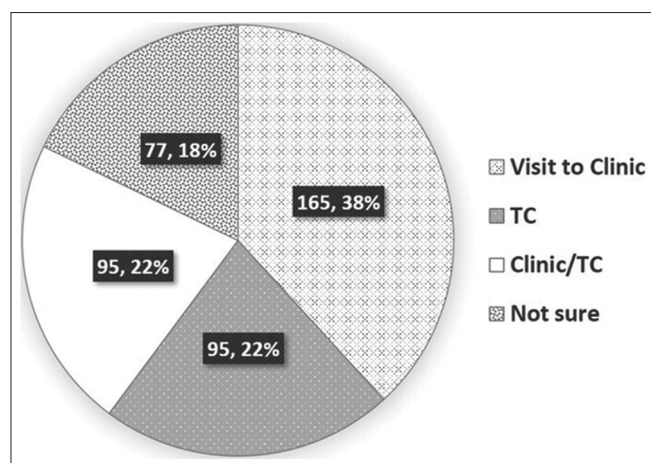


Figure 1: Pie chart demonstrating the types of consultation services preferred by the participants during the survey

The survey was completed by 432 participants (mean age \pm standard deviation = 26.06 \pm 13.92 years, 230 females and 307 adults (>16 years)); 393 participants were from India and the rest were from other countries.

Through our survey, we found that 44% of people were willing for teleconsultation for eye care, of which half of them (22%) only wanted a teleconsultation [Fig. 1]. A little over one-third of patients still preferred a physical consultation. This pattern was similar between participants in India and other countries, even with a small sample size in the latter group. Future studies can explore the barriers for uptake to improve the teleconsultation services.

Teleconsultation is the second most preferred choice among the survey participants. This reveals the familiarity and increasing popularity of this mode of eye care. In years to come, teleconsultation services have the potential to become the major healthcare delivery system. This will warrant changes in clinical management policy and measures for planning timely appointments, dynamic screening tools, and providing cost-effective treatments.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest

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Table 1: Summary of the methodology

Description	Survey report
Survey development	Literature review followed by a discussion between four optometrists to finalize the contents of the questionnaire
Number and nature of items	9 close-ended questions
Reliability	Not determined
Mode of survey	Internet-based (Google forms), anonymous
Survey period	October 2020-January 2021
Sample frame	Open survey: School/college-going students and working professionals in India and few other countries
Target population	School/college going students and working professionals
Recruitment process	Emails and social media (such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Facebook) accounts of LV Prasad Eye Institute; reminder sent 4 times
Participation	Voluntary participation
Survey administration	Sequential questions administered using Google forms
Informed consent	E-consent. Parents gave consent and filled the form for children (<16 years of age).
Number of screens	5
Review step	Review with back button; no alteration possible once the response is submitted
Data capturing	Automatic conversion into a Google spreadsheet
Data analysis	Descriptive statistics and Chi-square test
Software for statistical analysis	SPSS Version 20

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