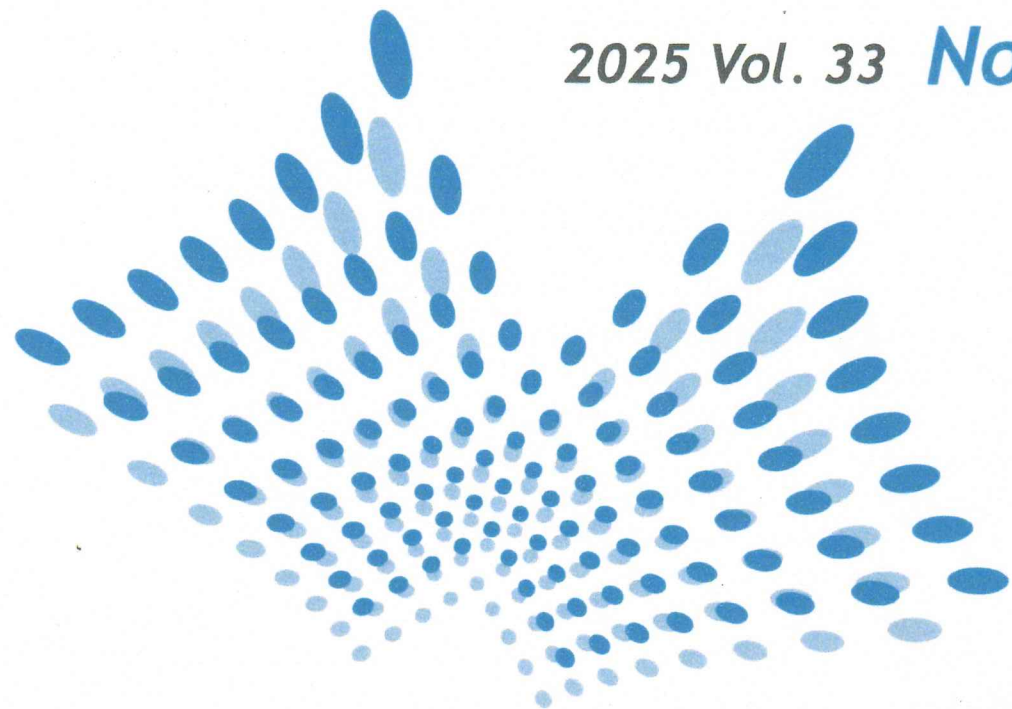


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Perspective

Current status and countermeasures for childhood myopia in Japan: a look toward preventing future visual impairment

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The number of children with myopia has been increasing markedly worldwide in recent years. By 2050, it is estimated that more than half of the world's population will have myopia, and approximately 10% of the global population will have severe myopia. One of the most important causes of myopia, besides the influence of heredity, is reduced outdoor activity.

It is therefore important to educate and practice correct lifestyle habits to prevent the onset and progression of myopia during childhood and maintain good eyesight throughout life.

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Key words: myopia in children, near work time and viewing distance, screen time, outdoor activity time, prevention of future visual impairment

I Introduction

The number of children with myopia is increasing worldwide due to changes in people's living environment. According to a systematic review by the Brien Holden Vision Institute, by 2050, it is estimated that the number of people with myopia will reach 4.9 billion, which is more than half the world's population, and 940 million people, about 10% of the global population, will have severe myopia¹⁾. In particular, the prevalence of myopia among young people in East Asian countries, including Japan, has reportedly increased rapidly to nearly 90% over the past half century, and myopia has also become more severe²⁾. Despite this extremely worrying situation, the eye condition of "myopia" is all too common and is generally not viewed as a "disease"; in many cases, it is thought that it can be corrected with glasses or contact lenses. However, even mild myopia is a risk factor for future serious eye diseases that cause visual impairment and can lead to blindness, such as glaucoma, retinal detachment, and macular degeneration. A large-scale epidemiological study

also showed that the risk for serious eye diseases increases at an accelerated rate as the degree of myopia worsens³⁾. Taking comprehensive measures to prevent the progression of myopia in school-aged children has therefore been proposed as an urgent social need to maintain good eye health and visual function throughout the lives of children, who live in an era where lifespans can be up to 100 years, instead of making efforts to address myopia after these children become adults¹⁾. Due to these circumstances, research and national measures are being carried out around the world to address this important issue.

The Chinese Ministry of Education launched a plan to reduce the number of citizens with myopia as a national policy in response to a statement by President Xi Jinping in 2018, who said "we must protect children's eye health and ensure their bright future"⁴⁾. The Taiwan Student Vision Care Program (TSVCP) has been implemented in Taiwan, and the National Myopia Prevention Program (NMPP) has been implemented in Singapore, showing an effect in improving the prevalence of myopia⁵⁾. Meanwhile, in Japan, the increase in severe myopia and the risk of serious complications have not really been fully recognized by the Japanese government and educational settings, and there has been a lack of awareness of the problem and crisis.

In light of this, a survey of the actual situation of myopia in children has been carried out since fiscal year 2020 by the Japan Society of School Health, a non-profit organization, under the initiative of the Japanese Ministry of Education,

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