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**Prevalence of refractive errors in children
of Bope-Poddala Health Unit area in the district of Galle**

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The normal refractive state of the eye is called emmetropia, in which the parallel rays of light entering the eye are focused on to the retina whilst the accommodation is suspended. Deviation from emmetropia is called refractive error or ametropia. Refractive errors lead to poor vision and in children, it may cause a permanent visual defect called amblyopia. The objective of this study was to assess the magnitude of the problem of refractive errors among children

Visual acuity screening was done in all children of 3-14 years of age in the Bope – Poddala Health Unit area in Galle district of Southern Sri Lanka. Refractive errors were diagnosed after subjecting the positive cases to refraction test.

Visual screening was done on 5649 pre-school and school children (87.8% and 12.2%) aged 3 – 14 years in two stages. Of them, 52.1% were males. Majority were Sinhala (86.4%) while 13.3% were Muslims. Visual defects were found in 9.7% (including refractive errors and other diseases). The detected cases were subjected to confirmation by proper refraction test. Failure rate for referral was 1.9%. Refractive errors were found in 6.2% (5.8% males; 6.6% females).

Table 1 shows the age specific prevalence of refractive errors.

Age group (years)	Number examined	Prevalence of refractive errors
3 – 4	220	2.3%
4 – 5	364	5.5%
5 – 6	620	7.6%
6 – 7	634	7.7%
7 – 8	555	8.6%
8 – 9	611	4.3%

Age group (years)	Number examined	Prevalence of refractive errors
9 – 10	564	5.3%
10 – 11	561	6.8%
11 – 12	565	6.7%
12 – 13	545	5.0%
13 – 14	410	5.6%
Total	5,649	6.2%

It is concluded that a fairly high prevalence of refractive errors in Sri Lankan children indicate the need of proper visual screening at early ages to prevent further visual damage due to non correction.

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