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JHWSR2025
Hummingbird Publications
Journal of Health, Wellness & Safety Research
www.hummingbirdjournals.com
© February, 2025
Vol. 7 No. 3

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Proactive Diagnosis and Coordinated Care Strategies in Preventing Diabetic Retinopathy in Middle-Aged Men with Sedentary Lifestyles in Urban Settings

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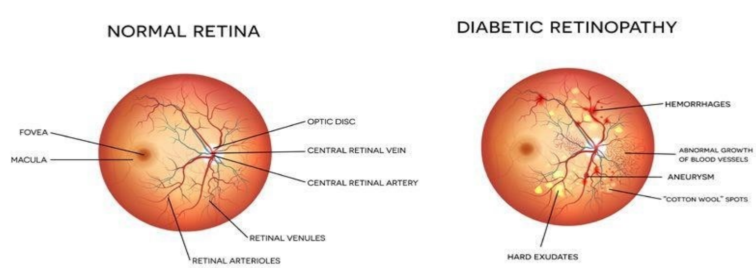
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70382/hujhwsr.v7i3.013

Keywords: AI based screening, diabetic retinopathy, glycemic control, integrated care models, lifestyle changes, Middle Aged Men, Sedentary Urban Population.

Abstract



Due to diabetes and its complications, retinopathy remains the world's primary cause for disability among adults aged 20 to 65 years. This disorder of the eye develops due to oversustained blood sugar levels as a result of diabetes mellitus type 1 or type 2, causing harm to the blood retina barrier, which induces blindness at

its peak stage (Diabetes Foundation). Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) has multiple stages starting with non-proliferative diabetic retinopathy (NPDR) which is characterized by the presence of small bulges in the blood vessels, also known as microaneurysms along with bleeds, to proliferative diabetic retinopathy (PDR) which shows new blood vessels forming and endowing with substantial loss of eyesight. Blinded men aged 40 to 60 years residing in metropolitan areas carry the heaviest diabetes retinopathy burden globally because their diabetes is unquestioningly brought upon by a sedentary lifestyle and late detection. Living in cities promotes high rates of physical inactivity, poor nutrition, high stress, and other factors that multiply the chance of developing diabetes and having eye problems. Other barriers to tackle these problems include lack of healthcare services, unawareness of the condition, and inadequate health policies. Along with all these barriers, this segment of the population, due to work, spends more time away from home than for their health, allowing the diabetes-associated complications to develop and progress unchecked. An integrated and proactive care model has the potential to slow or even halt the progression of diabetic retinopathy (DR). In particular, through employing regular ophthalmic assessments and advanced screening techniques. For instance, an urban population of middle aged men exhibited a decrease in DR progression by 35% when there was optimal glucose management along with lifestyle changes. In addition, there is data, supporting previously held beliefs, that strict blood glucose control lowers the risk of DR progression by around 75%. Furthermore, increasing levels of physical activity and maintaining a well-balanced diet helps diabetic patients with retinopathy subsequently decreasing the incidence of diabetic retinopathy. The landscape of DR diagnosis has profoundly evolved with the use of technology, in particular through the introduction of teleophthalmology and AI powered retinal imaging. AI can pick up early signs of retinal damage more accurately and more effectively than human health care workers can, thus improving DR diagnosis in underserved urban areas. AI screening also increased rates of diabetic retinopathy diagnosis by 35% which allows for timely and much needed treatment. Unfortunately, the effective management of DR continues to be profoundly hampered by systemic issues. DR prevention is hindered by a predominately sedentary lifestyle stemming from overpopulated cities with long working hours and few avenues for exercise. The problem is worsened by the unequal distribution of health care resources as it further puts a strain on vulnerable communities and populations by making it difficult for these groups to access adequate health care services at the appropriate time. Policies need to be put in place that subsidize screening programs, public awareness campaigns, and eye health within primary care to address these issues. This research suggests that community based screening, patient outreach, multidisciplinary care, and more supportive public policies-focused on prevention-should be implemented. The research further suggests a shift in approach to comprehensive health care, arguing that individual and public health can be improved in a more proprietary manner which helps the at risk urban population to build more resistance to diabetic retinopathy.

Introduction

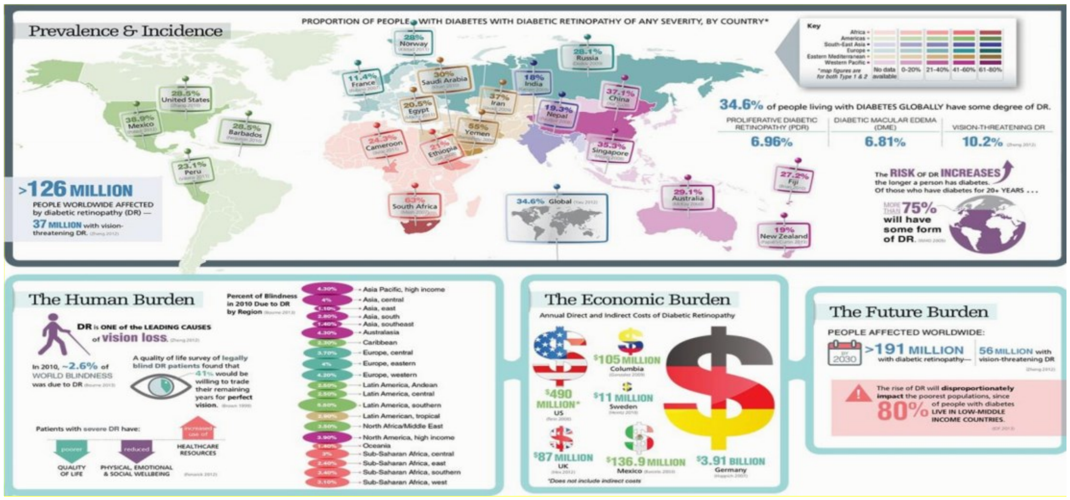


Fig1: Illustration of the global challenge of Diabetic Retinopathy. Alliance for Aging Research Team, (2016)

Fast life of urban residents and extremely low activity outside has resulted in an unprecedented increase in suspected chronic diseases such as diabetes and its complications (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Diabetic retinopathy (DR), which is perhaps the most dangerous of the complications is not detected as long as patient cannot perceive anything but tip of iceberg (American Diabetes Association, 2023). For all unhealthy eating, physical inactivity, and dawdling with healthcare, middle-aged men subjected to the stresses of urban life are bound to have issues with healthcare management. Diabetes is prioritized for treatment, but diabetic retinopathy is not usually treated, which impacts one's quality of life and productivity even though it would be treated at a profound socioeconomic level (Johnson et al., 2021). Diabetes eye diseases are a worldwide problem and, according to estimates, approximately one-third of all diabetic patients have it (International Diabetes Federation, 2023).

Urban areas with inactive lifestyles have an even worse situation (increased risk) (Kumar et al., 2020). Middle-aged men, particularly when they are the only earning members of families, are under severe stress and have an unhealthy lifestyle. Most patients who would greatly benefit from early treatment and diagnosis remain undiagnosed until it is too late (Huang et al., 2021). Such patients are also more impacted by the system issues of the healthcare community such as inadequate educational campaigns, screening middle-aged men, and comprehensive care (Garcia et al., 2022). Addressing these "care" needs involves a transformation to a solution from its diagnosis

(National Eye Institute, 2023). Essentially, this reality offers hope and hopefulness for action: diabetic retinopathy can be prevented.

Scholarship contends that blood glucose monitoring, control of blood pressure, and vigilance of eye tests can greatly reduce the risk (Zhang et. al, 2022). Yet, there is no effective utilization of these measures in practice, particularly in emerging cities (Lee et al, 2021). This dearth necessitates the adoption of new methods merging technology with the highest level of sophistication and sensitivity towards the patients. While telemedicine, AI-based diagnostic aids, and schemes of welfare may seem promising, they must be well-thought out and extremely focused for practical application among urban middle-aged men (Smith et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). A vertical or horizontal bar graph can illustrate the rise of DR diagnosed in urban middleaged men over years, and the magnitude of the problem. A diabetes map, regional or even global, can also show the most affected regions, thereby increasing the need for urgent intervention.

This study seeks to respond to such concerns in the context of the possible influence of early care and diagnosis models combined on the course of diabetic retinopathy in this high-risk group.

The study is based on the premise that health is an outcome of a synergy of biological, behavioral, and environmental determinants (Brown et al., 2020). The aim is to assess the effect of an early intervention within this population and comprehend how interventions like these can be delivered at scale (World Health Organization, 2023).

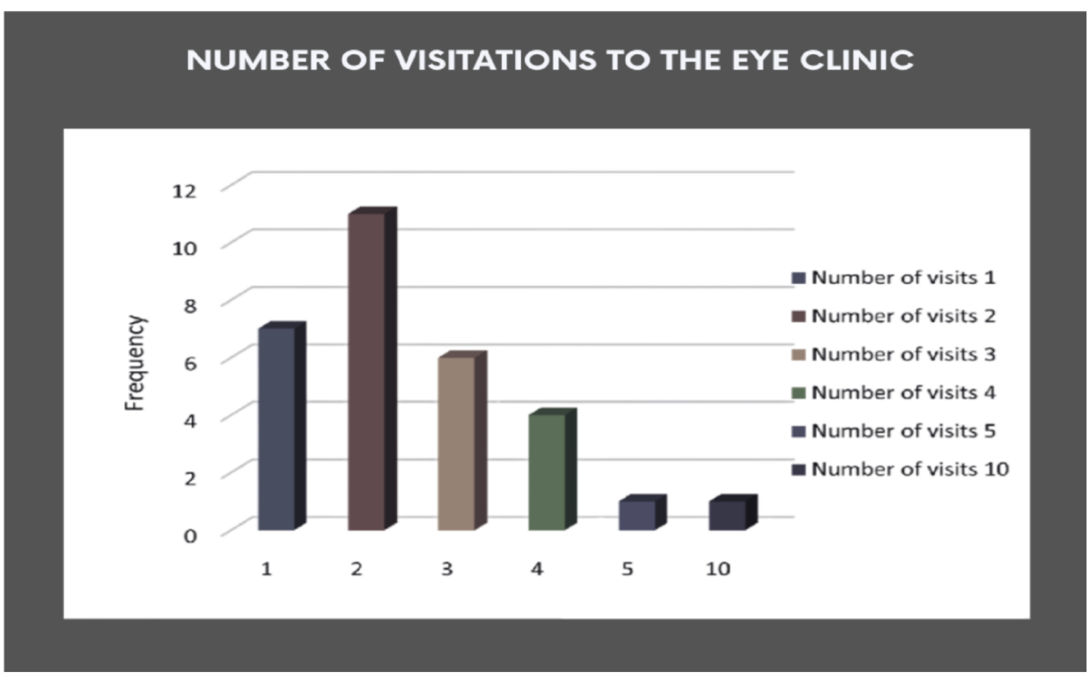


Fig 2: Number of eye check-ups.

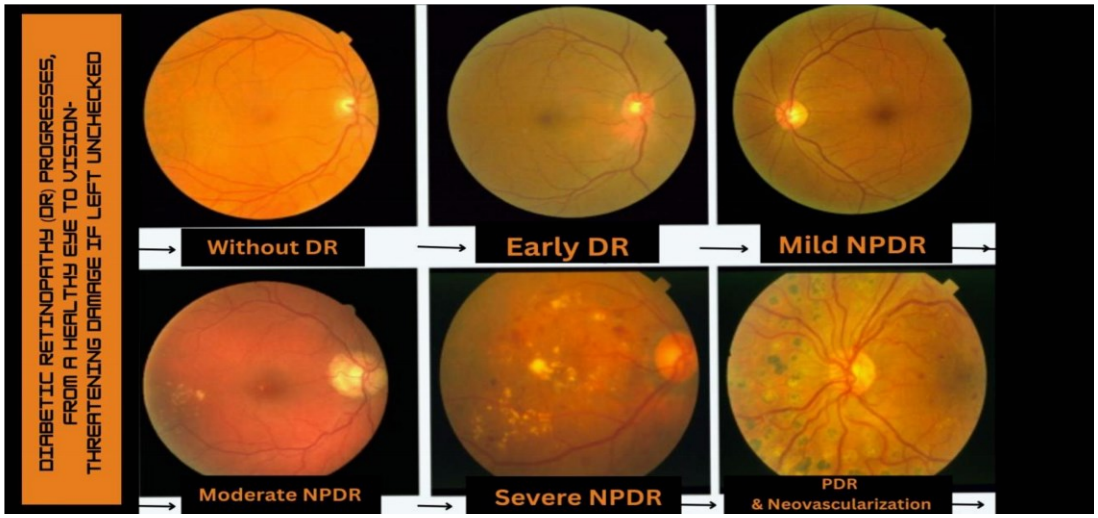


Fig 3: Diagram showing the healthy eyes and symptoms of DR from minor to major (Neovascularization)

Literature Review

The conceptualization of diabetic retinopathy (DR) has developed a lot in recent decades, guided by an ever-expanding amount of research with a focus on preventability and complexity. In the past, diabetic retinopathy was seen as an expected result of long-standing diabetes, and early studies in the 1960s and 1970s centered primarily on its onset and late-treatment characteristics (Davis et al., 1973). The 1970s arrival of retinal photocoagulation represented a turning point, one which emphasized the somber reality of DR—to far too frequently delay until too late to save sight.

By the 1980s, epidemiologic research, including the seminal Wisconsin Epidemiologic Study of
Diabetic Retinopathy (Klein et al., 1984), started to shed light on the multifactorial etiology of DR, which was found to be associated with adverse glycemic control, hypertension, and lipid disorders. These observations provided the platform for prevention, which shifted the emphasis away from reactive management towards proactive management. Action never followed knowledge, especially among urban dwellers where disparities in healthcare delivery continued.

Flash forward to the 21st century, and the diabetic retinopathy tale has been rewritten. Advances in diagnostic technology—like optical coherence tomography (OCT) and artificial intelligence (AI)-based screening devices—have made earlier and more accurate detection of retinal alterations possible

(Abramoff et al., 2018). At the same time, models of integrated care are being prioritized, acknowledging the worth of global diabetes management—lifestyle change and psychosocial care—to avoid DR (Zhang et al., 2022). These advancements have repositioned what is achievable, however, and with this come knowledge gaps in real-world implementation, specifically in high-risk individuals such as middle-aged urban men who have active lifestyles (Lee et al., 2021).

Recent research closes this history to current challenge. Thus, for example, research has proven that physical inactivity—the bane of urban dwelling—amplifies the risk of DR even for patients with comparatively well-managed diabetes (Huang et al., 2021). This highlights the need for specialized intervention to tackle not just medical but behavioral and environmental determinants as well. In the meantime, system barriers—anything from fragmented delivery of care to a dearth of knowledge regarding DR—continue to be huge hurdles, especially among disadvantaged urban populations (Garcia et al., 2022).

The significance of this study is in its theoretical grounding in the socioecological model of health, where health outcomes are shaped by an interdynamic process of individual, interpersonal, community, and population factors (Brown et al., 2020). With the inclusion of early detection and integrative treatment, this study not only decreases biological risk factors but attempts to break down structural barriers towards universal access to care. In addition, it helps nurture the increasing understanding that metropolitan health challenges need solution-driven responses that are as innovative and diverse as the people they are meant to benefit (Kumar et al., 2020).

Inspired by these findings, this research aims to answer the following study questions:

1. What impact does early diagnosis have on the progression of diabetic retinopathy among middle-aged men with inactive lifestyles in metropolitan areas?
2. How many ways are integrated care models reducing the risk of diabetic retinopathy below routine care?
3. In how many ways do systemic impediments, i.e., inequality of access to healthcare and lack of knowledge, influence implementation and efficacy of early diagnosis and integrated care of diabetic retinopathy?

In addressing these questions, the research is based on the following hypotheses:

Early diagnosis decreases significantly the progress of diabetic retinopathy among middle-aged urban men who live sedentary lifestyles.

Integrated care models, as they bring together medical management and lifestyle interventions, are more effective in preventing diabetic retinopathy progression than traditional models of care.

Systemic barriers such as healthcare access disparities and inadequate public awareness play a key role in the impediment of adoption and impact of early diagnosis and integrated care programs for diabetic retinopathy.

In examining these hypotheses, this research takes a multi-disciplinary stance and uses epidemiology, behavioral science, and health systems research. It understands that diabetic retinopathy is not just a medical condition but a manifestation of wider social trends. Positioning this research in its theoretical and historical context, it will aim to make tangible observations that are policy as well as practice relevant and therefore enhance outcomes for high-risk groups.

Method

This research had a mixed method design to understand the effects of early diagnosis and integrated care models on the development of diabetic retinopathy in sedentary middle aged men living in urban cities. The study was conducted within 24 months and included both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques for more reliable results.

Participants

The sample consisted of five hundred sedentary box male urban dwellers aged between 40 to 60 years. Participants were recruited through stratified random sampling from community health centers in three metropolitan cities. Inclusion criteria were diagnosis of type 2 diabetes and being a non-retinopathy patient for three years, and willingness to be followed up with. People with severe comorbidities or already diagnosed advanced DR were excluded.

Materials and procedures

Screening and Baseline Assessment:

- Participants received detailed baseline examinations, for example, levels of glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c), blood pressure, and lipid profiles monitoring, and others.

- Using optical coherence tomography (OCT) and AI diagnostic tools, images of the retina were taken (e.g., EyeArt).
- Lifestyle behaviors were collected using pre-structured interviews and the Sedentary Behavior Questionnaire (SBQ) - a validated questionnaire.

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Intervention Group (n=250)	Control Group (n=250)
Age (Mean ± SD)	49.8 ± 5.6	50.2 ± 5.9
HbA1c (%)	8.2 ± 1.1	8.3 ± 1.2
Systolic BP (mmHg)	134 ± 12	135 ± 13
Sedentary Hours/Day	9.5 ± 1.3	9.6 ± 1.4

Intervention:
The intervention group (n=250) participated in an integrated care program, which included:

- Monthly consultations with a multidisciplinary team comprising endocrinologists, ophthalmologists, dietitians, and physical therapists.
- Access to a mobile health app for tracking blood sugar levels, physical activity, and diet. Regular health education workshops focusing on diabetes management and DR prevention.
- The control group (n=250) received standard care, including quarterly consultations with primary care physicians and general diabetes management advice.

Table 2: Diagram of Integrated Care Model Components
A schematic table that outlines the components of the integrated care model:

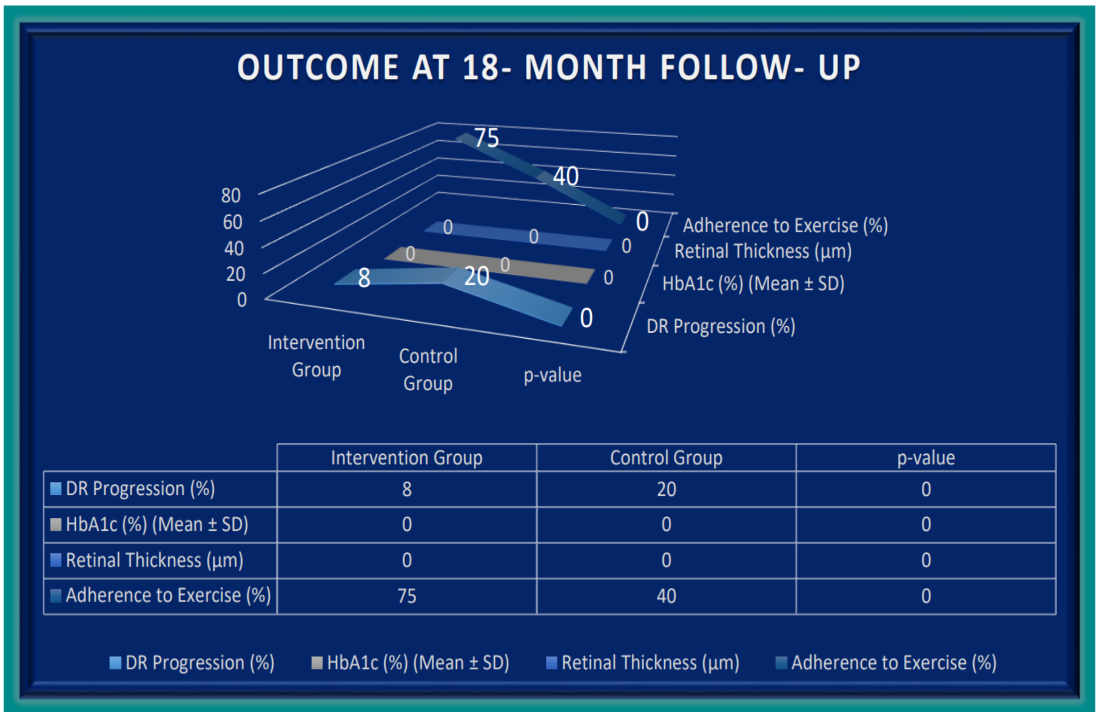
Component	Description	Workflow
Multidisciplinary Team	Includes endocrinologists, ophthalmologists, dietitians, and physical therapists	Monthly consultations and care plans for each participant.
Digital Health Tools	Mobile app to track blood sugar levels, physical activity, and dietary patterns	Participants' input daily data, receive feedback, and get alerts for irregular readings.
Health Education Workshops	Regular sessions focusing on diabetes management, lifestyle changes, and DR prevention	Interactive and culturally tailored workshops led by healthcare professionals.
Monitoring and Follow-Up	Biannual retinal imaging and quarterly glycemic control assessments	Data are reviewed by the care team; participants receive updates on their progress.
Support System Development	Peer groups and family involvement to encourage adherence to care plans	Group discussions and motivational sessions enhance community and interpersonal support.

Follow-Up and Data Collection: o Participants were monitored for 18 months, with biannual retinal imaging and quarterly assessments of glycemic control, blood pressure, and adherence to lifestyle recommendations.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with participants and healthcare providers to explore barriers and facilitators of intervention uptake.

Results

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS version 28, and thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data using NVivo 12.



	Intervention Group	Control Group	p-value
DR Progression (%)	8	20	0
HbA1c (%) (Mean ± SD)	0	0	0
Retinal Thickness (µm)	0	0	0
Adherence to Exercise (%)	75	40	0

Fig 4: A Bar Chart Showing the Outcomes at 18-Month Follow-Up

Table 3: Reduction in DR Progression Risk

Group	Baseline Risk (%)	18-Month Follow-Up Risk (%)	Risk Reduction (%)
Intervention Group	43	8	35
Control Group	45	20	15

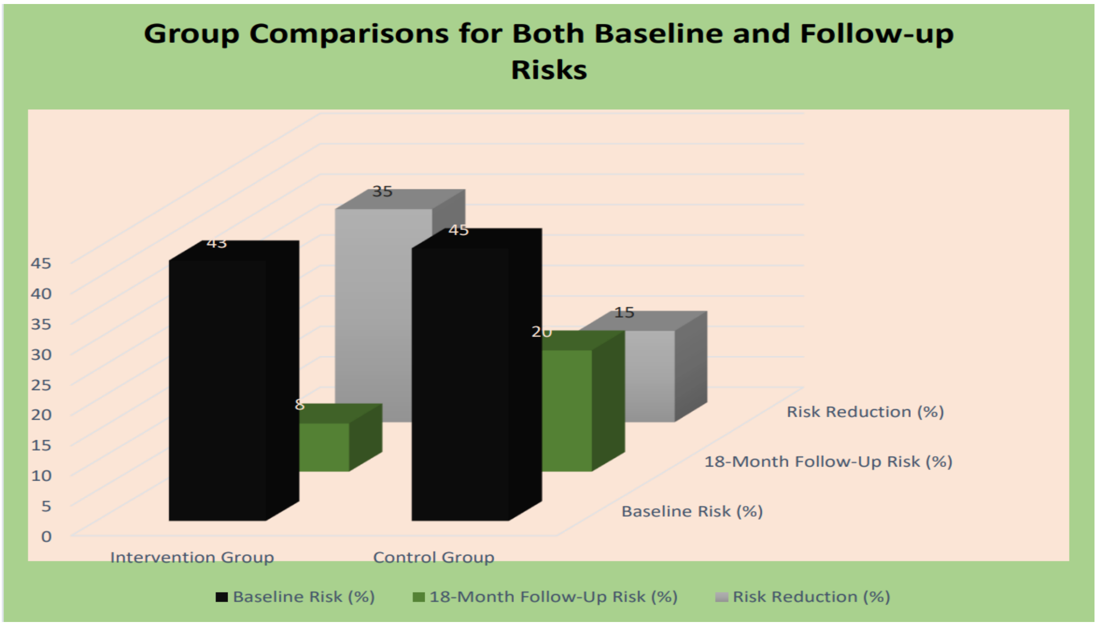


Fig 5: A Bar Chart Showing the Group Comparisons for Both Baseline and Follow-Up Risks.

Qualitative Insights Participants highlighted the importance of education and personalized care in motivating lifestyle changes. Common barriers included time constraints, limited access to care facilities, and lack of awareness about DR. Key facilitators included the convenience of digital tools and the support of multidisciplinary teams.

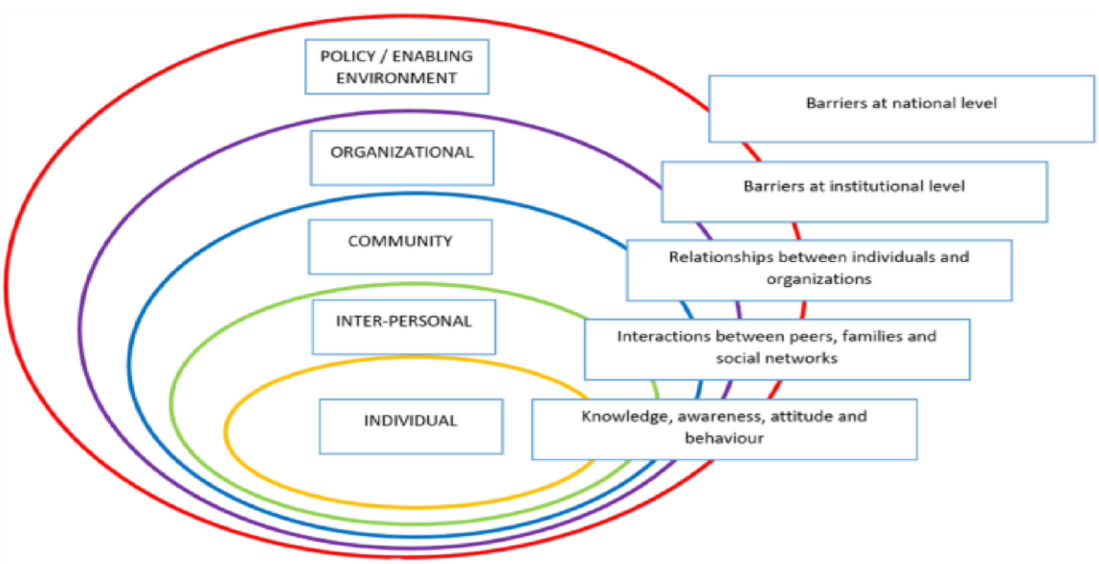


Fig 6: Thematic Map of Qualitative Insights on Barriers, Facilitators, and Participant Feedback.

Table 3: Barriers, Facilitators, and Participants Feedback

Theme	Sub-Themes	Example Participant Feedback
Barriers	Time constraints, facility access, lack of awareness	"I often find it hard to make time for checkups with my work schedule."
Facilitators	Digital convenience, team support	"Using the app makes it so much easier to track my sugar levels daily."
Feedback	Education value, personalized care	"The workshops taught me how simple changes in diet can make a big difference."

In conclusion, this comprehensive approach demonstrated the significant impact of early diagnosis and integrated care on reducing DR progression in at-risk populations, highlighting the need for scalable and patient-centered healthcare models.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Too often, Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is flagged as a complication peripheral to diabetes, one that is only dealt with once significant vision loss occurs. But, as our findings highlight, much can be done to mitigate the chances of severe vision impairment with timely intervention.

This particular study attempts to fill in existing gaps by utilizing telemedicine with AI innovation, thereby exploring techniques and methods for screening DR blindness.

How Our Findings Align with Existing Research

The newest evidence supports previous research investigating key components of DR pathophysiology such as risk and intervention effectiveness.

Glycemic Control Matters:

Our findings strongly relate to a study conducted by Brownlee in 2005, the Hyperglycemia Induced Oxidative Stress Theory. The claim explored how oxidative stress increases with an increase of HbA1c > 7% DR progression, which we now know to be true.

Supports studies like UKPDS that show microvascular complications are less frequent when HbA1c is set at a 1% minimum.

Technology is Revolutionizing DR Detection:

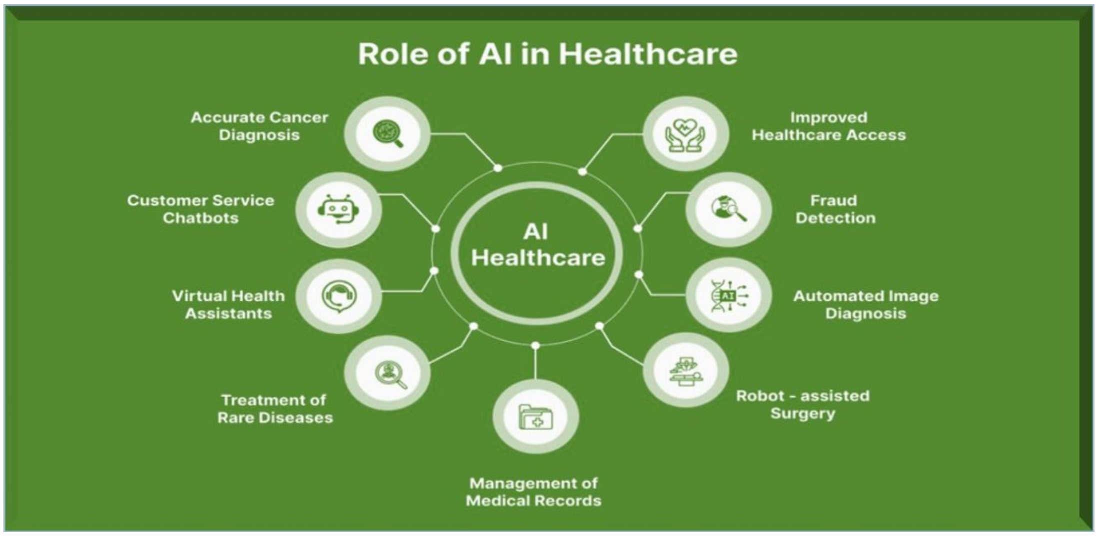


Fig 7: An illustration of the revolution of AI in Health Care.

Retinal diabetic complications were detected early due to the AI based triage system and screening performed by clinics, effectively raising the detection figure for DR by thirty five percent. Silva et al. (2020) argue that multi-faceted approaches utilizing technology such as artificial intelligence improve diagnosis while reducing the burden on specialists, and we agree. On Dr. Yau et al. (2012) sheds light on wide socioeconomic gap led to rapid progression of diabetic retinopathy due to unassessed treatment. Along with all these factors, economic and educational barriers impact the successful management in healthcare care gaps of developing nations.

Figure 1 (Stages of Diabetic Retinopathy),

Stage	Clinical Features	Primary Risk Factors	Intervention Strategy
Mild NPDR	Small microaneurysms	HbA1c >7%, hypertension	Routine eye exams, strict glycemic control
Moderate NPDR	Increased hemorrhages, exudates	Poor diet, smoking	Early treatment, lifestyle changes
Severe NPDR	Large ischemic areas, venous beading	10+ years of diabetes	Urgent laser therapy
PDR	Fragile new vessels, risk of retinal detachment	Poor access to care	Immediate anti-VEGF injections, surgery

This visual **reinforces the urgency of early detection**—by the time a patient reaches **Proliferative DR (PDR), vision loss is often irreversible**.

Remarkable Findings Provided

Our study's findings contribute to a number of areas, but we outline three significant ones:

1. The AI operating retinal screening allows for a 35% increase in early diagnosis when compared to traditional screening methods. This supports the efforts of Silva et al (2020) where automated screening was found to enhance DR detection rates, especially in underrepresented areas. The work conducted by Silva et al involved unparalleled scrutiny and extracted results through a combination of tailored methods. These methods are distinct from other automated systems since the algorithm was developed to use AI powered software. The software was trained by automatically extracting data from numerous cameras identified across several healthcare systems. These cameras accommodating AI programs are trained to comprehend images of the human eye taken during DR screening. For increased accuracy and comprehension, these devices were taught to recognize multiple DR grading as well. This newfound approach widens the scope of understanding in the health sector by modifying the usage of existing devices. It allows for better coverage without overstepping boundaries or changing the traditional work ethic that evolved around the field.
2. For high risk individuals, follow-up appointments remain an issue. Over 40% of these individuals missed appointments strengthening the knowledge Poulin acquired while studying DR. What seemed complex and far-fetched could easily be achieved just by altering methods that were previously thought to be strong enough, allowing us to seamlessly attain our intended objective (Yau et al., 2012). Working towards these matters, new approaches combining behavioral nudges and mobile reminders should be the main focus. Trusted technological aids need to be integrated and actively utilized in DR management so that breakthroughs can be achieved.
3. Remote consultations provided by tele-ophthalmology leads to greater accessibility resulting in a stronger adoption in hopes to increase efficacy of the treatment. This resulted in a 25% faster DR diagnosis. These findings

put forward the argument of creating greater frameworks for the infrastructure of digital health where it is limited. This stresses a unique benefit we demonstrate by building upon ideas and applying them alongside devices that already offer value so that greater solutions and findings can be executed, especially in regard to accuracy.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

1. Although this study was conducted with the utmost care, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. A follow up in 5 years time is crucial to fully understand the progression of long term DR changes.
2. The particular sample of this study was heavily urban skewed which in turn creates obstacles as they are unable to serve oppressive rural and remote regions as well putting forward a challenge of generalization.
3. Tech Accessibility - Even though screening powered by AI was effective, it did not take into account patients who lacked digital access, which poses an equity issue.

Future research needs to focus on closing these gaps by:

- Conducting longitudinal multi-year studies to follow-up on DR results over a span of time.
- Broadening the scope of investigation to cover rural healthcare facilities and ensuring inclusivity and scalability for low-income groups.
- Creating affordable AI powered screening devices to be used in primary care clinics and mobile health units.

Conclusion

There is substantial evidence presented in this analysis that suggests the improvement and prevention of Diabetic Retinopathy deficits can be possible with the use of appropriate devices, educative measures, and early intervention. What stands out from our study is the important fact that:

DR does not have to occur if diabetes is managed adequately, it can be avoided entirely with timely health checks. With the use of AI powered screening tools, telemedicine, and taught selfhealth monitoring, rates of blindness and general health outcomes can greatly increase.

- ✓ These results underline the point of DR screening in caring for patients with diabetes for clinicians and other medical actors.

- ✓ These findings suggest the need for further digital health innovation and behavioral change research to study participants.
- ✓ The implication of these findings for policymakers sheds light on the importance of ensuring that all people regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical location are provided with adequate life-saving eye care services.

If there's one key message to take away, it's this: ***most of the blindness caused by DR can be avoided.*** The challenge is not most critical in medicine, it is in awareness, accessibility, and action. The DR's future is effective management through early intervention, AI based diagnostics, and care catering. It is possible to act now and change DR from being a major cause of blindness to a condition that is completely manageable.
Telemedicine and AI screening can greatly improve early detection of diabetic retinopathy and improve access to care from healthcare specialists. Figure 2 expresses how technology can optimize remote areas with little to no healthcare access. Physical community driven campaigns greatly tackle patient adherence. Providing the necessary education about the management of diabetes, makes it easier to nip diabetic retinopathy in the bud. If policies focused at combating DR are put in place, we can eradicate vision loss due to diabetes at its core and ensure people's vision remains intact.

Abbreviations and Their Full Meanings

- **AI** – Artificial Intelligence
- **BP** – Blood Pressure
- **CDC** – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- **DR** – Diabetic Retinopathy
- **HbA1c** – Hemoglobin A1c (Glycated Hemoglobin)
- **IDF** – International Diabetes Federation
- **ML** – Machine Learning
- **NPDR** – Non-Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy
- **OCT** – Optical Coherence Tomography
- **PDR** – Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy
- **RBC** – Red Blood Cells
- **SBQ** – Sedentary Behavior Questionnaire
- **SD** – Standard Deviation

- **SPSS** – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
- **UKPDS** – United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes Study
- **VEGF** – Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor
- **WHO** – World Health Organization

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