

Sight loss link to low income and poor quality of life in older people

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Findings from a study released today by Thomas Pocklington Trust and carried out at The University of Manchester, showed that older people in the poorest fifth of the population had an almost 80% higher risk of developing severe visual impairment than those from the wealthiest fifth². This is compounded by the finding that deterioration in vision over a two year period was related to decreases in income, quality of life and social activity. People whose vision deteriorated from good or very good to fair or poor were found to have levels of depression that increased by 29% and a fall in income levels of 19%, compared to the changes for those whose vision remained stable.

This report uses data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, which follows a large number of [older people](#) over time. It includes questions on vision and so provides an opportunity to study what puts people at risk of, and the consequences of, [sight loss](#).

Previous findings from studies of the same group of people⁴ have demonstrated that:

having fair or poor vision was associated with a greater chance of having low quality of life, poor psychological well-being and symptoms relating to depression, and this was in major part due to the health, economic and social inequalities they experience.

A separate study⁵ funded by Pocklington revealed that during their working life, people with sight loss can face at least 25% higher costs for everyday living than those who are fully sighted. The study, carried out

by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University, found that even when people have some vision, sight loss affects so many aspects of life that additional costs increase the weekly budget accepted as the Minimum Income Standard by over £50, as compared to a sighted adult.

Dr Catherine Dennison, Head of Health and Wellbeing Research, says "The evidence around the links between low income and sight loss is a huge cause for concern. These new findings show that older people with sight loss are more likely to be poor when they lose their sight, to face higher costs of living as a result of sight loss, and to experience falling income after they lose their sight. The evidence of the connections between low income, sight loss and high costs of living points to the need for action to tackle this. "

Professor James Nazroo, the lead researcher on the Pocklington funded study of ELSA data and Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester⁶ has emphasised the importance of recognising links between poverty, sight loss and eye health: "Sight loss carries major consequences for wellbeing, financial circumstances and quality of life generally and it is most commonly experienced by those older people who are already most vulnerable in society. It is crucial to ensure that those who are most vulnerable have good access to eye checks and treatments and that they receive appropriate financial and social support."

Provided by University of Manchester

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