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Global Prevalence of Myopia (2024)



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Myopia, or nearsightedness, is a condition that continues to affect millions worldwide. As the world becomes more urbanized and digitalized, the rates of myopia have been on the rise, prompting researchers and healthcare professionals to investigate the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to this growing epidemic.

This article will explore the current global prevalence of myopia, highlighting the most significant statistics and trends across different age groups and regions. We'll also discuss projected trends in myopia, along with potential solutions and interventions to address this growing public health concern.

Global Myopia Prevalence: Key Statistics and Trends

Myopia Rates by Age Group

- In several Asian countries, the prevalence of myopia among late teenagers and young adults (Korea, Taiwan, and China) is reported to be between 84% and 97%.
-

In the United States, approximately 41.0% of children aged 5 to 17 in urban areas have myopia, with a nationwide prevalence estimated at 36.1%.

- Nearly 224 million people worldwide, or almost 3% of the population, are highly nearsighted. This means they need glasses or contacts stronger than -5.00 diopters to see clearly.

Myopia Prevalence in Developed vs. Developing Countries

The prevalence of myopia varies significantly between developed and developing countries. Higher rates are observed in developed regions, particularly urban East Asian countries.

Region	Myopia Prevalence
Urban East Asia	80–90%
United States	42%
Germany (adults 35–74)	35.1%
United Kingdom (adults 48+)	23.0%
Australia (adults 49+)	15.0%
Nigeria (adults 40+)	16.1%

Projected Myopia Rates by 2050

- Nearly 50% of the world's population is projected to be myopic by 2050, which equates to almost 5 billion people
- The projected prevalence of high myopia, in particular, is expected to reach almost 10% of the global population by 2050, translating to around 1 billion people at a significantly increased risk of permanent vision impairment
- In the United States, it's predicted that between 27% and 43% of cases of uncorrectable visual impairment in 2050 may be directly attributable to myopia

Economic Burden of Myopia Worldwide

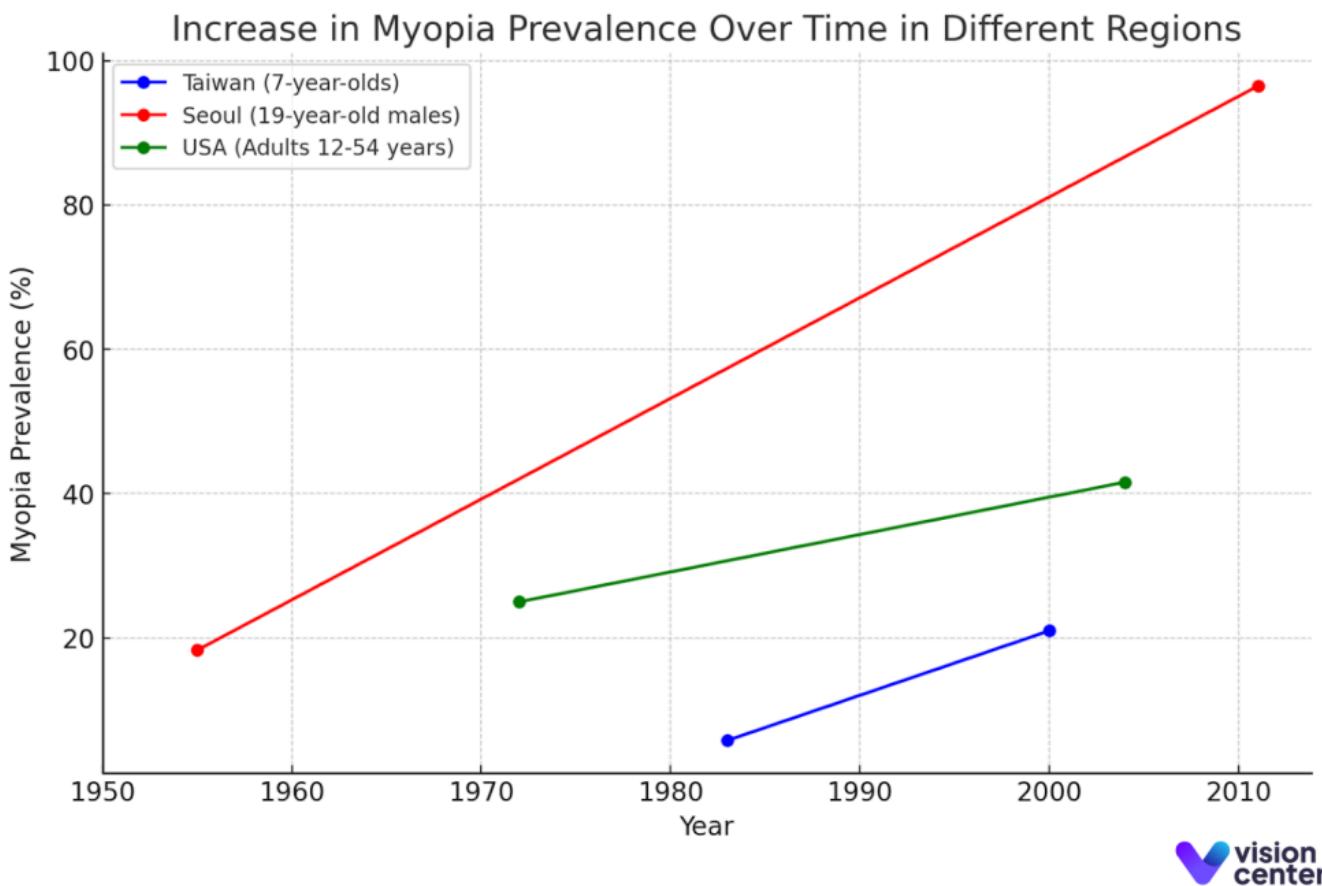
- The global potential productivity loss associated with vision impairment (VI) and blindness due to uncorrected myopia in 2015 was estimated at \$244 billion
- Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia were the regions significantly affected by lost productivity due to myopia, with productivity loss estimated at \$40 billion and \$35 billion, respectively
- The East Asia region, which includes China, had the greatest potential burden of productivity loss, around \$150 billion

Trends in Myopia Prevalence Over Time

Studies have shown that the prevalence of myopia has been increasing rapidly over the past few decades, particularly in East Asian countries.

In Taiwan, for example, the prevalence of myopia among 7-year-old children increased from 5.8% in 1983 to 21% in 2000. Similarly, in Seoul, South Korea, the prevalence of myopia among 19-year-old males increased from 18.3% in 1955 to 96.5% in 2011.

This trend isn't limited to East Asia; other regions have also experienced a significant increase in myopia prevalence. In the United States, the prevalence of myopia among adults aged 12 to 54 years increased from 25% in 1971–1972 to 41.6% in 1999–2004.



Causes of the Myopia Epidemic

Several factors have been identified as potential contributors to the increasing prevalence of myopia worldwide:

- 1. Increased near work and screen time:** The rise in digital device use and extended periods of near work, such as reading and studying, have been associated with a higher risk of myopia development.
- 2. Reduced outdoor time:** Spending less time outdoors has been linked to an increased risk of myopia. Exposure to natural light and distant focusing may protect against myopia development.
- 3. Urbanization and education:** Urban environments and higher levels of education have been associated with a higher prevalence of myopia. This is possibly due to increased near work and reduced outdoor time.
- 4. Genetic factors:** While environmental factors play a significant role in myopia development, genetic predisposition also contributes to an individual's risk of developing myopia.

Potential Solutions and Interventions

To address the growing myopia epidemic, several potential solutions and interventions have been proposed:

1. **Outdoor time:** Encouraging children to spend more time outdoors, particularly during daylight hours, may help reduce the risk of myopia development and progression
2. **Eye breaks and visual hygiene:** Promoting regular eye breaks during extended near work, such as the 20–20–20 rule (looking at an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes), can help reduce eye strain and potentially slow myopia progression
3. **Myopia control therapies:** Interventions such as atropine eye drops, orthokeratology (ortho-k) lenses, and multifocal contact lenses have shown promise in slowing myopia progression in children
4. **Education and awareness:** Increasing public awareness about myopia, its risk factors, and the importance of regular eye examinations can help promote early detection and intervention
5. **Research and innovation:** Continued research into the causes, mechanisms, and potential treatments for myopia is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat this growing epidemic

The global prevalence of myopia has reached epidemic proportions, with rates continuing to rise across all age groups and regions. The projected rates of myopia by 2050 paint a concerning picture. Nearly half of the world's population is expected to be myopic, and a significant portion is at risk of permanent vision impairment due to high myopia.

The economic burden associated with myopia is substantial, with productivity losses in the billions of dollars, particularly in regions such as East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Investing in vision correction services and myopia control measures could potentially lead to significant savings in productivity and improve the quality of life for millions of individuals worldwide.

Several factors, including increased work and screen time, reduced outdoor time, urbanization, and genetic predisposition, have been identified as potential contributors to the increasing prevalence of myopia. A multifaceted approach involving outdoor time, visual hygiene, myopia control therapies, education, and research is necessary to address this growing public health concern.

As the world continues to evolve and become more urbanized and digitized, it's crucial to address the growing myopia epidemic through proactive interventions and innovative solutions. By understanding the current prevalence, projected trends, causes, and potential solutions, we can work towards developing effective strategies to prevent, control, and manage myopia.

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Mara Sigue, with a B.A. in Social Sciences, is a dedicated web content writer for Vision Center. She is committed to making eye health research accessible and understandable to people from diverse backgrounds and educational levels. Her writing aims to bridge the gap between complex vision health topics and readers' needs for clear, factual information.



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Systematic review and meta-analysis of myopia prevalence in African school children

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Aleksandra Barac, Editor

Abstract

Purpose

Increased prevalence of myopia is a major public health challenge worldwide, including in Africa. While previous studies have shown an increasing prevalence in Africa, there is no collective review of evidence on the magnitude of myopia in African school children. Hence, this study reviews the evidence and provides a meta-analysis of the prevalence of myopia in African school children.

Methods

This review was conducted using the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Five computerized bibliographic databases, PUBMED, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Africa Index Medicus were searched for published studies on the prevalence of myopia in Africa from 1 January 2000 to 18 August 2021. Studies were assessed for methodological quality. Data were gathered by gender, age and refraction technique and standardized to the definition of myopia as refractive error ≥ 0.50 diopter. A meta-analysis was

conducted to estimate the prevalence. Significant heterogeneity was detected among the various studies ($I^2 > 50\%$), hence a random effect model was used, and sensitivity analysis was performed to examine the effects of outliers.

Results

We included data from 24 quality assessed studies, covering 36,395 African children. The overall crude prevalence of myopia over the last two decades is 4.7% (95% CI, 3.9–5.7) in African children. Although the prevalence of myopia was slightly higher in females (5.3%, 95%CI: 4.1, 6.5) than in males (3.7%, 95% CI, 2.6–4.7; $p = 0.297$) and higher in older [12–18 years 5.1% (95% CI, 3.8–6.3) than younger children (aged 5–11 years, 3.4%, 95% CI, 2.5–4.4; $p = 0.091$), the differences were not significant. There was a significantly lower prevalence of myopia with cycloplegic compared with non-cycloplegic refraction [4.2%, 95%CI: 3.3, 5.1 versus 6.4%, 95%CI: 4.4, 8.4; $p = 0.046$].

Conclusions

Our results showed that myopia affects about one in twenty African schoolchildren, and it is overestimated in non-cycloplegic refraction. Clinical interventions to reduce the prevalence of myopia in the region should target females, and school children who are aged 12–18 years.

Introduction

Uncorrected refractive error is the most common cause of visual impairment affecting an estimated one billion people globally [1]. Myopia is the most common refractive error and an important cause of ocular morbidity, particularly among school-aged children and young adults. Worldwide, myopia is reaching epidemic proportions linked to changing lifestyles and modern technology, particularly mobile devices [2]. Globally, myopia affected 22.9% of the world's population in 2000, with projections of an increase to 49.8% by 2050 affecting 4.8 billion people [2], representing a 117% increase over 50 years. According to a 2015 report, it was estimated that globally, about 1.89 billion people are myopic and 170 million have high myopia [3].

The reported prevalence of myopia in children aged 5–17 years ranges from 1.2% in Meki Zone, Nepal, to 73.0% in South Korea [4, 5]. Over 15 years, the prevalence of myopia increased from 79.5% to 87.7% in Chinese high school children with an average age of 18.5 ± 0.7 years [6]. In South African school children aged 5–15 years, the reported prevalence of myopia was only 2.9% with retinoscopy and 4.0% using autorefraction [7]. The authors reported that this prevalence increased to 9.6% at age 15 years.

The increase in myopia prevalence will have a significant economic impact because of associated ocular health problems and visual impairment. Uncorrected myopia of between- 1.50 D and- 4.00 D can significantly affect vision to be regarded as a cause of moderate visual impairment and blindness, respectively [8]. Apart from its direct impact on visual impairment, high myopia [usually defined as a spherical equivalent ≥ 5.00 D [4, 9, 10] of myopia, although the definitions used to grade myopia are variable] increases the risk of potentially blinding ocular pathologies such as retinal holes; retinal tears; retinal degeneration; retinal detachment; and myopic macular degeneration [3, 11]. Uncorrected myopia has huge social, economic, psychological and developmental implications [12]. The economic cost of refractive errors, including myopia, has been estimated to be approximately US\$ 202 billion per annum [13], far exceeding that of other eye diseases.

The increasing prevalence of myopia has led to research in the study of the possible mechanism for myopia development, which has generated two broad themes: the role of nature (genetic influences) and nurture (environmental influences including lifestyle). Understanding the mechanism for the development of myopia is also being explored in the control of myopia. Epidemiologic data from Southeast Asia has given credence to the association between near work and myopia, given the number of hours children from this region spend doing near work. Due to vast regional differences in culture, habits, socioeconomic status, educational levels and urbanization, there is uncertainty as to the exact magnitude of the myopia burden among African school-aged children and its trend over time [14].

In the last few decades, there has been a change in the lifestyle and behavior of people in Africa as a result of increasing urbanization [15]. Africa's urban population grew from 27 million in 1950 to 567 million in 2015 (a 2,000% increase), and now 50% of Africa's population live in one of the continent's 7,617 urban agglomerations of 10,000 or more inhabitants [16]. Consequently, more children and young adults in Africa are increasingly engaged in indoor and near work activities compared to earlier generations [17]. Children spend long hours doing schoolwork and, following the advent of technology, increasingly use mobile devices for gaming and other activities [18, 19]. These factors are thought to promote myopia development and/or progression [20–23].

Africa is the world's second largest and second most populous continent, after Asia, and it accounts for about 16% of the world's human population. While every global region will experience a decline in population by 2100, the African population is expected to triple. Africa's population is the youngest amongst all the continents, the median age in 2012 was 19.7 years compared to the global median of 30.4 years. This young population is an important asset for the continent's development. The challenges of the young population must be addressed in time as they constitute the bulk of the productive age of the economy. While rising myopia is a cause for global concern, it is not given due attention in Africa due to a lack of adequate prevalence data and prospective studies tracking the trend of myopia over decades [24]. Due to this, the representation of Africa is poor in studies predicting global trends of myopia [24]. The aim of this study was to systematically review the evidence and provide a meta-analysis of the prevalence of myopia in African school children which will address the knowledge gap and help understand the prevalence of myopia among this group in Africa.

Materials and methods

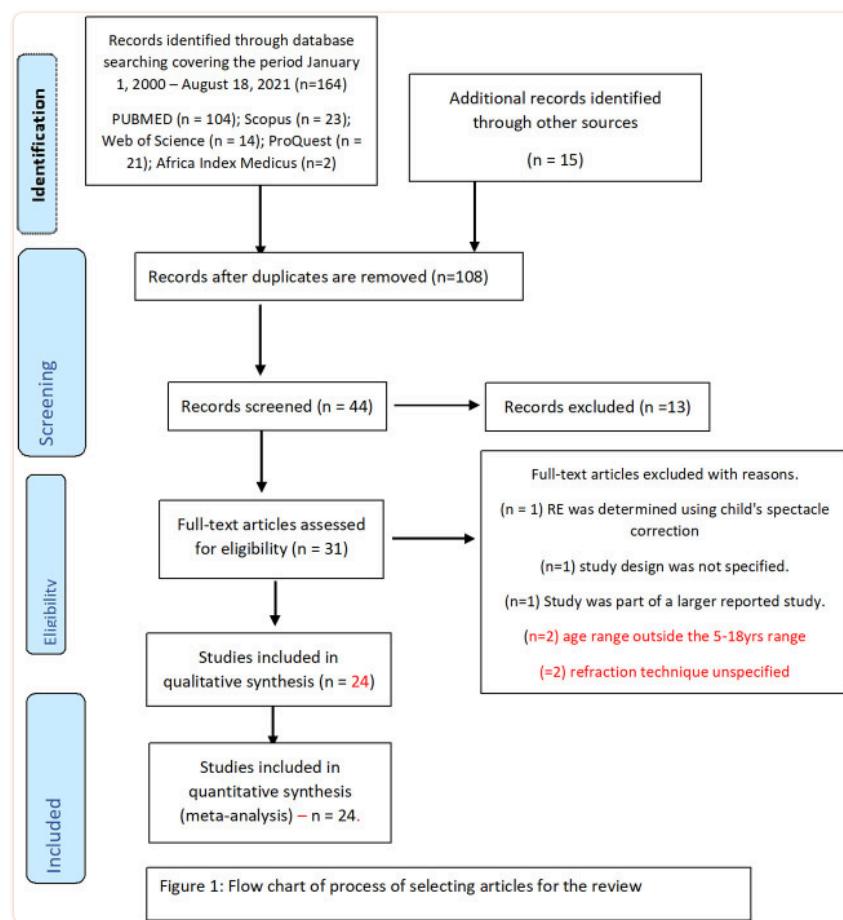
This systematic review followed the framework of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA. See Checklist in [S1 File](#)) [25]. The protocol for the review was registered with PROSPERO (#CRD42020187609).

Search strategy and quality assessment

Two review team members (GO and BE) performed an independent systematic search and review of myopia in Africa using published data spanning the last two decades. Refractive error came into reckoning as a cause of visual impairment in the last two decades, following the change in the definition of visual impairment which was based on presenting visual acuity [26]. The search was conducted on 25th May and 18th August 2021. A third reviewer, KO, adjudicated where there were disagreements. The quality of each selected article was assessed using the checklist developed by Downs and Black [27] and each included article was assessed and scored on a 10-item scale (scoring is shown in [S1 Table](#)). The search was restricted to articles available online, articles

mentioning prevalence of myopia in any region of Africa, and articles published in the English language. Searches included the following databases: Web of sciences, PubMed, ProQuest, MEDLINE, Scopus, and African Index Medicus from 1st of January 2000 to August 18, 2021.

We searched these databases using the following MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms and keywords: Refractive AND error AND Africa AND children AND prevalence. A number of iterations of these search terms were used, for example, "refractive error AND Africa AND children AND prevalence" or "refractive error AND Africa AND children". Further details about search strategy and MeSH terms are available in the ([S2 File](#)). A broader search also used terms such as epidemiology, myopia, and school children. We also identified and included relevant studies by manually searching through the reference lists of identified papers. The PRISMA flowchart presented in [Fig 1](#) shows the process used for selecting articles.



[Fig 1](#)

Flow chart of process of selecting articles for the review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies published between 2000 and 2021, investigating the prevalence of refractive error in male and female school children aged 5 to 18 years of age were included in the review. Studies that employed an observational cross-sectional study design; had a clear description of the sampling technique; stated the method of measuring refractive error (cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction), as well as objective or subjective refraction; stated the criteria for defining myopia (spherical equivalent ≥ 0.50 D of myopia [[2](#), [28–30](#)]; the study was either school-based or

population-based; and were published in English language, were included in the review. The decision as to whether the articles met the inclusion criteria was made independently by the two reviewers (GO and BE) and where there was a disagreement, a third reviewer (KO) was consulted.

Studies where the criteria for defining myopia were not specified; the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified for this review; or which reported findings from a hospital/clinic-based sample were excluded from the review.

Data extraction

The data extracted from each article included the following: Authors; year of publication; country of study; study design; sample size; sampling technique; the age of study participants; criteria for defining myopia; method of refractive error assessment (cycloplegic vs non-cycloplegic); method of refractive error assessment (objective vs subjective); prevalence of myopia; and the proportion of refractive error due to myopia. Where the reported prevalence was not clearly defined, the corresponding author in the published article was contacted for clarification.

Statistical methods

Meta-analysis was conducted using Stata version 14.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA). The syntax “metaprop” in Stata was used to generate forest plots and each forest plot showed the prevalence of myopia in school children, by gender, age and refraction technique in individual studies and its corresponding weight, as well as the pooled prevalence in each subset and its associated 95% confidence intervals (CI). A heterogeneity test obtained for the different studies showed a high level of inconsistency ($I^2 > 50\%$) thereby indicating the use of a random effect model in all the meta-analyses conducted. Sensitivity analysis was carried out by examining the effect of outliers, by employing similar method to that used by Patsopoulos et al. [31], which involves the process of comparing the pooled prevalence before and after eliminating one study at a time. The funnel plot was used to report the potential bias and small/large study effects and Begg’s tests was used to assess asymmetry. The prevalence was subdivided into separate datasets based on overall prevalence, males or females, cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction for a more detailed analysis of the prevalence of myopia. Also, to study a possible variation of the prevalence of myopia in terms of age, the age groups in the reported studies were divided into two categories: 5–11 years and 12–18 years. Their respective funnel plots are shown as ([S3–S7 Files](#)).

Results

Summary of included studies

From the described search strategy, a total of 164 potentially relevant titles/abstracts of articles were initially identified. [Fig 1](#) presents the flowchart of the article screening and selection process. Following a quick inspection of identified studies and removal of duplicate articles, 44 relevant articles were assessed for eligibility. Using the pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 24 of 30 articles that underwent detailed review were eligible, and data from these studies were included in this study. A breakdown of the eligible studies as well as their quality assessment scores (maximum of 10) are presented in [Table 1](#). [S1 Table](#) shows how the quality assessment scores were calculated.

Table 1

Characteristics of studies that reported the prevalence of myopia in school-aged children in Africa and were included in the meta-analysis.

First Author	Year of study	Study Country [†]	Age group	Mean age (years)	Total Sample size	Cycloplegia	Objective refraction	Prevalence of myopia (%)	Comm refrac error
Atowa [32]	2017	Nigeria	8–15	11.5 ± 2.3	1197	Yes	Objective	2.7	
Wajuihian [33]	2017	South Africa	13–18	15.8 ± 1.6	1586	No	Objective	7	
Chebil [34]	2016	Tunisia	6–14	10.1 ± 1.8	6192	Yes	Objective	3.71	
Kedir [35]	2014	Ethiopia	7–15	Not reported	570	No	Subjective	2.6	
Soler [36]	2015	Equatorial Guinea	6–16	10.8 ± 3.1	425	Yes	Objective	10.4	
Kumah [37]	2013	Ghana	12–15	13.8	2435	Yes	Objective	3.2	
Mehari [38]	2013	Ethiopia	7–18	13.1 ± 2.5	4238	No	Objective	6	
Jimenez [39]	2012	Burkina Faso	6–16	11.2 ± 2.4	315	No	Objective	2.5	
Naidoo [7]	2003	South Africa	5–15	Not reported	4890	Yes	Objective	2.9	
Yamamah [40]	2015	Egypt	6–17	10.7 ± 3.1	2070	Yes	Objective	3.1	Astign
Nartey [41]	2016	Ghana	6–16	10.6	811	No	Subjective	4.6	
Anera [42]	2006	Burkina Faso	5–16	10.2 ± 2.2	388	Yes	Objective	0.5	
Chukwuemeka [43]	2015	South Africa	7–14	9.9 ± 2.2	421	No	Objective	18.7	Astign
Alrasheed [44]	2016	Sudan	6–15	10.8 ± 2.8	1678	Yes	Objective	6.8	Myopi
Abdul-Kabir [45]	2016	Ghana	10–15	Not reported	208	No	Objective	22.6	Myopi
Ebri [46]	2019	Nigeria	10–18	13.3 ± 1.9	4241	Yes	Objective	4.8	Astign
Ezinne [47]	2018	Nigeria	5–15	9.0 ± 2.5	998	Yes	Objective	4.5	Myopi

[†] = country the study was conducted;

[‡] = authors provided data for only those aged 5–18 years.

The included studies comprised of the following: six (25.0%) studies from Ghana, four (16.7%) each from South Africa, and Nigeria, three from Ethiopia (12.5%), two (8.3%) from Burkina Faso, and one (4.2%) each from Sudan, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Somalia and Tunisia ([Table 1](#)). Of the reviewed articles, 84.2% (n = 21) were school-based, cross-sectional studies, two (8.3%) were population-based, cross-sectional studies, while one (4.2%) employed a cross-sectional study design but did not report whether it was school or population-based.

Method of measuring refractive error in African school-aged children

Of the reviewed studies, 13 (54.2%) performed cycloplegic refraction to determine the refractive error status of the children, while non-cycloplegic refraction was used in 11 (45.8%) of the studies. Regarding the technique used for refractive error measurement, over three-quarters of the studies (n = 20, 83.3%) performed objective refraction, with about one-sixth (n = 4, 16.7%) performing subjective refraction.

Prevalence of myopia in African school-aged children

The number of children aged 5–18 years included in the study ranged from 208 for a study conducted in Ghana [\[45\]](#) to 6192 for another study conducted in Tunisia [\[34, 55\]](#). The prevalence of myopia reported in these studies ranged from 0.5% [\[42\]](#) to 10.4% [\[36, 52\]](#) with cycloplegic refraction. In studies where non-cycloplegic refraction was used to determine refractive error refraction in school children, the reported myopia prevalence ranged from 1.7% [\[51\]](#) to 22.6% [\[45\]](#).

Meta-analysis of myopia prevalence in children ag 5–18 years in Africa (2000–2021)

Myopia prevalence among school children in Africa [Fig 2](#) shows a forest plot of the prevalence of myopia among African school children aged 5–18 years. The pooled estimate of myopia in the African region was significant (5.0%, 95%CI: 4.1, 5.8; p<0.001) and about 37.5% of the studies (n = 9) reported significantly higher prevalence of myopia and 50% (n = 12) reporting significantly lower prevalence compared with the pooled estimate across Africa. The study by Abdul-Kabir found the highest prevalence (22.6%) of myopia among Ghanaian children (95%CI: 17.1, 28.9) [\[45\]](#), while Anera et al. found the lowest prevalence among children in Burkina Faso (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.9) [\[42\]](#). The pooled prevalence estimates of myopia was similar to the study by Ebri [\[46\]](#) and Ezinne [\[47\]](#) (4.8%, 95%CI: 4.2, 5.5), both involving children from Nigeria [\[46, 47\]](#). Funnel plots and using Begg's test for Myopia in Africa indicated homogeneity ([S3 File](#)) and meta-regression analysis of myopia by year of publication indicated that publication of year increased as the proportion of myopia decreased but this relationship was not statistically significant (p = 0.423, [S7 File](#)).

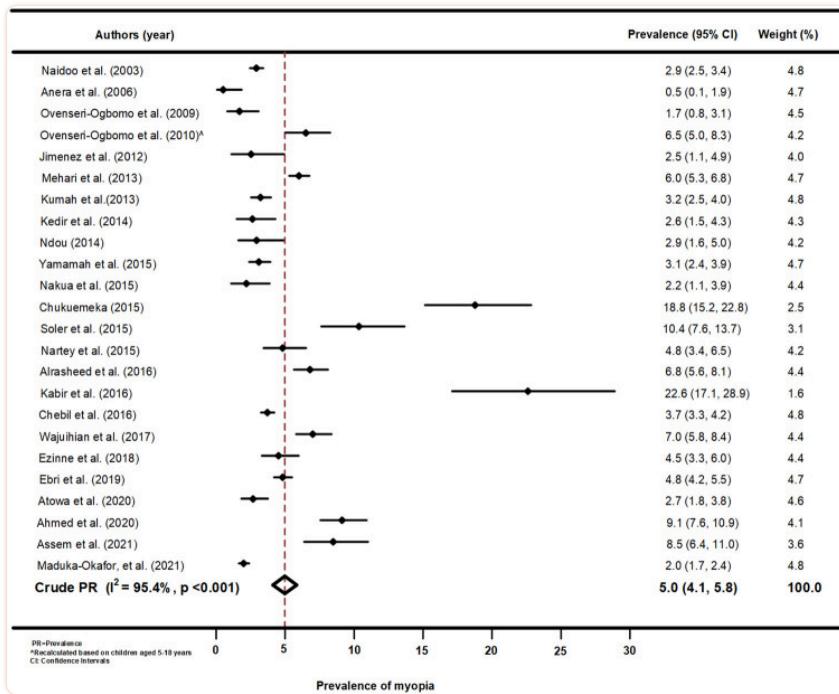


Fig 2

Forest plot of myopia prevalence from the meta-analysis of African studies.

Myopia prevalence by gender of the School children in Africa (2000–2021)

[Fig 3](#) is a forest plot for prevalence of myopia by gender among school children aged 5–18 years in Africa. The prevalence estimates varied significantly between studies in both male and female children ($p<0.001$, per gender), and the overall pooled prevalence of myopia by gender was 4.8% (95%CI: 4.1, 5.6) and similar between male and female estimates ($p = 0.297$). Compared with the overall pooled estimate, the prevalence of myopia was slightly higher in male (4.5%, 95%CI: 3.4, 5.5) children than females (5.3%, 95%CI: 4.1, 6.5) but the difference was not significant as indicated by the overlapping of the CIs with that of the overall pooled estimate. Funnel plots and using Begg's test for Myopia by gender reported absence of publication biases ([S4 File](#)).

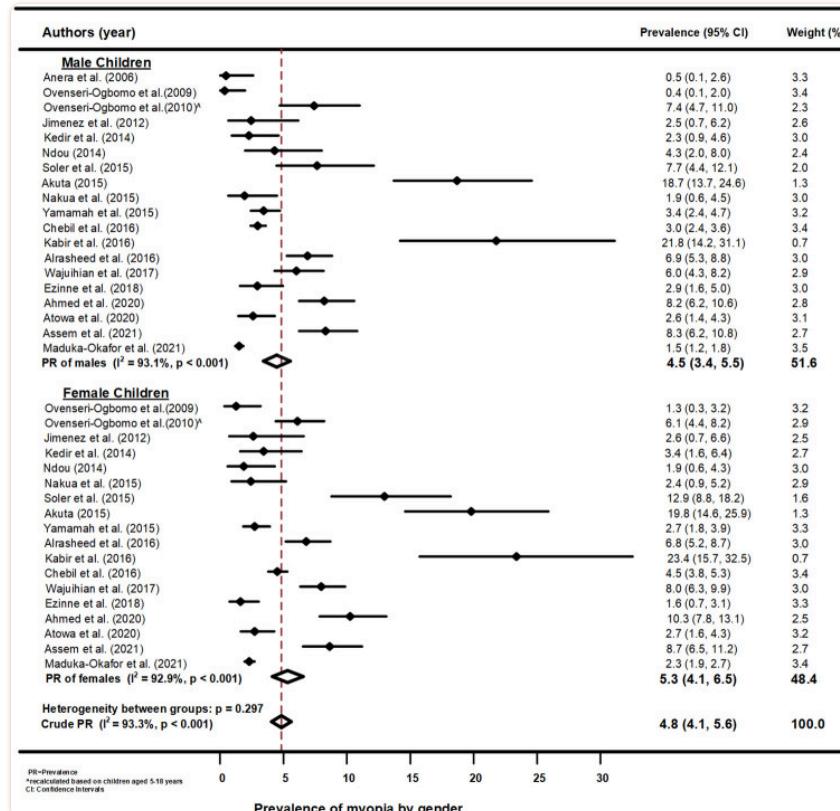


Fig 3

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by gender from the meta-analysis of African studies.

Myopia prevalence by age group of the school children in Africa (2000–2021)

The forest plot of the prevalence of myopia in children aged 5–11 years and 12–18 years is presented in Fig 4. The pooled estimate of myopia in school children aged 5–11 years and 12–18 years was lower (3.7%, 95%CI 2.6, 4.7) and higher (5.8%, 95%CI 3.8, 6.3) respectively, than the pooled estimate but none was significant as they overlapped with the pooled estimate in Africa (4.4%, 95%CI 3.6, 5.2). The heterogeneity between the groups was approaching significant ($p = 0.091$) but older children had a higher prevalence of myopia than younger children. Among those aged 5–11 years, the highest significant prevalence was reported in a Ghanaian study (16.4%, 95%CI: 13.0, 20.3) and a study conducted in Equatorial Guinea (8.2%, 95%CI: 5.8, 11.3) while school children in Ethiopia (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.5) had the lowest significant prevalence estimate of myopia. Among those aged 12–18 years, children in Ghana also showed the highest significant prevalence of myopia (20.2%, 95%CI: 16.5, 24.4), but the lowest prevalence was reported among School children in Burkina Faso (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.9). The heterogeneity of these studies by age as subgroups analysis were low (S5 File).

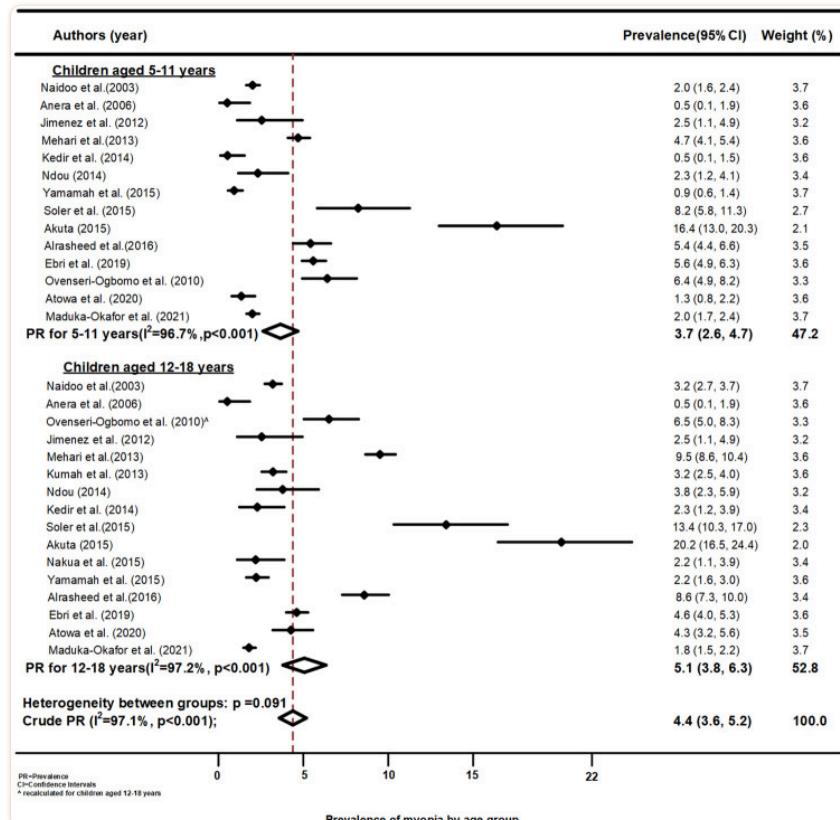


Fig 4

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by age group across African studies.

Myopia prevalence by mode of refraction among school children in Africa (2000–2021)

The forest plot displayed in Fig.5 shows the pooled estimate of myopia prevalence among school children in Africa. Using cycloplegic refraction, studies have reported significantly lower prevalence estimates of myopia among school children in Africa compared with those that used non-cycloplegic refraction (4.2%, 95%CI: 3.3, 5.1 versus 6.4%, 95%CI: 4.4, 8.4; $p = 0.046$). From the plot, it can be seen that studies that used non cycloplegic technique to determine refraction had greater variabilities in the reported myopia prevalence (ranging from 1.7 to 22.6%), but those that performed cycloplegic refraction had smaller between study variability in the reported prevalence of myopia (range from 0.5 to 10.4%). Funnel plots and the Begg's test for Myopia by refraction technique shown in S6 and S7 Files, respectively, found no publication biases.

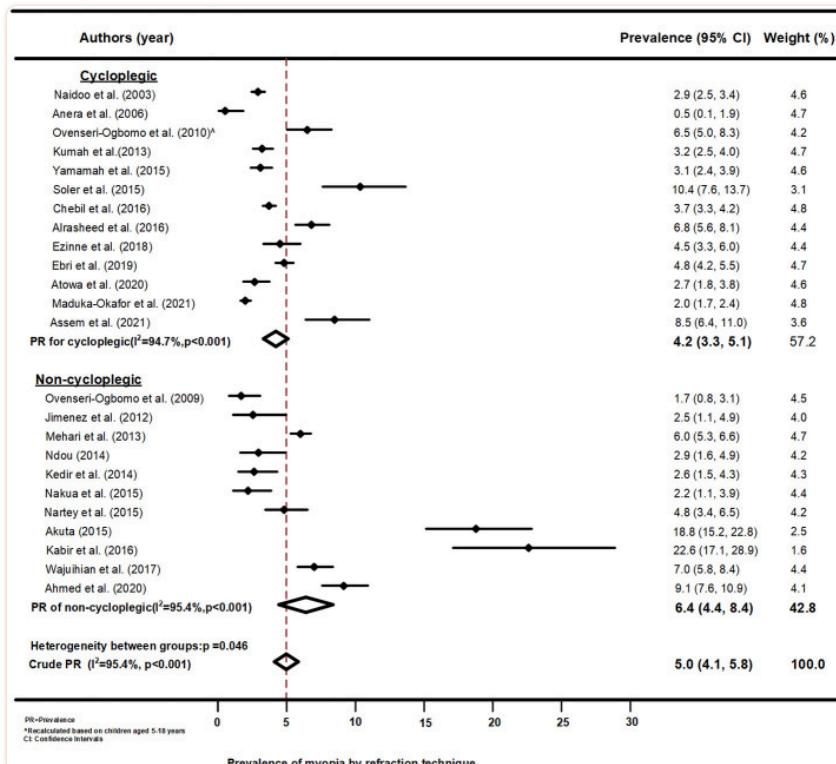


Fig 5

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by refraction technique among school children in Africa.

Discussion

Prevalence of myopia

The present study provided recent estimates of the myopia prevalence in African children using data from twenty eight studies conducted over two decades. The prevalence of myopia defined as SER $\geq 0.50\text{D}$ of myopia in school children across African countries was 4.7% (95%CI, 3.9, 5.7%) and there were wide variations within and between African countries. A significantly higher prevalence rate was observed in Ghana [45] and South Africa [43], with significantly lower rates in Burkina Faso [42] and Ethiopia [56]. In some countries like Ghana, the variation in the reported prevalence of myopia between studies reached 21% [37, 41, 45, 48, 51, 52]. Although the regional variations in myopia prevalence found in this study are consistent with the statement of Foster and Jiang who remarked that “Considerable regional difference exists from country to country even within the same geographical area” [57], it remains unclear why these variations exist. While the criteria for defining refractive error is often cited as the reason for the variation in the prevalence of refractive errors, including myopia, between studies, this may not be the case in our study because only studies that defined myopia as spherical equivalent of $\geq 0.50\text{ D}$ were included.

The overall low prevalence of myopia found across Africa is consistent with other studies that reported lower myopia prevalence in African children compared with Asian children [5, 58]. It is instructive to note that in four of the studies that were included in the current review [36, 43, 45, 52], the reported prevalence of myopia was greater than 10%. Of these, two studies [36, 52] used cycloplegic refraction, which is thought to more accurately estimate the prevalence of myopia [59]. The lower prevalence of myopia in Africa compared with the other regions may be related to the

differences in genetic predisposition to myopia development, and to culture [60–62]. Although the role of genetics in the development and progression of myopia is reported to be small [12], it is believed to have a role in an individual's susceptibility to environmental risk factors for myopia [63]. In addition, several studies have shown the major involvement of environmental factors such as near work (writing, reading, and working on a computer) in myopia development [60, 63]. In many African countries, children do not start education and learning at the same early age as in other countries of Asia. African children are therefore exposed to less near work and are more involved with outdoor activities, resulting in less risk of developing myopia compared with their Asian counterparts. This assertion is supported by the fact that in 2010, the pre-primary school enrolment rate in the most populous country in Africa (Nigeria) was 41.83% compared to 89.12% in 2012 in China (the most populous country in Asia) [64]. We acknowledge that a recent investigation [65] has shown that more precise objective measures are required to make definitive conclusions about the relationship between myopia and near work.

Notwithstanding the relatively low prevalence of myopia found among African children, there is a need to monitor myopia prevalence among children in this region given the increasing access to, and use of, mobile devices among African population [19], including children. This is important considering the reported higher increase in the prevalence of myopia in black children living in Africa (2.8% to 5.5%) compared with other black children not living in Africa (4.8% to 19.9%) after 10 years [58]. It is assumed that black children not in Africa may have more access and exposure to near work, including mobile devices, and less outdoor activities than their counterparts in Africa.

Age and gender-based differences in myopia prevalence

There was a 34.6% increase in the prevalence of myopia between the age groups with the older age group having a higher prevalence of 5.2%. The slightly higher prevalence of myopia between the two age groups shows there is a tendency for myopia prevalence to increase with age which is consistent with previous studies from elsewhere [58, 66, 67]. This increase in myopia prevalence is thought to be associated with the increasing growth of the eyeball. Although the pooled prevalence of myopia in female children was slightly higher than in male children (4.7 versus 3.7%), the difference did not reach statistical significance. The influence of gender on the prevalence of myopia has not been unequivocal in the literature [68–72] with some suggesting that the slightly higher prevalence in females may be related to the different ages of onset of puberty between boys and girls [73]. Other factors that could account for the reported apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls include limited outdoor activity time than boys [74].

Prevalence of myopia by refraction technique (cycloplegic and non-cycloplegic)

The present study demonstrated that cycloplegic refraction resulted in significantly lower estimates of myopia prevalence than non-cycloplegic refraction, which was consistent with previous studies [75–78]. It has been reported that non-cycloplegic refraction overestimates the prevalence of myopia, yields a non-reliable measurement of association of myopia risk factors [59, 76], and hence cycloplegic refraction is regarded as the gold standard for measuring myopia [59]. Over half of the studies in this review utilised cycloplegic refraction, which is particularly important in this age group where the difference between the cycloplegic and non-cycloplegic refraction is quite high [77, 78]. The fact that non-cycloplegic refraction often results in overestimation of myopia may have, in part, accounted for the high prevalence reported in one study from Ghana [45]. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that cycloplegic refraction results in a lower variability of measured refractive error than non-cycloplegic refraction (see Fig 5), which may reflect the variable accommodative state

during the refraction of children of different ages. This finding underscores the need to appropriately control accommodation when performing refraction especially in young children who have a higher amplitude of accommodation and in whom accommodation is more active.

Implications of the study

This is the first systematic review and meta-analysis to estimate the prevalence of myopia among school children in Africa and its variation with age, gender and refraction technique. As previously reported, the prevalence of myopia in Africa appears low compared to other regions such as South East Asia. This study also provides baseline data for comparison and future prevalence studies to establish a trend in myopia epidemiology in this population. A further remarkable finding in this review is the demonstration that non-cycloplegic refraction overestimated the prevalence of myopia and results in more variable estimates of refractive errors compared with cycloplegic refraction. The interpretation of myopia prevalence data obtained from non-cycloplegic refraction may be potentially misleading to researchers and policymakers. As a result, it is recommended that cycloplegic refraction be used in all studies investigating the prevalence of myopia in children.

Strengths and limitations of the review

This review has certain limitations. Firstly, this review did not investigate the trend in the prevalence of myopia among school children in Africa due to the limited number of studies. Secondly, the selection of English-only studies likely biased the results towards studies in Anglophone countries or countries where the findings were reported in English. Thirdly, the current review did not explore the various factors influencing the epidemiology of myopia in this population. Despite these limitations, a major strength of this study is the selection of studies that used a uniform definition of myopia (i.e. $\geq 0.50\text{DS}$ of myopia) which allowed for a better comparison in the reported prevalence of myopia. In addition, the study excluded studies that were conducted in unselected groups such as hospital-based studies and studies that did not report any evidence of sampling in the study. In addition, the selected studies were evaluated for robustness in the study designs employed in each study.

Conclusions

In summary, this systematic review and meta-analysis have shown that the prevalence of myopia among schoolchildren in Africa is lower than other regions of the world. The use of non-cycloplegic refraction for estimation of myopia prevalence can be misleading as it returns higher and more variable prevalence estimates. There is a need to monitor the trend of myopia as more children in this region are increasingly being exposed to identified risk factors for myopia development including access to mobile devices, increased near work, increased online or remote learning, and limited time outdoors. Future studies are needed to understand the role of ethnicity on the myopia prevalence in Africa as the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about whether significant differences in the prevalence of myopia among different ethnicity in Africa exists.

Supporting information

S1 Table

Quality assessment of full-text articles included in review.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (23K, docx)

S1 File

PRISMA 2020 checklist.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (32K, docx)

S2 File

Search terms for refractive error Africa children prevalence filters (2000–2021).

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (13K, docx)

S3 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S4 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by gender.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S5 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by age in categories.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S6 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by refraction technique.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S7 File

A meta-regression analysis of Myopia by year of publication.

The vertical axis is the log proportion of Myopia, and the horizontal axis represents year of publication. Each dark dot represented one selected study, and the size of each dark dots corresponds to the weight assigned to each study. Given the slope of the regression line has descending slightly in this figure, this could be interpreted as publication of year increased, the proportion of myopia decreased and, this relationship did not differ statistically ($p = 0.5512$).

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (37K, docx)

S8 File

Data used in the analysis.

(XLSX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (46K, xlsx)

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Data Availability

All relevant data are within the paper and its [Supporting information](#) files.

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Decision Letter 0

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

13 Dec 2021

PONE-D-21-28841 Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children. PLOS ONE

Dear Dr. Osuagwu,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to PLOS ONE. After careful consideration, we feel that it has merit but does not fully meet PLOS ONE's publication criteria as it currently stands. Therefore, we invite you to submit a revised version of the manuscript that addresses the points raised during the review process.

Please submit your revised manuscript by Jan 27 2022 11:59PM. If you will need more time than this to complete your revisions, please reply to this message or contact the journal office at plosone@plos.org. When you're ready to submit your revision, log on to <https://www.editorialmanager.com/pone/> and select the 'Submissions Needing Revision' folder to locate your manuscript file.

Please include the following items when submitting your revised manuscript:

- A rebuttal letter that responds to each point raised by reviewers. You should upload this letter as a separate file labeled 'Response to Reviewers'.
- A marked-up copy of your manuscript that highlights changes made to the original version. You should upload this as a separate file labeled 'Revised Manuscript with Track Changes'.
- An unmarked version of your revised paper without tracked changes. You should upload this as a separate file labeled 'Manuscript'.

If you would like to make changes to your financial disclosure, please include your updated statement in your cover letter. Guidelines for resubmitting your figure files are available below the reviewer comments at the end of this letter.

If applicable, we recommend that you deposit your laboratory protocols in protocols.io to enhance the reproducibility of your results. Protocols.io assigns your protocol its own identifier (DOI) so that it can be cited independently in the future. For instructions see:

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/submission-guidelines#loc-laboratory-protocols>. Additionally, PLOS ONE offers an option for publishing peer-reviewed Lab Protocol articles, which describe protocols hosted on protocols.io. Read more information on sharing protocols at https://plos.org/protocols?utm_medium=editorial-email&utm_source=authorletters&utm_campaign=protocols.

We look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Kind regards,

Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

PLOS ONE

Journal Requirements:

When submitting your revision, we need you to address these additional requirements.

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[Note: HTML markup is below. Please do not edit.]

Reviewers' comments:

Reviewer's Responses to Questions

Comments to the Author

1. Is the manuscript technically sound, and do the data support the conclusions?

The manuscript must describe a technically sound piece of scientific research with data that supports the conclusions. Experiments must have been conducted rigorously, with appropriate controls, replication, and sample sizes. The conclusions must be drawn appropriately based on the data presented.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

2. Has the statistical analysis been performed appropriately and rigorously?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

3. Have the authors made all data underlying the findings in their manuscript fully available?

The [PLOS Data policy](#) requires authors to make all data underlying the findings described in their manuscript fully available without restriction, with rare exception (please refer to the Data Availability Statement in the manuscript PDF file). The data should be provided as part of the manuscript or its supporting information, or deposited to a public repository. For example, in addition to summary statistics, the data points behind means, medians and variance measures should be available. If there are restrictions on publicly sharing data—e.g. participant privacy or use of data from a third party—those must be specified.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: No

4. Is the manuscript presented in an intelligible fashion and written in standard English?

PLOS ONE does not copyedit accepted manuscripts, so the language in submitted articles must be clear, correct, and unambiguous. Any typographical or grammatical errors should be corrected at revision, so please note any specific errors here.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

5. Review Comments to the Author

Please use the space provided to explain your answers to the questions above. You may also include additional comments for the author, including concerns about dual publication, research ethics, or publication ethics. (Please upload your review as an attachment if it exceeds 20,000 characters)

Reviewer #1: The authors conducted a review and meta-analysis of articles on the prevalence of myopia in African children.

This study follows the recommendations for this type of review.

Several points of detail should be reported

1 ° In the inclusion criteria, the authors report having excluded studies in which the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified. But they did not clearly define the age ranges of this review themselves.

2 ° Two articles have been included but pose a problem in my opinion.

- They did not report whether it was school- or population-based. The inclusion / exclusion criteria are not clear at this level

- They did not specify the method used to determine the refractive error. However, it is clearly specified in the inclusion criteria "stated the method of measuring refractive error - cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction, as well as objective or subjective refraction"

I think we should exclude these articles or change the inclusion criteria

3 ° in the table, in addition to the age limits, the median or average of the ages must be included in each article. Moreover, the authors specify it for an article: In another study (43) however, the children were aged 4 - 24 years but with a mean age of 12 years.

4 ° in the discussion, when the authors evoke the fact that fewer children await early education and learning in many African countries, compared with Asian countries, means that the children do less near work and are more involved with outdoor tasks, nuances must be made.

In a meta-analysis, Gajjar (Acta ophtahlmol 2021) show that the role of near vision is still questionable and that the study of the literature does not allow a conclusion. On the other hand, Tang Y (J Glob Health. 2021) shows the existence of a difference in the prevalence of myopia in China depending on whether the children live in the city or in the countryside.

5° The authors said that "the apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls may be due to girls having ... shorter axial length than boys". That surprising !!!

Reviewer #2: This is a good Meta-analysis regarding the myopia prevalence in Africa

it is good structured and well-written; however, it would be better if you add a figure showing prevalence of myopia by ethnicity (black vs white vs asian in the same region) to show if it affects the prevalence of myopia or not

6. PLOS authors have the option to publish the peer review history of their article ([what does this mean?](#)). If published, this will include your full peer review and any attached files.

If you choose “no”, your identity will remain anonymous but your review may still be made public.

Do you want your identity to be public for this peer review? For information about this choice, including consent withdrawal, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

Reviewer #1: No

Reviewer #2: No

[NOTE: If reviewer comments were submitted as an attachment file, they will be attached to this email and accessible via the submission site. Please log into your account, locate the manuscript record, and check for the action link "View Attachments". If this link does not appear, there are no attachment files.]

While revising your submission, please upload your figure files to the Preflight Analysis and Conversion Engine (PACE) digital diagnostic tool, <https://pacev2.apexcovantage.com/>. PACE helps ensure that figures meet PLOS requirements. To use PACE, you must first register as a user. Registration is free. Then, login and navigate to the UPLOAD tab, where you will find detailed instructions on how to use the tool. If you encounter any issues or have any questions when using PACE, please email PLOS at figures@plos.org. Please note that Supporting Information files do not need this step.

2022; 17(2): e0263335.

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Author response to Decision Letter 0

13 Jan 2022

Response to Reviewers comments

Dear Aleksandra Barac

Thanks for the very useful comments which has strengthened our manuscript. We have revised the article according to the suggested comments. We have provided a point-by-point response to all reviewers comments for clarity.

The changes made in the revised manuscript and supplementary files were highlighted using red font for easy identification.

Journal Requirements:

When submitting your revision, we need you to address these additional requirements.

1. Please ensure that your manuscript meets PLOS ONE's style requirements, including those for file naming. The PLOS ONE style templates can be found at

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/file?id=wjVg/PLOSOne%20formatting%20sample%20main%20body.pdf> and

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2. Please include captions for your Supporting Information files at the end of your manuscript, and update any in-text citations to match accordingly. Please see our Supporting Information guidelines for more information: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/s/supporting-information>.

Response: Done

Comments to the Author

1. Is the manuscript technically sound, and do the data support the conclusions?

The manuscript must describe a technically sound piece of scientific research with data that supports the conclusions. Experiments must have been conducted rigorously, with appropriate controls, replication, and sample sizes. The conclusions must be drawn appropriately based on the data presented.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

2. Has the statistical analysis been performed appropriately and rigorously?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

3. Have the authors made all data underlying the findings in their manuscript fully available?

The PLOS Data policy requires authors to make all data underlying the findings described in their manuscript fully available without restriction, with rare exception (please refer to the Data Availability Statement in the manuscript PDF file). The data should be provided as part of the manuscript or its supporting information, or deposited to a public repository. For example, in addition to summary statistics, the data points behind means, medians and variance measures should be available. If there are restrictions on publicly sharing data—e.g. participant privacy or use of data from a third party—those must be specified.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: No

Response: We have included the study data used in the analysis as a spread sheet inline with PlosOne policy

4. Is the manuscript presented in an intelligible fashion and written in standard English?

PLOS ONE does not copyedit accepted manuscripts, so the language in submitted articles must be clear, correct, and unambiguous. Any typographical or grammatical errors should be corrected at revision, so please note any specific errors here.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

5. Review Comments to the Author

Please use the space provided to explain your answers to the questions above. You may also include additional comments for the author, including concerns about dual publication, research ethics, or publication ethics. (Please upload your review as an attachment if it exceeds 20,000 characters)

Reviewer #1:

The authors conducted a review and meta-analysis of articles on the prevalence of myopia in African children.

This study follows the recommendations for this type of review.

Several points of detail should be reported

1 ° In the inclusion criteria, the authors report having excluded studies in which the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified. But they did not clearly define the age ranges of this review themselves.

Response: Agreed and we have excluded the 4–24year-old range study (Yareed et al) and the 5-19 year study (Ovenseri-Ogbomo et al) as they do not meet our stipulated inclusion criteria of 5-18 year.

2 ° Two articles have been included but pose a problem in my opinion.

- They did not report whether it was school- or population-based. The inclusion / exclusion criteria are not clear at this level. They did not specify the method used to determine the refractive error. However, it is clearly specified in the inclusion criteria "stated the method of measuring refractive error - cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction, as well as objective or subjective refraction"

Response: The inclusion and exclusion criteria were made clearer and as suggested, we excluded these studies as the two stipulated criteria are not specified [Rushood (39) and Woldeamanuel (47)]

3 ° in the table, in addition to the age limits, the median or average of the ages must be included in each article. Moreover, the authors specify it for an article: In another study (43) however, the children were aged 4 - 24 years but with a mean age of 12 years.

Response: We have included the mean age in Table 1 and the study with age range 4-24years was excluded based on the exclusion criteria.

4 ° in the discussion, when the authors evoke the fact that fewer children await early education and learning in many African countries, compared with Asian countries, means that the children do less near work and are more involved with outdoor tasks, nuances must be made.

Response: In a meta-analysis, Gajjar (Acta ophthalmol 2021) showed that the role of near vision is still questionable and that the study of the literature does not allow a conclusion. On the other hand, Tang Y (J Glob Health. 2021) showed the existence of a difference in the prevalence of myopia in China depending on whether the children live in the city or in the countryside. However, we agree with the reviewer and have made the following revision in the discussion section:

In addition, several studies have shown the major involvement of environmental factors such as near work (writing, reading, and working on a computer) in myopia development(62, 65). In many African countries, children do not start education and learning at the same early age as in other countries of Asia. African children are therefore exposed to less near work and are more involved with outdoor activities, resulting in less risk of developing myopia compared with their Asian counterparts. This assertion is supported by the fact that in 2010, the pre-primary school enrolment rate in the most populous country in Africa (Nigeria) was 41.83% compared to 89.12% in 2012 in China (the most populous country in Asia) (66). We acknowledge that a recent investigation(67) has shown that more precise objective measures are required to make definitive conclusions about the relationship between myopia and near work.

5° The authors said that "he apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls may be due to girls having ... shorter axial length than boys". That surprising !!!

Response: Zadnik et al study was referring to a specific context in their study, where they found that girls tended to have steeper corneas, stronger crystalline lenses, and shorter eyes/axial length than boys. These findings are specific to their study and cannot be used to explain any result where a higher prevalence of myopia in girls is found. For example, we know that shorter axial length is generally associated with hyperopia and not myopia.

However, the new analysis after removing the 4 studies, showed no statistically significant difference in myopia prevalence between gender. Therefore, we have removed this statement and the revised section now reads:

The influence of gender on the prevalence of myopia has not been unequivocal in the literature (70-74) with some suggesting that the slightly higher prevalence in females may be related to the different ages of onset of puberty between boys and girls (75). Other factors that could account for the reported apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls include limited outdoor activity time than boys (76).

Reviewer #2

This is a good Meta-analysis regarding the myopia prevalence in Africa. It is good structured and well-written; however, it would be better if you add a figure showing prevalence of myopia by ethnicity (black vs white vs asian in the same region) to show if it affects the prevalence of myopia or not

Response: Thanks for the suggestion. Although the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about the differences in the prevalence of myopia between ethnic groups in Africa, studies that have been conducted in Africa did not specify the different ethnicities. However, we think there is need for such comparison between black vs white vs Asian and this could be another research interest with a different research aim for another manuscript. We have suggested this in the conclusion for future study direction. The section now reads:

Future studies are needed to understand the role of ethnicity on the myopia prevalence in Africa as the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about whether significant differences in the prevalence of myopia among different ethnicity in Africa exists.

6. PLOS authors have the option to publish the peer review history of their article (what does this mean?). If published, this will include your full peer review and any attached files.

If you choose “no”, your identity will remain anonymous but your review may still be made public.

Do you want your identity to be public for this peer review? For information about this choice, including consent withdrawal, please see our Privacy Policy.

Reviewer #1: No

Reviewer #2: No

Response. Thanks for your comments

Attachment

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2022; 17(2): e0263335.

Published online 2022 Feb 3. doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0263335.r003](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263335.r003)

Decision Letter 1

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

17 Jan 2022

Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children.

PONE-D-21-28841R1

Dear Dr. Osuagwu,

We're pleased to inform you that your manuscript has been judged scientifically suitable for publication and will be formally accepted for publication once it meets all outstanding technical requirements.

Within one week, you'll receive an e-mail detailing the required amendments. When these have been addressed, you'll receive a formal acceptance letter and your manuscript will be scheduled for publication.

An invoice for payment will follow shortly after the formal acceptance. To ensure an efficient process, please log into Editorial Manager at <http://www.editorialmanager.com/pone/>, click the 'Update My Information' link at the top of the page, and double check that your user information is up-to-date. If you have any billing related questions, please contact our Author Billing department directly at authorbilling@plos.org.

If your institution or institutions have a press office, please notify them about your upcoming paper to help maximize its impact. If they'll be preparing press materials, please inform our press team as soon as possible -- no later than 48 hours after receiving the formal acceptance. Your manuscript will remain under strict press embargo until 2 pm Eastern Time on the date of publication. For more information, please contact onepress@plos.org.

Kind regards,

Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

PLOS ONE

2022; 17(2): e0263335.

Published online 2022 Feb 3. doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0263335.r004](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263335.r004)

Acceptance letter

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

24 Jan 2022

PONE-D-21-28841R1

Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children.

Dear Dr. Osuagwu:

I'm pleased to inform you that your manuscript has been deemed suitable for publication in PLOS ONE. Congratulations! Your manuscript is now with our production department.

If your institution or institutions have a press office, please let them know about your upcoming paper now to help maximize its impact. If they'll be preparing press materials, please inform our press team within the next 48 hours. Your manuscript will remain under strict press embargo until 2 pm Eastern Time on the date of publication. For more information please contact onepress@plos.org.

If we can help with anything else, please email us at plosone@plos.org.

Thank you for submitting your work to PLOS ONE and supporting open access.

Kind regards,

PLOS ONE Editorial Office Staff

on behalf of

Dr. Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

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Published online 2022 Feb 3. doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0263335](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263335)

PMCID: PMC8812871

PMID: [35113922](#)

Systematic review and meta-analysis of myopia prevalence in African school children

[Godwin Ovenseri-Ogbomo](#), Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing,^{# 1} [Uchechukwu L. Osuagwu](#), Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing,^{2,‡*} [Bernadine N. Ekpenyong](#), Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing,^{3,‡} [Kingsley Agho](#), Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Writing – review & editing,^{4,‡} [Edgar Ekure](#), Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing,^{# 5} [Antor O. Ndep](#), Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing,^{# 6} [Stephen Ocansey](#), Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing,^{# 7} [Khathutshelo Percy Mashige](#), Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing,^{# 8} [Kovin Shunmugan Naidoo](#), Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing,^{# 8} ,^{# 9} and [Kelechi C. Ogbuehi](#), Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing^{# 10}

Aleksandra Barac, Editor

Abstract

Purpose

Increased prevalence of myopia is a major public health challenge worldwide, including in Africa. While previous studies have shown an increasing prevalence in Africa, there is no collective review of evidence on the magnitude of myopia in African school children. Hence, this study reviews the evidence and provides a meta-analysis of the prevalence of myopia in African school children.

Methods

This review was conducted using the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Five computerized bibliographic databases, PUBMED, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Africa Index Medicus were searched for published studies on the prevalence of myopia in Africa from 1 January 2000 to 18 August 2021. Studies were assessed for methodological quality. Data were gathered by gender, age and refraction technique and standardized to the definition of myopia as refractive error ≥ 0.50 diopter. A meta-analysis was

conducted to estimate the prevalence. Significant heterogeneity was detected among the various studies ($I^2 > 50\%$), hence a random effect model was used, and sensitivity analysis was performed to examine the effects of outliers.

Results

We included data from 24 quality assessed studies, covering 36,395 African children. The overall crude prevalence of myopia over the last two decades is 4.7% (95% CI, 3.9–5.7) in African children. Although the prevalence of myopia was slightly higher in females (5.3%, 95%CI: 4.1, 6.5) than in males (3.7%, 95% CI, 2.6–4.7; $p = 0.297$) and higher in older [12–18 years 5.1% (95% CI, 3.8–6.3) than younger children (aged 5–11 years, 3.4%, 95% CI, 2.5–4.4; $p = 0.091$), the differences were not significant. There was a significantly lower prevalence of myopia with cycloplegic compared with non-cycloplegic refraction [4.2%, 95%CI: 3.3, 5.1 versus 6.4%, 95%CI: 4.4, 8.4; $p = 0.046$].

Conclusions

Our results showed that myopia affects about one in twenty African schoolchildren, and it is overestimated in non-cycloplegic refraction. Clinical interventions to reduce the prevalence of myopia in the region should target females, and school children who are aged 12–18 years.

Introduction

Uncorrected refractive error is the most common cause of visual impairment affecting an estimated one billion people globally [1]. Myopia is the most common refractive error and an important cause of ocular morbidity, particularly among school-aged children and young adults. Worldwide, myopia is reaching epidemic proportions linked to changing lifestyles and modern technology, particularly mobile devices [2]. Globally, myopia affected 22.9% of the world's population in 2000, with projections of an increase to 49.8% by 2050 affecting 4.8 billion people [2], representing a 117% increase over 50 years. According to a 2015 report, it was estimated that globally, about 1.89 billion people are myopic and 170 million have high myopia [3].

The reported prevalence of myopia in children aged 5–17 years ranges from 1.2% in Meki Zone, Nepal, to 73.0% in South Korea [4, 5]. Over 15 years, the prevalence of myopia increased from 79.5% to 87.7% in Chinese high school children with an average age of 18.5 ± 0.7 years [6]. In South African school children aged 5–15 years, the reported prevalence of myopia was only 2.9% with retinoscopy and 4.0% using autorefraction [7]. The authors reported that this prevalence increased to 9.6% at age 15 years.

The increase in myopia prevalence will have a significant economic impact because of associated ocular health problems and visual impairment. Uncorrected myopia of between- 1.50 D and- 4.00 D can significantly affect vision to be regarded as a cause of moderate visual impairment and blindness, respectively [8]. Apart from its direct impact on visual impairment, high myopia [usually defined as a spherical equivalent ≥ 5.00 D [4, 9, 10] of myopia, although the definitions used to grade myopia are variable] increases the risk of potentially blinding ocular pathologies such as retinal holes; retinal tears; retinal degeneration; retinal detachment; and myopic macular degeneration [3, 11]. Uncorrected myopia has huge social, economic, psychological and developmental implications [12]. The economic cost of refractive errors, including myopia, has been estimated to be approximately US\$ 202 billion per annum [13], far exceeding that of other eye diseases.

The increasing prevalence of myopia has led to research in the study of the possible mechanism for myopia development, which has generated two broad themes: the role of nature (genetic influences) and nurture (environmental influences including lifestyle). Understanding the mechanism for the development of myopia is also being explored in the control of myopia. Epidemiologic data from Southeast Asia has given credence to the association between near work and myopia, given the number of hours children from this region spend doing near work. Due to vast regional differences in culture, habits, socioeconomic status, educational levels and urbanization, there is uncertainty as to the exact magnitude of the myopia burden among African school-aged children and its trend over time [14].

In the last few decades, there has been a change in the lifestyle and behavior of people in Africa as a result of increasing urbanization [15]. Africa's urban population grew from 27 million in 1950 to 567 million in 2015 (a 2,000% increase), and now 50% of Africa's population live in one of the continent's 7,617 urban agglomerations of 10,000 or more inhabitants [16]. Consequently, more children and young adults in Africa are increasingly engaged in indoor and near work activities compared to earlier generations [17]. Children spend long hours doing schoolwork and, following the advent of technology, increasingly use mobile devices for gaming and other activities [18, 19]. These factors are thought to promote myopia development and/or progression [20–23].

Africa is the world's second largest and second most populous continent, after Asia, and it accounts for about 16% of the world's human population. While every global region will experience a decline in population by 2100, the African population is expected to triple. Africa's population is the youngest amongst all the continents, the median age in 2012 was 19.7 years compared to the global median of 30.4 years. This young population is an important asset for the continent's development. The challenges of the young population must be addressed in time as they constitute the bulk of the productive age of the economy. While rising myopia is a cause for global concern, it is not given due attention in Africa due to a lack of adequate prevalence data and prospective studies tracking the trend of myopia over decades [24]. Due to this, the representation of Africa is poor in studies predicting global trends of myopia [24]. The aim of this study was to systematically review the evidence and provide a meta-analysis of the prevalence of myopia in African school children which will address the knowledge gap and help understand the prevalence of myopia among this group in Africa.

Materials and methods

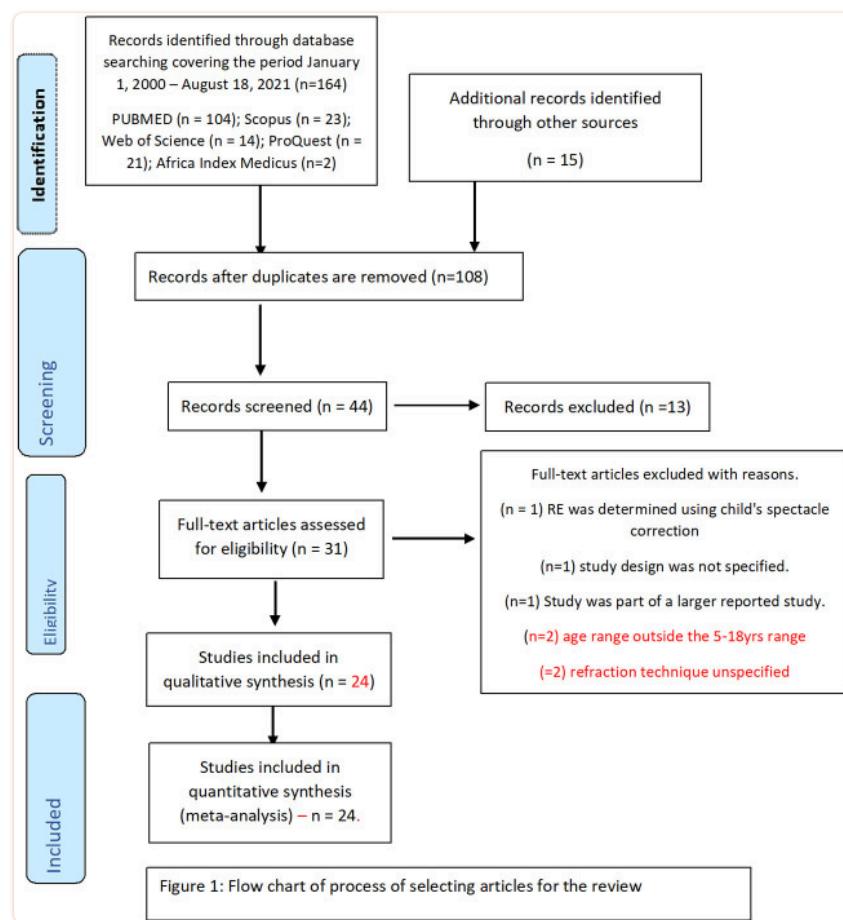
This systematic review followed the framework of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA. See Checklist in [S1 File](#)) [25]. The protocol for the review was registered with PROSPERO (#CRD42020187609).

Search strategy and quality assessment

Two review team members (GO and BE) performed an independent systematic search and review of myopia in Africa using published data spanning the last two decades. Refractive error came into reckoning as a cause of visual impairment in the last two decades, following the change in the definition of visual impairment which was based on presenting visual acuity [26]. The search was conducted on 25th May and 18th August 2021. A third reviewer, KO, adjudicated where there were disagreements. The quality of each selected article was assessed using the checklist developed by Downs and Black [27] and each included article was assessed and scored on a 10-item scale (scoring is shown in [S1 Table](#)). The search was restricted to articles available online, articles

mentioning prevalence of myopia in any region of Africa, and articles published in the English language. Searches included the following databases: Web of sciences, PubMed, ProQuest, MEDLINE, Scopus, and African Index Medicus from 1st of January 2000 to August 18, 2021.

We searched these databases using the following MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms and keywords: Refractive AND error AND Africa AND children AND prevalence. A number of iterations of these search terms were used, for example, "refractive error AND Africa AND children AND prevalence" or "refractive error AND Africa AND children". Further details about search strategy and MeSH terms are available in the ([S2 File](#)). A broader search also used terms such as epidemiology, myopia, and school children. We also identified and included relevant studies by manually searching through the reference lists of identified papers. The PRISMA flowchart presented in [Fig 1](#) shows the process used for selecting articles.



[Fig 1](#)

Flow chart of process of selecting articles for the review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies published between 2000 and 2021, investigating the prevalence of refractive error in male and female school children aged 5 to 18 years of age were included in the review. Studies that employed an observational cross-sectional study design; had a clear description of the sampling technique; stated the method of measuring refractive error (cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction), as well as objective or subjective refraction; stated the criteria for defining myopia (spherical equivalent ≥ 0.50 D of myopia [[2](#), [28–30](#)]; the study was either school-based or

population-based; and were published in English language, were included in the review. The decision as to whether the articles met the inclusion criteria was made independently by the two reviewers (GO and BE) and where there was a disagreement, a third reviewer (KO) was consulted.

Studies where the criteria for defining myopia were not specified; the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified for this review; or which reported findings from a hospital/clinic-based sample were excluded from the review.

Data extraction

The data extracted from each article included the following: Authors; year of publication; country of study; study design; sample size; sampling technique; the age of study participants; criteria for defining myopia; method of refractive error assessment (cycloplegic vs non-cycloplegic); method of refractive error assessment (objective vs subjective); prevalence of myopia; and the proportion of refractive error due to myopia. Where the reported prevalence was not clearly defined, the corresponding author in the published article was contacted for clarification.

Statistical methods

Meta-analysis was conducted using Stata version 14.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA). The syntax “metaprop” in Stata was used to generate forest plots and each forest plot showed the prevalence of myopia in school children, by gender, age and refraction technique in individual studies and its corresponding weight, as well as the pooled prevalence in each subset and its associated 95% confidence intervals (CI). A heterogeneity test obtained for the different studies showed a high level of inconsistency ($I^2 > 50\%$) thereby indicating the use of a random effect model in all the meta-analyses conducted. Sensitivity analysis was carried out by examining the effect of outliers, by employing similar method to that used by Patsopoulos et al. [31], which involves the process of comparing the pooled prevalence before and after eliminating one study at a time. The funnel plot was used to report the potential bias and small/large study effects and Begg’s tests was used to assess asymmetry. The prevalence was subdivided into separate datasets based on overall prevalence, males or females, cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction for a more detailed analysis of the prevalence of myopia. Also, to study a possible variation of the prevalence of myopia in terms of age, the age groups in the reported studies were divided into two categories: 5–11 years and 12–18 years. Their respective funnel plots are shown as ([S3–S7 Files](#)).

Results

Summary of included studies

From the described search strategy, a total of 164 potentially relevant titles/abstracts of articles were initially identified. [Fig 1](#) presents the flowchart of the article screening and selection process. Following a quick inspection of identified studies and removal of duplicate articles, 44 relevant articles were assessed for eligibility. Using the pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 24 of 30 articles that underwent detailed review were eligible, and data from these studies were included in this study. A breakdown of the eligible studies as well as their quality assessment scores (maximum of 10) are presented in [Table 1](#). [S1 Table](#) shows how the quality assessment scores were calculated.

Table 1

Characteristics of studies that reported the prevalence of myopia in school-aged children in Africa and were included in the meta-analysis.

First Author	Year of study	Study Country [†]	Age group	Mean age (years)	Total Sample size	Cycloplegia	Objective refraction	Prevalence of myopia (%)	Comm refrac error
Atowa [32]	2017	Nigeria	8–15	11.5 ± 2.3	1197	Yes	Objective	2.7	
Wajuihian [33]	2017	South Africa	13–18	15.8 ± 1.6	1586	No	Objective	7	
Chebil [34]	2016	Tunisia	6–14	10.1 ± 1.8	6192	Yes	Objective	3.71	
Kedir [35]	2014	Ethiopia	7–15	Not reported	570	No	Subjective	2.6	
Soler [36]	2015	Equatorial Guinea	6–16	10.8 ± 3.1	425	Yes	Objective	10.4	
Kumah [37]	2013	Ghana	12–15	13.8	2435	Yes	Objective	3.2	
Mehari [38]	2013	Ethiopia	7–18	13.1 ± 2.5	4238	No	Objective	6	
Jimenez [39]	2012	Burkina Faso	6–16	11.2 ± 2.4	315	No	Objective	2.5	
Naidoo [7]	2003	South Africa	5–15	Not reported	4890	Yes	Objective	2.9	
Yamamah [40]	2015	Egypt	6–17	10.7 ± 3.1	2070	Yes	Objective	3.1	Astign
Nartey [41]	2016	Ghana	6–16	10.6	811	No	Subjective	4.6	
Anera [42]	2006	Burkina Faso	5–16	10.2 ± 2.2	388	Yes	Objective	0.5	
Chukwuemeka [43]	2015	South Africa	7–14	9.9 ± 2.2	421	No	Objective	18.7	Astign
Alrasheed [44]	2016	Sudan	6–15	10.8 ± 2.8	1678	Yes	Objective	6.8	Myopi
Abdul-Kabir [45]	2016	Ghana	10–15	Not reported	208	No	Objective	22.6	Myopi
Ebri [46]	2019	Nigeria	10–18	13.3 ± 1.9	4241	Yes	Objective	4.8	Astign
Ezinne [47]	2018	Nigeria	5–15	9.0 ± 2.5	998	Yes	Objective	4.5	Myopi

[†] = country the study was conducted;

[‡] = authors provided data for only those aged 5–18 years.

The included studies comprised of the following: six (25.0%) studies from Ghana, four (16.7%) each from South Africa, and Nigeria, three from Ethiopia (12.5%), two (8.3%) from Burkina Faso, and one (4.2%) each from Sudan, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Somalia and Tunisia ([Table 1](#)). Of the reviewed articles, 84.2% (n = 21) were school-based, cross-sectional studies, two (8.3%) were population-based, cross-sectional studies, while one (4.2%) employed a cross-sectional study design but did not report whether it was school or population-based.

Method of measuring refractive error in African school-aged children

Of the reviewed studies, 13 (54.2%) performed cycloplegic refraction to determine the refractive error status of the children, while non-cycloplegic refraction was used in 11 (45.8%) of the studies. Regarding the technique used for refractive error measurement, over three-quarters of the studies (n = 20, 83.3%) performed objective refraction, with about one-sixth (n = 4, 16.7%) performing subjective refraction.

Prevalence of myopia in African school-aged children

The number of children aged 5–18 years included in the study ranged from 208 for a study conducted in Ghana [\[45\]](#) to 6192 for another study conducted in Tunisia [\[34, 55\]](#). The prevalence of myopia reported in these studies ranged from 0.5% [\[42\]](#) to 10.4% [\[36, 52\]](#) with cycloplegic refraction. In studies where non-cycloplegic refraction was used to determine refractive error refraction in school children, the reported myopia prevalence ranged from 1.7% [\[51\]](#) to 22.6% [\[45\]](#).

Meta-analysis of myopia prevalence in children ag 5–18 years in Africa (2000–2021)

Myopia prevalence among school children in Africa [Fig 2](#) shows a forest plot of the prevalence of myopia among African school children aged 5–18 years. The pooled estimate of myopia in the African region was significant (5.0%, 95%CI: 4.1, 5.8; p<0.001) and about 37.5% of the studies (n = 9) reported significantly higher prevalence of myopia and 50% (n = 12) reporting significantly lower prevalence compared with the pooled estimate across Africa. The study by Abdul-Kabir found the highest prevalence (22.6%) of myopia among Ghanaian children (95%CI: 17.1, 28.9) [\[45\]](#), while Anera et al. found the lowest prevalence among children in Burkina Faso (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.9) [\[42\]](#). The pooled prevalence estimates of myopia was similar to the study by Ebri [\[46\]](#) and Ezinne [\[47\]](#) (4.8%, 95%CI: 4.2, 5.5), both involving children from Nigeria [\[46, 47\]](#). Funnel plots and using Begg's test for Myopia in Africa indicated homogeneity ([S3 File](#)) and meta-regression analysis of myopia by year of publication indicated that publication of year increased as the proportion of myopia decreased but this relationship was not statistically significant (p = 0.423, [S7 File](#)).

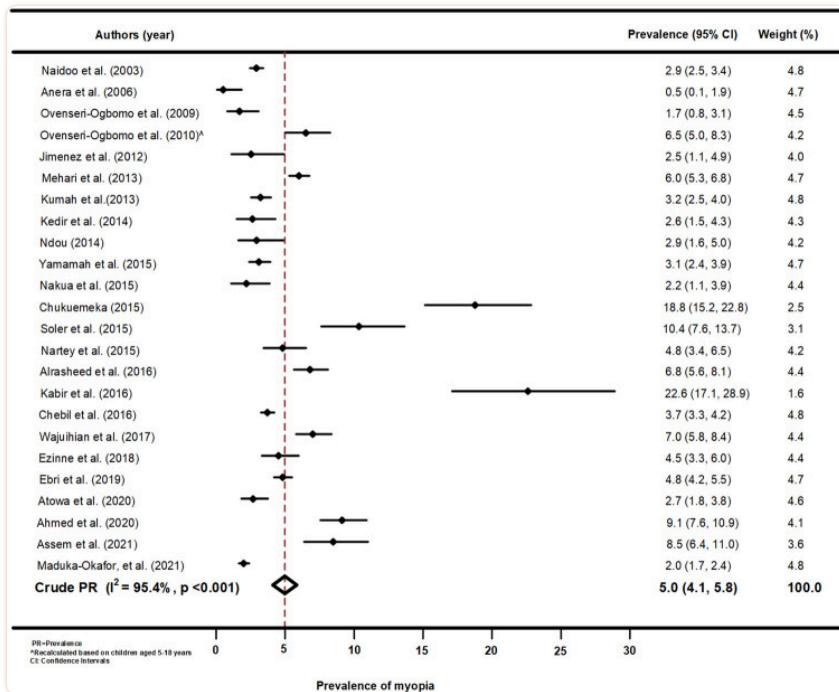


Fig 2

Forest plot of myopia prevalence from the meta-analysis of African studies.

Myopia prevalence by gender of the School children in Africa (2000–2021)

[Fig 3](#) is a forest plot for prevalence of myopia by gender among school children aged 5–18 years in Africa. The prevalence estimates varied significantly between studies in both male and female children ($p<0.001$, per gender), and the overall pooled prevalence of myopia by gender was 4.8% (95%CI: 4.1, 5.6) and similar between male and female estimates ($p = 0.297$). Compared with the overall pooled estimate, the prevalence of myopia was slightly higher in male (4.5%, 95%CI: 3.4, 5.5) children than females (5.3%, 95%CI: 4.1, 6.5) but the difference was not significant as indicated by the overlapping of the CIs with that of the overall pooled estimate. Funnel plots and using Begg's test for Myopia by gender reported absence of publication biases ([S4 File](#)).

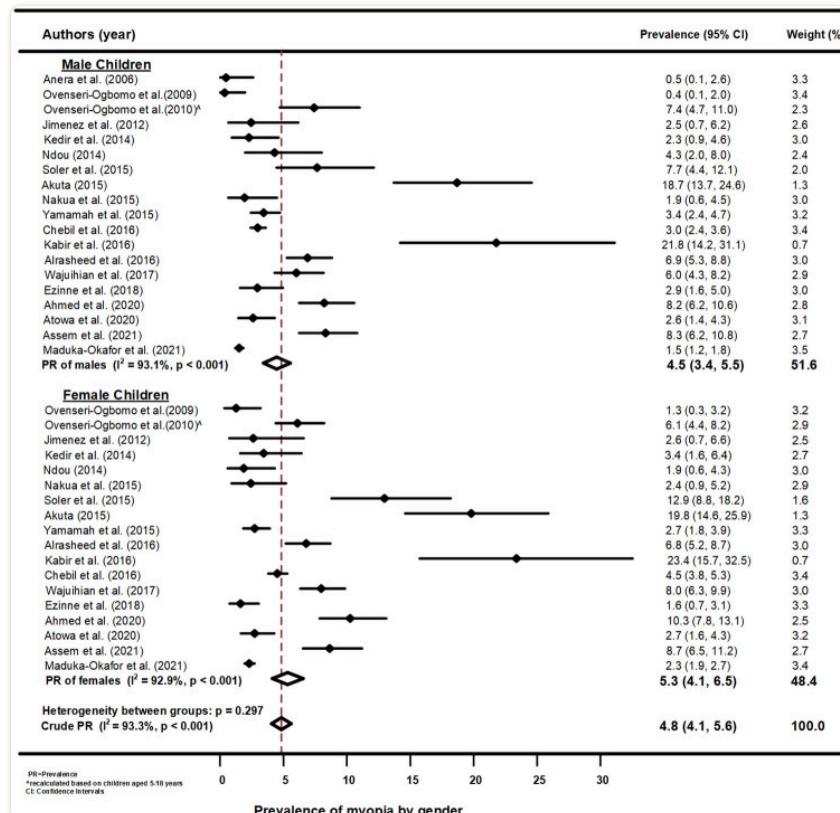


Fig 3

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by gender from the meta-analysis of African studies.

Myopia prevalence by age group of the school children in Africa (2000–2021)

The forest plot of the prevalence of myopia in children aged 5–11 years and 12–18 years is presented in Fig 4. The pooled estimate of myopia in school children aged 5–11 years and 12–18 years was lower (3.7%, 95%CI 2.6, 4.7) and higher (5.8%, 95%CI 3.8, 6.3) respectively, than the pooled estimate but none was significant as they overlapped with the pooled estimate in Africa (4.4%, 95%CI 3.6, 5.2). The heterogeneity between the groups was approaching significant ($p = 0.091$) but older children had a higher prevalence of myopia than younger children. Among those aged 5–11 years, the highest significant prevalence was reported in a Ghanaian study (16.4%, 95%CI: 13.0, 20.3) and a study conducted in Equatorial Guinea (8.2%, 95%CI: 5.8, 11.3) while school children in Ethiopia (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.5) had the lowest significant prevalence estimate of myopia. Among those aged 12–18 years, children in Ghana also showed the highest significant prevalence of myopia (20.2%, 95%CI: 16.5, 24.4), but the lowest prevalence was reported among School children in Burkina Faso (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.9). The heterogeneity of these studies by age as subgroups analysis were low (S5 File).

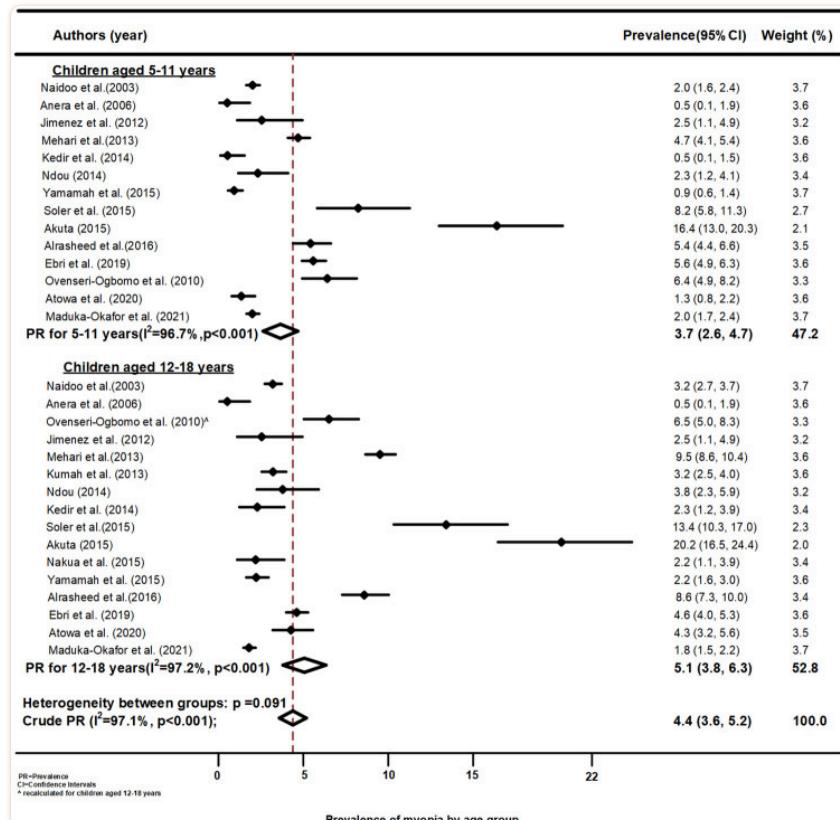


Fig 4

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by age group across African studies.

Myopia prevalence by mode of refraction among school children in Africa (2000–2021)

The forest plot displayed in Fig 5 shows the pooled estimate of myopia prevalence among school children in Africa. Using cycloplegic refraction, studies have reported significantly lower prevalence estimates of myopia among school children in Africa compared with those that used non-cycloplegic refraction (4.2%, 95%CI: 3.3, 5.1 versus 6.4%, 95%CI: 4.4, 8.4; $p = 0.046$). From the plot, it can be seen that studies that used non cycloplegic technique to determine refraction had greater variabilities in the reported myopia prevalence (ranging from 1.7 to 22.6%), but those that performed cycloplegic refraction had smaller between study variability in the reported prevalence of myopia (range from 0.5 to 10.4%). Funnel plots and the Begg's test for Myopia by refraction technique shown in S6 and S7 Files, respectively, found no publication biases.

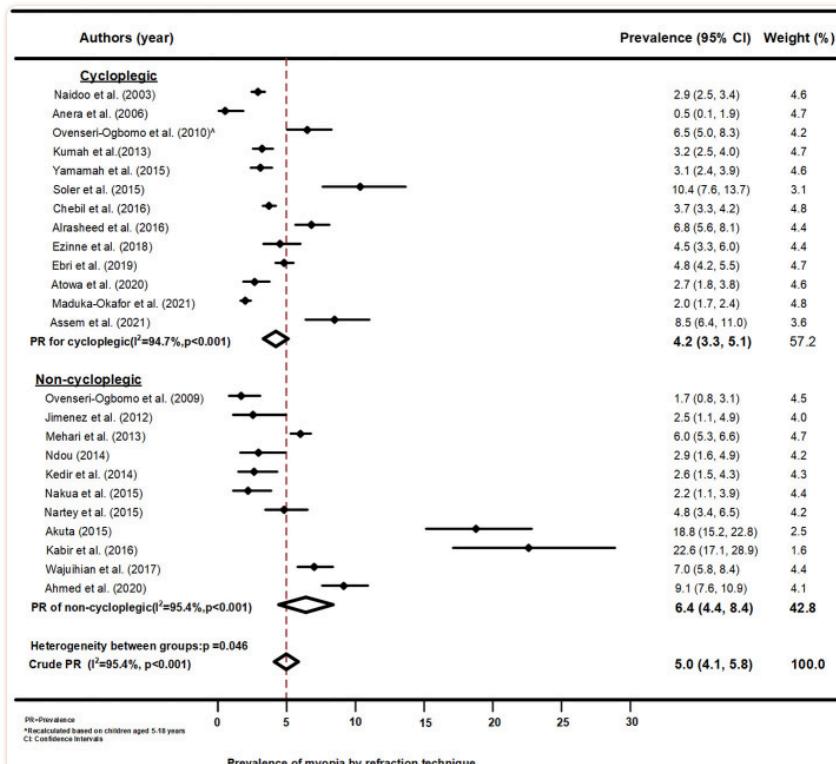


Fig 5

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by refraction technique among school children in Africa.

Discussion

Prevalence of myopia

The present study provided recent estimates of the myopia prevalence in African children using data from twenty eight studies conducted over two decades. The prevalence of myopia defined as SER $\geq 0.50\text{D}$ of myopia in school children across African countries was 4.7% (95%CI, 3.9, 5.7%) and there were wide variations within and between African countries. A significantly higher prevalence rate was observed in Ghana [45] and South Africa [43], with significantly lower rates in Burkina Faso [42] and Ethiopia [56]. In some countries like Ghana, the variation in the reported prevalence of myopia between studies reached 21% [37, 41, 45, 48, 51, 52]. Although the regional variations in myopia prevalence found in this study are consistent with the statement of Foster and Jiang who remarked that “Considerable regional difference exists from country to country even within the same geographical area” [57], it remains unclear why these variations exist. While the criteria for defining refractive error is often cited as the reason for the variation in the prevalence of refractive errors, including myopia, between studies, this may not be the case in our study because only studies that defined myopia as spherical equivalent of $\geq 0.50\text{ D}$ were included.

The overall low prevalence of myopia found across Africa is consistent with other studies that reported lower myopia prevalence in African children compared with Asian children [5, 58]. It is instructive to note that in four of the studies that were included in the current review [36, 43, 45, 52], the reported prevalence of myopia was greater than 10%. Of these, two studies [36, 52] used cycloplegic refraction, which is thought to more accurately estimate the prevalence of myopia [59]. The lower prevalence of myopia in Africa compared with the other regions may be related to the

differences in genetic predisposition to myopia development, and to culture [60–62]. Although the role of genetics in the development and progression of myopia is reported to be small [12], it is believed to have a role in an individual's susceptibility to environmental risk factors for myopia [63]. In addition, several studies have shown the major involvement of environmental factors such as near work (writing, reading, and working on a computer) in myopia development [60, 63]. In many African countries, children do not start education and learning at the same early age as in other countries of Asia. African children are therefore exposed to less near work and are more involved with outdoor activities, resulting in less risk of developing myopia compared with their Asian counterparts. This assertion is supported by the fact that in 2010, the pre-primary school enrolment rate in the most populous country in Africa (Nigeria) was 41.83% compared to 89.12% in 2012 in China (the most populous country in Asia) [64]. We acknowledge that a recent investigation [65] has shown that more precise objective measures are required to make definitive conclusions about the relationship between myopia and near work.

Notwithstanding the relatively low prevalence of myopia found among African children, there is a need to monitor myopia prevalence among children in this region given the increasing access to, and use of, mobile devices among African population [19], including children. This is important considering the reported higher increase in the prevalence of myopia in black children living in Africa (2.8% to 5.5%) compared with other black children not living in Africa (4.8% to 19.9%) after 10 years [58]. It is assumed that black children not in Africa may have more access and exposure to near work, including mobile devices, and less outdoor activities than their counterparts in Africa.

Age and gender-based differences in myopia prevalence

There was a 34.6% increase in the prevalence of myopia between the age groups with the older age group having a higher prevalence of 5.2%. The slightly higher prevalence of myopia between the two age groups shows there is a tendency for myopia prevalence to increase with age which is consistent with previous studies from elsewhere [58, 66, 67]. This increase in myopia prevalence is thought to be associated with the increasing growth of the eyeball. Although the pooled prevalence of myopia in female children was slightly higher than in male children (4.7 versus 3.7%), the difference did not reach statistical significance. The influence of gender on the prevalence of myopia has not been unequivocal in the literature [68–72] with some suggesting that the slightly higher prevalence in females may be related to the different ages of onset of puberty between boys and girls [73]. Other factors that could account for the reported apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls include limited outdoor activity time than boys [74].

Prevalence of myopia by refraction technique (cycloplegic and non-cycloplegic)

The present study demonstrated that cycloplegic refraction resulted in significantly lower estimates of myopia prevalence than non-cycloplegic refraction, which was consistent with previous studies [75–78]. It has been reported that non-cycloplegic refraction overestimates the prevalence of myopia, yields a non-reliable measurement of association of myopia risk factors [59, 76], and hence cycloplegic refraction is regarded as the gold standard for measuring myopia [59]. Over half of the studies in this review utilised cycloplegic refraction, which is particularly important in this age group where the difference between the cycloplegic and non-cycloplegic refraction is quite high [77, 78]. The fact that non-cycloplegic refraction often results in overestimation of myopia may have, in part, accounted for the high prevalence reported in one study from Ghana [45]. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that cycloplegic refraction results in a lower variability of measured refractive error than non-cycloplegic refraction (see Fig 5), which may reflect the variable accommodative state

during the refraction of children of different ages. This finding underscores the need to appropriately control accommodation when performing refraction especially in young children who have a higher amplitude of accommodation and in whom accommodation is more active.

Implications of the study

This is the first systematic review and meta-analysis to estimate the prevalence of myopia among school children in Africa and its variation with age, gender and refraction technique. As previously reported, the prevalence of myopia in Africa appears low compared to other regions such as South East Asia. This study also provides baseline data for comparison and future prevalence studies to establish a trend in myopia epidemiology in this population. A further remarkable finding in this review is the demonstration that non-cycloplegic refraction overestimated the prevalence of myopia and results in more variable estimates of refractive errors compared with cycloplegic refraction. The interpretation of myopia prevalence data obtained from non-cycloplegic refraction may be potentially misleading to researchers and policymakers. As a result, it is recommended that cycloplegic refraction be used in all studies investigating the prevalence of myopia in children.

Strengths and limitations of the review

This review has certain limitations. Firstly, this review did not investigate the trend in the prevalence of myopia among school children in Africa due to the limited number of studies. Secondly, the selection of English-only studies likely biased the results towards studies in Anglophone countries or countries where the findings were reported in English. Thirdly, the current review did not explore the various factors influencing the epidemiology of myopia in this population. Despite these limitations, a major strength of this study is the selection of studies that used a uniform definition of myopia (i.e. $\geq 0.50\text{DS}$ of myopia) which allowed for a better comparison in the reported prevalence of myopia. In addition, the study excluded studies that were conducted in unselected groups such as hospital-based studies and studies that did not report any evidence of sampling in the study. In addition, the selected studies were evaluated for robustness in the study designs employed in each study.

Conclusions

In summary, this systematic review and meta-analysis have shown that the prevalence of myopia among schoolchildren in Africa is lower than other regions of the world. The use of non-cycloplegic refraction for estimation of myopia prevalence can be misleading as it returns higher and more variable prevalence estimates. There is a need to monitor the trend of myopia as more children in this region are increasingly being exposed to identified risk factors for myopia development including access to mobile devices, increased near work, increased online or remote learning, and limited time outdoors. Future studies are needed to understand the role of ethnicity on the myopia prevalence in Africa as the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about whether significant differences in the prevalence of myopia among different ethnicity in Africa exists.

Supporting information

S1 Table

Quality assessment of full-text articles included in review.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (23K, docx)

S1 File

PRISMA 2020 checklist.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (32K, docx)

S2 File

Search terms for refractive error Africa children prevalence filters (2000–2021).

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (13K, docx)

S3 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S4 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by gender.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S5 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by age in categories.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S6 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by refraction technique.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S7 File

A meta-regression analysis of Myopia by year of publication.

The vertical axis is the log proportion of Myopia, and the horizontal axis represents year of publication. Each dark dot represented one selected study, and the size of each dark dots corresponds to the weight assigned to each study. Given the slope of the regression line has descending slightly in this figure, this could be interpreted as publication of year increased, the proportion of myopia decreased and, this relationship did not differ statistically ($p = 0.5512$).

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (37K, docx)

S8 File

Data used in the analysis.

(XLSX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (46K, xlsx)

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Data Availability

All relevant data are within the paper and its [Supporting information](#) files.

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Decision Letter 0

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

13 Dec 2021

PONE-D-21-28841 Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children. PLOS ONE

Dear Dr. Osuagwu,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to PLOS ONE. After careful consideration, we feel that it has merit but does not fully meet PLOS ONE's publication criteria as it currently stands. Therefore, we invite you to submit a revised version of the manuscript that addresses the points raised during the review process.

Please submit your revised manuscript by Jan 27 2022 11:59PM. If you will need more time than this to complete your revisions, please reply to this message or contact the journal office at plosone@plos.org. When you're ready to submit your revision, log on to <https://www.editorialmanager.com/pone/> and select the 'Submissions Needing Revision' folder to locate your manuscript file.

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We look forward to receiving your revised manuscript.

Kind regards,

Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

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Reviewer's Responses to Questions

Comments to the Author

1. Is the manuscript technically sound, and do the data support the conclusions?

The manuscript must describe a technically sound piece of scientific research with data that supports the conclusions. Experiments must have been conducted rigorously, with appropriate controls, replication, and sample sizes. The conclusions must be drawn appropriately based on the data presented.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

2. Has the statistical analysis been performed appropriately and rigorously?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

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Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: No

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Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

5. Review Comments to the Author

Please use the space provided to explain your answers to the questions above. You may also include additional comments for the author, including concerns about dual publication, research ethics, or publication ethics. (Please upload your review as an attachment if it exceeds 20,000 characters)

Reviewer #1: The authors conducted a review and meta-analysis of articles on the prevalence of myopia in African children.

This study follows the recommendations for this type of review.

Several points of detail should be reported

1 ° In the inclusion criteria, the authors report having excluded studies in which the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified. But they did not clearly define the age ranges of this review themselves.

2 ° Two articles have been included but pose a problem in my opinion.

- They did not report whether it was school- or population-based. The inclusion / exclusion criteria are not clear at this level

- They did not specify the method used to determine the refractive error. However, it is clearly specified in the inclusion criteria "stated the method of measuring refractive error - cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction, as well as objective or subjective refraction"

I think we should exclude these articles or change the inclusion criteria

3 ° in the table, in addition to the age limits, the median or average of the ages must be included in each article. Moreover, the authors specify it for an article: In another study (43) however, the children were aged 4 - 24 years but with a mean age of 12 years.

4 ° in the discussion, when the authors evoke the fact that fewer children await early education and learning in many African countries, compared with Asian countries, means that the children do less near work and are more involved with outdoor tasks, nuances must be made.

In a meta-analysis, Gajjar (Acta ophtahlmol 2021) show that the role of near vision is still questionable and that the study of the literature does not allow a conclusion. On the other hand, Tang Y (J Glob Health. 2021) shows the existence of a difference in the prevalence of myopia in China depending on whether the children live in the city or in the countryside.

5° The authors said that "the apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls may be due to girls having ... shorter axial length than boys". That surprising !!!

Reviewer #2: This is a good Meta-analysis regarding the myopia prevalence in Africa

it is good structured and well-written; however, it would be better if you add a figure showing prevalence of myopia by ethnicity (black vs white vs asian in the same region) to show if it affects the prevalence of myopia or not

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Reviewer #1: No

Reviewer #2: No

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Author response to Decision Letter 0

13 Jan 2022

Response to Reviewers comments

Dear Aleksandra Barac

Thanks for the very useful comments which has strengthened our manuscript. We have revised the article according to the suggested comments. We have provided a point-by-point response to all reviewers comments for clarity.

The changes made in the revised manuscript and supplementary files were highlighted using red font for easy identification.

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Comments to the Author

1. Is the manuscript technically sound, and do the data support the conclusions?

The manuscript must describe a technically sound piece of scientific research with data that supports the conclusions. Experiments must have been conducted rigorously, with appropriate controls, replication, and sample sizes. The conclusions must be drawn appropriately based on the data presented.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

2. Has the statistical analysis been performed appropriately and rigorously?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

3. Have the authors made all data underlying the findings in their manuscript fully available?

The PLOS Data policy requires authors to make all data underlying the findings described in their manuscript fully available without restriction, with rare exception (please refer to the Data Availability Statement in the manuscript PDF file). The data should be provided as part of the manuscript or its supporting information, or deposited to a public repository. For example, in addition to summary statistics, the data points behind means, medians and variance measures should be available. If there are restrictions on publicly sharing data—e.g. participant privacy or use of data from a third party—those must be specified.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: No

Response: We have included the study data used in the analysis as a spread sheet inline with PlosOne policy

4. Is the manuscript presented in an intelligible fashion and written in standard English?

PLOS ONE does not copyedit accepted manuscripts, so the language in submitted articles must be clear, correct, and unambiguous. Any typographical or grammatical errors should be corrected at revision, so please note any specific errors here.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

5. Review Comments to the Author

Please use the space provided to explain your answers to the questions above. You may also include additional comments for the author, including concerns about dual publication, research ethics, or publication ethics. (Please upload your review as an attachment if it exceeds 20,000 characters)

Reviewer #1:

The authors conducted a review and meta-analysis of articles on the prevalence of myopia in African children.

This study follows the recommendations for this type of review.

Several points of detail should be reported

1 ° In the inclusion criteria, the authors report having excluded studies in which the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified. But they did not clearly define the age ranges of this review themselves.

Response: Agreed and we have excluded the 4–24year-old range study (Yareed et al) and the 5-19 year study (Ovenseri-Ogbomo et al) as they do not meet our stipulated inclusion criteria of 5-18 year.

2 ° Two articles have been included but pose a problem in my opinion.

- They did not report whether it was school- or population-based. The inclusion / exclusion criteria are not clear at this level. They did not specify the method used to determine the refractive error. However, it is clearly specified in the inclusion criteria "stated the method of measuring refractive error - cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction, as well as objective or subjective refraction"

Response: The inclusion and exclusion criteria were made clearer and as suggested, we excluded these studies as the two stipulated criteria are not specified [Rushood (39) and Woldeamanuel (47)]

3 ° in the table, in addition to the age limits, the median or average of the ages must be included in each article. Moreover, the authors specify it for an article: In another study (43) however, the children were aged 4 - 24 years but with a mean age of 12 years.

Response: We have included the mean age in Table 1 and the study with age range 4-24years was excluded based on the exclusion criteria.

4 ° in the discussion, when the authors evoke the fact that fewer children await early education and learning in many African countries, compared with Asian countries, means that the children do less near work and are more involved with outdoor tasks, nuances must be made.

Response: In a meta-analysis, Gajjar (Acta ophthalmol 2021) showed that the role of near vision is still questionable and that the study of the literature does not allow a conclusion. On the other hand, Tang Y (J Glob Health. 2021) showed the existence of a difference in the prevalence of myopia in China depending on whether the children live in the city or in the countryside. However, we agree with the reviewer and have made the following revision in the discussion section:

In addition, several studies have shown the major involvement of environmental factors such as near work (writing, reading, and working on a computer) in myopia development(62, 65). In many African countries, children do not start education and learning at the same early age as in other countries of Asia. African children are therefore exposed to less near work and are more involved with outdoor activities, resulting in less risk of developing myopia compared with their Asian counterparts. This assertion is supported by the fact that in 2010, the pre-primary school enrolment rate in the most populous country in Africa (Nigeria) was 41.83% compared to 89.12% in 2012 in China (the most populous country in Asia) (66). We acknowledge that a recent investigation(67) has shown that more precise objective measures are required to make definitive conclusions about the relationship between myopia and near work.

5° The authors said that "he apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls may be due to girls having ... shorter axial length than boys". That surprising !!!

Response: Zadnik et al study was referring to a specific context in their study, where they found that girls tended to have steeper corneas, stronger crystalline lenses, and shorter eyes/axial length than boys. These findings are specific to their study and cannot be used to explain any result where a higher prevalence of myopia in girls is found. For example, we know that shorter axial length is generally associated with hyperopia and not myopia.

However, the new analysis after removing the 4 studies, showed no statistically significant difference in myopia prevalence between gender. Therefore, we have removed this statement and the revised section now reads:

The influence of gender on the prevalence of myopia has not been unequivocal in the literature (70-74) with some suggesting that the slightly higher prevalence in females may be related to the different ages of onset of puberty between boys and girls (75). Other factors that could account for the reported apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls include limited outdoor activity time than boys (76).

Reviewer #2

This is a good Meta-analysis regarding the myopia prevalence in Africa. It is good structured and well-written; however, it would be better if you add a figure showing prevalence of myopia by ethnicity (black vs white vs asian in the same region) to show if it affects the prevalence of myopia or not

Response: Thanks for the suggestion. Although the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about the differences in the prevalence of myopia between ethnic groups in Africa, studies that have been conducted in Africa did not specify the different ethnicities. However, we think there is need for such comparison between black vs white vs Asian and this could be another research interest with a different research aim for another manuscript. We have suggested this in the conclusion for future study direction. The section now reads:

Future studies are needed to understand the role of ethnicity on the myopia prevalence in Africa as the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about whether significant differences in the prevalence of myopia among different ethnicity in Africa exists.

6. PLOS authors have the option to publish the peer review history of their article (what does this mean?). If published, this will include your full peer review and any attached files.

If you choose “no”, your identity will remain anonymous but your review may still be made public.

Do you want your identity to be public for this peer review? For information about this choice, including consent withdrawal, please see our Privacy Policy.

Reviewer #1: No

Reviewer #2: No

Response. Thanks for your comments

Attachment

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Decision Letter 1

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

17 Jan 2022

Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children.

PONE-D-21-28841R1

Dear Dr. Osuagwu,

We're pleased to inform you that your manuscript has been judged scientifically suitable for publication and will be formally accepted for publication once it meets all outstanding technical requirements.

Within one week, you'll receive an e-mail detailing the required amendments. When these have been addressed, you'll receive a formal acceptance letter and your manuscript will be scheduled for publication.

An invoice for payment will follow shortly after the formal acceptance. To ensure an efficient process, please log into Editorial Manager at <http://www.editorialmanager.com/pone/>, click the 'Update My Information' link at the top of the page, and double check that your user information is up-to-date. If you have any billing related questions, please contact our Author Billing department directly at authorbilling@plos.org.

If your institution or institutions have a press office, please notify them about your upcoming paper to help maximize its impact. If they'll be preparing press materials, please inform our press team as soon as possible -- no later than 48 hours after receiving the formal acceptance. Your manuscript will remain under strict press embargo until 2 pm Eastern Time on the date of publication. For more information, please contact onepress@plos.org.

Kind regards,

Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

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Acceptance letter

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

24 Jan 2022

PONE-D-21-28841R1

Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children.

Dear Dr. Osuagwu:

I'm pleased to inform you that your manuscript has been deemed suitable for publication in PLOS ONE. Congratulations! Your manuscript is now with our production department.

If your institution or institutions have a press office, please let them know about your upcoming paper now to help maximize its impact. If they'll be preparing press materials, please inform our press team within the next 48 hours. Your manuscript will remain under strict press embargo until 2 pm Eastern Time on the date of publication. For more information please contact onepress@plos.org.

If we can help with anything else, please email us at plosone@plos.org.

Thank you for submitting your work to PLOS ONE and supporting open access.

Kind regards,

PLOS ONE Editorial Office Staff

on behalf of

Dr. Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

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Prevalence, sociodemographic risk factors, and coverage of myopia correction among adolescent students in the central region of Portugal

Amélia Fernandes Nunes,^{1,3} Mariana Cunha,¹ Miguel Castelo-Branco Sousa,² and Cristina Albuquerque Godinho^{3,4}

Abstract

Background

Knowing the prevalence of myopia at school age is essential to implement preventive measures and appropriate interventions, ensure access to vision care, promote a healthier educational environment and improve academic performance. The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of myopia and its associated sociodemographic risk factors, as well as to estimate the coverage of myopia correction among adolescents in center of Portugal.

Methods

This cross-sectional study evaluated 1115 adolescents from the 5th to the 9th year of school, with an average of 12.9 years ($SD = 1.5$) ranging from 10.0 to 18.0 years. Optometric evaluations were carried out in a school environment and consisted of the evaluation of distance visual acuity, assessed using a logarithmic visual acuity chart (ETDRS charts 1 and 2) at 4 m, and measured by refractive error with a pediatric autorefractometer (Plusoptix), by non-cycloplegic. Myopia was defined as spherical equivalent ($SE \leq -0.50$ diopter (D)) and uncorrected visual acuity ($UVA \leq 95\text{VAR}$). Adjusted logistic regression analysis was applied to investigate risk factors.

Results

We found a myopia rate of 21.5% and a high myopia rate of 1.4%. Higher school level and attendance at urban schools were associated with myopia, but no association was found with age or sex. Only 34.6% of myopic adolescents use the best optical correction and 26.4% do not use any type of optical correction.

Conclusions

Data on the prevalence of refractive problems in Portugal are scarce and heterogeneous. This study, although regional, provides a valuable contribution with a clear and reproducible methodology, following international guidelines and filling gaps in the existing literature. The results show that the rate of myopia in this age group is similar to reports from other European studies. The high rate of adolescents with uncorrected or under-corrected myopia in Portugal is a problem that deserves attention.

Keywords: Adolescence, Myopia, Sociodemographic factors, Visual acuity, Myopia correction coverage, Urban-suburban disparity

Background

Myopia is a refractive condition that tends to develop in pre-adolescence, worsening during puberty and progressing into early adulthood [1]. The greater the degree of myopia, the greater the risk of ocular complications that can lead to vision loss that is not recoverable [2].

The definition of myopia, the methods used to measure ocular refraction and the inconsistent use of cycloplegics, influence the quantifications of myopia prevalence. In most epidemiological studies, myopia is defined by $SE \leq -0.50D$ and high myopia by $SE \leq -5.00D$, with cycloplegic refraction [3]. However, the literature often uses non-cycloplegic refractive techniques and considers the same myopia definition [4–6]. Large-scale myopia studies rarely use cycloplegics, so there is a tendency to overestimate the rate of myopia [5].

The prevalence rates of myopia, when assessed using refractive techniques with cycloplegia, are higher in Asia than in Europe [7]. Studies reporting non-cycloplegic refractive measurements show a similar pattern of differences but at even higher rates [4, 8]. Although cycloplegic refraction is considered the most appropriate technique for myopia studies, the use of cycloplegic means it takes a long time to measure refraction and can cause temporary side effects, such as blurred near vision and photophobia, which reduces adherence. [9].

Autorefractometers (AR) are instruments frequently used to obtain ocular refraction in epidemiological studies, but closed-field AR's induce an overestimation of myopia. The use of open-field AR allows us to obtain refractive measurements close to cycloplegic refractive methods since it eliminates the stimulation of accommodation caused by instrument proximity [5]. It has also been recommended to measure non-cycloplegic autorefraction and visual acuity (VA) without correction, for higher accuracy in detecting myopia [9, 10]. The World Health Organization recommends measuring distance VA in vision screenings [11]. Employing a pinhole test in these screenings can reveal unmet refractive needs, as an improvement in VA with pinhole suggests the presence of correctable refractive errors [2, 11].

Although the magnitude of this problem presents geographic differences, an increase in the prevalence, incidence and progression rates has been observed globally. In Europe, population prevalence rates are estimated at around 40.0% and in certain parts of East Asia, rates exceed 60.0%, and there is strong evidence that these rates vary greatly with age [7]. This vision eye condition has become a growing concern in eye health, especially among school-age children and adolescents. Current trends show that children and adolescents are becoming myopic at an earlier age and that the degree of myopia continues to progress as these children age [2, 12]. The scientific literature reports that the prevalence of myopia tends to increase from the age of 6 years [7]. East Asia exhibits the highest rates of myopia, while Africa and South America have lower reported rates [13].

Health promotion and screening interventions are essential to prevent myopia and other refractive errors by identifying vision problems early. In addition, these actions can change behaviors by educating about the importance of spectacles and addressing common reasons for non-adherence to their use, such as discomfort or social stigma, thus improving acceptance and appropriate management of vision eye conditions. In Portugal, there is little data allowing to know the real extent of myopia. The National programme for eye health estimates that around 20.0% of children and around 50.0% of the adult population suffer from refractive errors in general, including myopia and other refractive conditions [14]. A study carried out with Portuguese university students recorded an increase in the prevalence of myopia from 23.4 to 41.3% between 2002 and 2014 [15]. Another study, based on the analysis of prescription and sales of ophthalmic lenses, estimated an increase in myopia from 40.0% in 2010 to more than 50.0% in 2020 [16].

The prevalence of refractive problems in Portugal is a topic where available data is relatively scarce and presents significant heterogeneity. Furthermore, these studies often present methodological descriptions that can be considered insufficiently detailed. This work aims to estimate the prevalence of myopia in adolescents who attend school from the 5th to the 9th year in the central region of Portugal. We also intend to understand the association of myopia with some sociodemographic parameters in these adolescents, and to estimate the coverage of myopia correction among this population.

Methods

Study design and participants

This is an epidemiological, cross-sectional and observational study. Participants were children and adolescents attending the 2nd cycle of basic education (5th and 6th grades) and the 3rd cycle of basic education (7th, 8th and 9th grades) in Covilhã, a city in the central area of Portugal.

All schools in the urban area of the municipality where the study was conducted were included, covering 2 schools from the second cycle and 4 schools from the third cycle of basic education. Due to the small number of students in suburban schools and their significant geographic dispersion, 2 from each educational cycle in suburban area were selected based on having the highest number of enrolled students. All children enrolled in the participating schools were invited to join the study, with those receiving authorization from their legal guardians included, without participant randomization.

The inclusion criteria were being a child /adolescent attending the 2nd or 3rd cycle of basic education, aged between 10 and 18 years old, having the authorization from their legal tutor and providing verbal consent on the day of the screening. Incomplete screening records or those with poor cooperation were excluded from the data analysis. Students undergoing treatment with orthokeratology or atropine were also excluded, as this treatment can temporarily influence visual acuity and myopia measurement.

Procedures

The study protocol consisted of the acquisition of refractive measurements in eye screening actions in schools. The study was approved from the Ethics Committee of the National School of Public Health (CEENSP nº 29/2023) and was previously authorized by the Ministry of Education (nº

1307100001). Data were collected between November 2023 and February 2024. The examination and vision testing was performed by AN and MC.

Socio-demographic data were collected, such as age, sex, school level, school location (urban or suburban area), place of birth, and special educational needs.

All study volunteers underwent monocular distance visual acuity measurement and ocular refraction assessment using an autorefractometer. Additionally, for participants who wore spectacles on the screening day, the prescription value of the spectacles was also recorded.

Visual acuity

VA was measured with ETDRS (Original Series Chart 1 and Chart 2; Good-Lite; USA) at 4 m under photopic lighting conditions. The lighting in the room was measured with a digital luxmeter (Luxmeter PCE-L335; PCE instruments; Tobarra, Spain) and values equal to or greater than 400 lx were considered acceptable [17]. The ETDRS charts are considered reliable, repeatable and easy to use in screening actions [18]. All VA were recorded on the Visual Acuity Rating scale (VAR), which is a more intuitive system for using a logarithmic charts and allows scoring letter by letter instead of line by line [18, 19]. In this rating system, each letter has a score of 1VAR; each line has 5VAR and the decimal VA = 1.0 is equivalent to 100VAR, and decimal VA = 0.8 is equivalent to 95VAR.

The protocol recommended by the WHO was followed to calculate the effective refractive correction coverage rate [2]. To determine UVA, all children were assessed monocularly and without any refractive correction. Visual acuity with usual correction (VAUC) was assessed in all children who wore glasses or contact lenses with their usual correction. In cases where the presented visual acuity (PVA) - defined as UVA for those not wearing corrective lenses or VAUC for those who did - was less than 95VAR, pinhole visual acuity (phVA) was also assessed. The diameter of pinhole was 1.5 mm. The same procedure was applied to record all visual acuity measurements. The patient started at the 80VAR line on the chart (equivalent 0.4 logMAR) and continued reading downwards until reaching a line where they could no longer correctly identify at least three letters. If the patient couldn't read the 80VAR line, they started at the top of the chart. The final score was based on the number of letters correctly identified. A different card was used for each eye to avoid learning effects.

Autorefraction

AR was performed under non-cycloplegic conditions, using the PlusOptix, model A09 (PlusOptix; Nuremberg, Germany). The PlusOptix is a device that measures ocular refraction at a distance of 1 m from the eyes, reducing the effects of instrumental myopia compared to closed-field AR. The refraction obtained with the PlusOptix A09 has shown agreement with the refraction of cycloplegic retinoscopy and is indicated as a screening method in myopic children [20, 21]. The ocular refraction of each participant was measured three times and the mean value of the SE of the three measurements was calculated. The SE was obtained by adding the spherical component to half the cylindrical component of the ocular refraction measured with the AR. When PlusOptix reported that the participant's ocular refraction exceeded its measurement capacity, the refraction of the student's usual spectacles was considered.

Definition of myopia

In screening activities, some authors recommend the combined use of refraction and VA, recognizing that this combination maximizes the sensitivity of screening in signaling myopia [10, 11, 22]. For children over 6 years of age, some authors recommend a decimal VA ≥ 1.0 , equivalent to 0.0logMAR or 100VAR [23, 24], other authors recommend a decimal VA ≥ 0.8 , equivalent to 0.1logMAR or 95VAR [9, 24].

In this study, the criteria of UAV $< 95\text{VAR}$ and SE $\leq -0.50\text{D}$ were used to define myopia. To facilitate comparison with other studies, only the SE $\leq -0.50\text{D}$ criterion was also used. To characterize severity, we considered high myopia SE $\leq -6.00\text{D}$, moderate myopia – $-6.00\text{D} < \text{SE} \leq -3.00\text{D}$ and mild myopia – $-3.00\text{D} < \text{SE} \leq -0.50\text{D}$.

Statistical analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 28 (IBM SPSS Statistics; New York, USA). Continuous variables were expressed as mean (*SD*) and categorical variables were presented as counts or proportions. The study of differences between the eyes for the continuous variables was carried out using the paired samples t-test. Chi-square test was used to compare categorical variables between groups. A multivariate logistic regression analysis was carried out using a stepwise backward method to explore the sociodemographic factors associated with myopia. The results of the logistic regression were reported as odds ratios (OR). For all analyses, a two-sided *p-value* < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Confidence intervals (CI) were calculated at 95%.

Results

A total of 1115 students from urban and suburban schools took part in the study. The average age was 12.9 (*SD* = 1.5) years, ranging from 10.0 to 18.0 years. The male sex represented 50.9% of the total sample, and 67.4% of the students attended urban schools. There was also a rate of 11.7% of adolescents flagged in school files as having special educational needs (SEN) and 15.6% of participants were from other countries. The majority of migrant students originated from America (*n* = 99, with 92 from Brazil) and Africa (*n* = 49, with 43 from Angola). There were 19 adolescents from other European countries and 7 from Asia. The origin of 2 migrant students was not documented. The characteristics of the sample according to various factors are presented in Table 1. The results of the study of the differences between the groups, as well as the prevalence of myopia according to each of the factors analyzed, are also included.

Table 1

General characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	Size [N (%)]	Age [years] (Average ± SD)	UVA [95VAR] N(%)	Myopia		N(%)	p-value 0	N(%)	p-value 0 0
				SE≤-0.50D	SE≤-0.50D and UVA < 95VAR				
Total sample	1115(100)	12.7 ± 1.5	516(46.3)	262(23.5)	--	240(21.5)	--		
Sex	Male	568(51.0)	12.7 ± 1.5	245(43.1)	133(23.4)	0.957	121(21.3)	0.857	
	Female	547(49.0)	12.7 ± 1.5	271(49.5)	129(23.6)		119(21.8)		
Nature	Portuguese	941(84.4)	12.6 ± 1.5	438(46.5)	221(23.5)	0.982	201(21.4)	0.756	
	Migrants	174(15.6)	12.8 ± 1.5	78(44.9)	41(23.6)		39(22.4)		
School level	2nd cycle	437(39.2)	11.2 ± 0.7	190(43.5)	77(17.8)	<	74(16.9)	0.003**	
	3rd cycle	678(60.8)	13.6 ± 1.0	326(48.1)	185(27.3)	0.001**	166(24.5)		
SEN	Positive	131(11.7)	13.0 ± 1.4	74(56.5)	29(21.1)	0.686	25(19.1)	0.469	
	Negative	984(88.3)	12.6 ± 1.5	442(44.9)	233(23.7)		215(21.8)		
School location	Urban	751(67.4)	12.8 ± 1.5	360(47.9)	195(26)	0.005**	176(23.4)	0.026*	
	Suburban	364(32.6)	12.5 ± 1.5	156(42.9)	67(18.4)		64(17.6)		

N - counts; % - proportions; SD – standard deviation - UVA – uncorrected visual acuity; VAR – visual acuity rating scale; SE – spherical equivalent; SEN – special educational needs

*Significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.001 level

Prevalence of myopia and risk factors

The mean values for UVA were $90.6 \pm 17\text{VAR}$ and $89.4 \pm 17\text{VAR}$ for the right and left eyes respectively, and this difference was statistically significant ($t = 5.656, p < 0.001$). The visual acuity of the worst eye was used to classify myopia. An UVA worse than 95VAR in at least one eye occurred in 516 participants (46.3%; 95% CI: 42.4–50.4%) (Table 1).

For the SE≤-0.50D criterion, a prevalence of myopia was found to be 23.4% (95% CI: 21.0–26.0%), and for the SE≤-0.50D and UAV < 95VAR criteria, it was 21.5% (95% CI: 18.9–24.4%). The average value of the SE of the myopic population ($n = 262$) was -2.70D ($SD = 1.86$), in a range between -0.50D and -10.37D . Considering SE≤-6.00D, we account for 16 cases, that is a rate of 1.4% (95% CI: 0.9–2.3%) was found for high myopia. The average value of the SE in high myopia was -7.52 ($SD = 1.32$).

The proportion of myopic participants was not significantly different between girls and boys, between Portuguese and migrant students or between participants with and without SEN. However, it was significantly different between the school level, with a higher proportion of adolescents with

myopia in the 3rd cycle; as well as between schools in urban and rural areas, with a higher proportion found in schools in the urban areas. These results were observed for both myopia classification criteria.

The association between the presence of myopia and age, sex, geographical location of the school and school level was studied using the odds ratio (OR) (Table 2).

Table 2

Myopia risk factors

Factor	OR crude (95% CI)	p-value	OR Adjusted (95% CI)	p-value
Age (numeric)	1.097 (0.996–1.208)	0.061	0.924 (0.786–1.085)	0.336
Sex	1.027 (0.772–1.367)	0.854	1.008 (0.756–1.344)	0.958
[male vs. female]				
School location [suburban vs. urban]	1.435 (1.044–1.973)	0.026*	1.409 (1.022–1.941)	0.036*
School level	1.590 (1.172–2.158)	0.003**	1.889 (1.152–3.097)	0.012*
[2nd cycle vs. 3rd cycle]				

*Significant at 0.05 level; ** significant at 0.001 level

The crude OR revealed an association between myopia and the school location, as well as between myopia and the school level. The adjusted OR showed that adolescents from urban schools were 1.4 times more likely to have myopia than those from rural schools, after adjusting for age, sex and cycle of studies. Adolescents in the 3rd cycle of studies were also 1.9 times more likely to have myopia than adolescents in the 2nd cycle, after adjusting for age, sex and school location.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of myopia severity, according to sociodemographic characteristics. Low myopia is more common in all subgroups, but there were sex differences ($\chi^2 = 11.868, p = 0.003$). Low myopia is more common in both boys and girls, but of the universe of myopic boys (121), 52.0% have low myopia and 41.3% have moderate myopia, while of the universe of myopic girls (119), 72.3% have a low degree of myopia and 21.0% have moderate myopia. In the studied sample, boys have the highest proportion of moderate myopia. The distribution of myopia severity did not reveal differences between adolescents at different school levels ($\chi^2 = 1.077, p = 0.584$) or between school location ($\chi^2 = 0.109, p = 0.947$).

[Fig. 1](#)

Myopia distribution by severity. *Legend* (Low myopia, Moderate myopia, High myopia). The number in the bars corresponds to the number of adolescents with the condition

Covrage of myopia correction

We found that 35.8% of the screened population reported wearing spectacles or contact lenses ($n = 400$). There were significant differences between sex in the use of spectacles, with a higher proportion of girls (218 girls, 54.5% and 182 boys, 45.5%) reporting the use of these devices ($\chi^2 = 6.409, p = 0.011$). However, no significant differences were found between urban and suburban areas, nor among different levels of education. Among the adolescents who reported using some optical correction, 13.0% (95% CI: 9.7–16.3%) did not show up with their usual correction on the screening day ($n = 53$). Among the adolescents who attended with their usual optical correction ($n = 347$), the majority ($n = 212$) used a myopic prescription, with SE $\leq -0.50\text{D}$. However, 36 of the students who use myopia correction do not meet the myopia criterion (UVA $< 95\text{VAR}$ AND AR SE $> -0.50\text{D}$). Hence, of the 240 students with myopia that have been identified, 176 use optical correction. In summary, we found a myopia rate of 21.5% (95% CI: 18.9–24.4%), of which 73.3% (95% CI: 67.8–78.9%) already use some optical correction. Moreover 3.2% (95% CI: 0.8–5.6%) of the sample use prescriptions for myopia while they not need it. It was also noted that the majority use monofocal lenses, with only 12 reported cases using myopia control lenses. There were no records of orthokeratology or atropine usage.

Table 3 shows the counts and proportions of adolescents who habitually use optical correction, according to presenting VA (UVA for those who do not use any correction, or VAUC for those who have spectacles or contact lenses). It also shows the number of cases in which VA improved when measured with the pinhole. It can be observed that only 34.6% (95% CI: 28.6–40.6%) of the myopic population is optically well corrected. Of the myopic teenagers who already use optical correction, a large percentage use insufficient correction to achieve a good vision. It was observed that 38.7% (95% CI: 32.5–44.9%) of the myopic population uses partial correction and 26.7% (95% CI: 21.1–32.3%) does not use any type of correction. The assessment of VA with pinhole in uncorrected or partially corrected myopic adolescents ($n = 157$) revealed that in 80.3% (95% CI: 74.1–86.5%) of cases it is possible to improve vision with adequate optical correction.

Table 3

Counts and proportions of myopic adolescents who already use some optical correction, according to the limits of uncorrected visual acuity (UVA) and corrected visual acuity (VAUC). SE – spherical equivalent; PhVA – pinhole visual acuity

Criteria	N	%
SE $\leq -0.50\text{D}$ and UVA $< 95\text{VAR}$	240	100
VAUC $\geq 95\text{VAR}$ [already wear spectacles or Contact lenses]	83	34.6
VAUC $< 95\text{VAR}$ [already wear spectacles or Contact lenses]	93	38.7
UVA $< 95\text{VAR}$ [do not wear spectacles or Contact lenses]	64	26.7
PhVA (N= (93 + 64)) [improved]	126	80.3%

Discussion

This study evaluated the prevalence of myopia in adolescents attending school from the 5th to the 9th year. For the SE≤-0.50D and UVA < 95VAR criteria, there was a prevalence of myopia of 21.5% (95%CI:18.9–24.4%) and for high myopia there was a prevalence of 1.4% (95%CI:0.9–2.3%). Attending the 3rd cycle of studies and attending schools in urban areas were factors associated with a higher prevalence of myopia, while age and sex were not associated with increased odds of myopia. We also observed that only 34.6% (95% CI: 28.6–40.6%) of myopic students were well-corrected and 26.7% (95% CI: 21.1–32.3%) did not use any optical refraction.

Myopia is notably more prevalent in Asia, with scientific literature indicating that children and adolescents in East Asia experience exceptionally high rates of myopia. In some regions, the prevalence has been reported to exceed 80.0% [25]. Given the limited information on myopia prevalence among adolescents in Portugal, it is more practical to analyze and compare myopia trends within the European context, where data are more robust. While extensive research exists in regions such as China, utilizing data from European countries provides a more relevant comparison to Portugal's situation and enables a more immediate and applicable analysis of local trends and predictors.

Studies on the prevalence of myopia in European children and adolescents are few, and those we found that had been published in the last 5 years report rates ranging from 10% in Sweden to 24.8% in Austria [26, 27]. When cycloplegic refraction is used, rates are lower [26, 28, 29] than when cycloplegia is not used [27, 30]. It should also be noted that most studies use SE≤-0.50D as the definition of myopia [22, 26, 28–30] but some studies use a more myopic cutoff point [31] and the joint assessment of autorefraction and visual acuity [32].

The myopia rate found in the present study is similar to that reported in other studies from European countries. A comparison of our results with reports from other studies that used more conservative criteria to define myopia (e.g., SE≤-0.50 and UVA ≤ 95VAR) reveals that myopia is slightly more prevalent among adolescents in Portugal (21.5%) than in Bulgaria (19.0%) [26], and very similar to the prevalence reported in Germany (21.5%), where the definition of myopia used a cutoff point SE≤-0.75D [31]. For a broader comparison with the SE≤-0.50D criterion, we found a prevalence rate of 23.4%. This value is very close to that reported by other studies with children and adolescents in Europe, which used the same definition of myopia. In Austria, a rate of 24.8% was found between the ages of 15 and 18, and in Spain, a rate of 20.1% was reported in children aged 6 to 7 [22, 30].

The prevalence of myopia and associated risk factors among children has not yet been determined. It is known that genetic and environmental factors play a role in its etiology. Risk factors for myopia may include a combination of genetic, environmental and lifestyle factors, with the most obvious being genetics, time outdoors, near work and sex [33]. The literature also reports that the prevalence of myopia increases with age, is more frequent in girls and in the urban areas [22, 34]. In the present study, there was no association between myopia and age, but an association was found with school level, with a higher prevalence of myopia in the 3rd cycle. Although a higher school level necessarily requires an older age, the age-adjusted multivariate analysis revealed that age has no association and that the probability of myopia is 1.9 times greater in adolescents in the 3rd cycle. We believe that this association is influenced by other factors that also contribute to myopia, such as the intensity of close work and excessive use of digital screens [34]. Adolescents in the 3rd cycle of studies have a greater academic workload, which requires them to dedicate more time to tasks with near vision. Furthermore, the excessive use of digital screens, both for academic support and leisure, tends to be greater among older adolescents [35].

Regarding sex, there is no consensus in the literature, with older studies reporting that men have a higher prevalence of myopia, while more recent studies report that women show higher prevalences [34]. Other authors also report finding no association between sex and myopia [36], in line with the results from our study. The urban environment is also described as a factor associated with myopia and urban-rural differences tend to be stronger where there is a greater disparity in living conditions [37, 38]. This study also found this association, with adolescents attending an urban school being 1.4 times more likely to have myopia than those attending a suburban school. In a study carried out in India, where the location of the school was also taken into account, it was observed that the rate of myopia was 1.3 times higher in urban schools than in suburban schools [39].

Multi-ethnic population-based studies suggest that the prevalence of myopia varies according to ethnicity. The scientific literature reports that the prevalence of myopia is highest in Asian populations (above 50.0%), and lowest in African regions (around 15.0%) and shows values between 20.0 and 40.0% in Europe and America [3, 13]. In our study, no significant differences were found in myopia rates between Portuguese and migrant adolescents. For the most conservative criterion, SE≤-0.50D and UVA < 95VAR, the prevalence of myopia was 21.4% for the Portuguese and 22.4% for the migrants' adolescents. The migrant population in this study was mostly from Brazil and African countries, with a low rate of students from Asia. We believe that the low representation of Asian adolescents is the main reason why the migrant population had a prevalence rate similar to that of adolescents born in Portugal.

Scientific literature reports that children with special educational needs have a higher prevalence of vision dysfunction when compared to population samples, and one of the main causes of this disability is refractive errors [40]. In our study, there were no significant differences in the proportion of myopic adolescents between those with (vs. without) SEN. Since adolescents with low levels of autonomy and low capacity for collaboration in the acquisition of measurements have been excluded from the study, adolescents from the SEN group with greater potential for vision impairment may have been left out of our sample. On the other hand, this analysis is limited to myopia, and refractive errors such as hyperopia or astigmatism in individuals with SEN may be more frequent [41].

Another finding from our study that deserves reflection concerns the use of optical correction. Other authors report that the use of corrective spectacles improves the cognitive and educational well-being, psychological well-being, mental health, and quality of life of school-age children and adolescents [42]. Several authors have reported high rates of uncorrected myopia in school-age children [24, 43]. Our study found that only 34.6% of adolescents with myopia were well-corrected, with 38.7% being under-corrected, and 26.7% not using any correction. According to WHO recommendations, in screening activities, an improvement in visual acuity with a pinhole means that the problem of vision impairment can be solved with the use of suitable spectacles [11]. In the present study, when evaluating visual acuity with the pinhole in uncorrected or undercorrected myopic participants, an improvement was obtained in 80.3% of cases, which means that these adolescents can see their vision improved with a simple pair of appropriately prescribed spectacles. We also found that there is a significant percentage of teenagers who report having spectacles, but who do not use them regularly (13.0%). Several studies have explored compliance to spectacle use in impairment vision due to refractive errors, and a systematic review reveals that non-adherence rates in children are hiegh, even when glasses are freely provided. The reasons for non-adherence are varief, including factors such as broken glasses, forgetfulness, parental perceptions, and peer pressure [44, 45]. The design of the present study did not allow us to explore the reasons for this behavior, but it reinforces the message that teenagers' refusal to wear prescribed spectacles puts

their eye health and their professional and academic future at risk [42]. Health professionals and the educational community must come together to raise awareness of the risks of non-compliance with spectacles, promote educational campaigns, and debunk myths and beliefs.

The main strength of this work lies in its analysis of data on myopia from a large sample of adolescents in the central region of Portugal, providing valuable insights into the prevalence of myopia in Portugal. However, there are also some limitations. One of the main limitations of this study is the fact that cycloplegic refraction was not used. Nevertheless, we sought a methodological design that would minimize this aspect, looking for a reliable alternative. An open-field autorefractometer was used, an instrument that is described as the closest technique to cycloplegic refraction [21, 37]. Another important measure was to combine the spherical equivalent measurement with uncorrected visual acuity, as proposed by others authors [9, 10], enabling to confer more confidence to the myopia prevalence values found in the present study. The definition of a refractive threshold and a visual acuity threshold as a cut-off point for myopia is therefore an added value and strengthens the findings of this study. The selection of the eye with poorer visual acuity may have contributed to some overestimation of myopia prevalence compared to studies that consider only one eye. However, this approach has also been adopted in similar studies [28, 32]. The association between myopia prevalence and the presence of modifiable environmental risk factors (e.g., shorter distance and longer time spent for near work) was not addressed in this study, representing an opportunity for future work. Studying modifiable environmental risk factors is fundamental for understanding which habits and behaviors of adolescents are associated with the development of myopia, providing relevant evidence for the development of recommendations for its prevention and management.

Conclusions

This paper is a cross-sectional study of myopia in adolescents at a center in Portugal. It shows that myopia in adolescence is comparable to that reported by other European countries, being at the upper end of reported rates (above 20.0%). Moreover, it showed that myopia was higher among higher school levels and among students of urban schools.

The high prevalence of uncorrected or under-corrected myopia is a worrying aspect. Another pertinent aspect concerns non-compliance with spectacles, as a considerable number of students who reported having spectacles were not wearing them at the time of the assessment. Adolescents' refusal to wear their usual spectacles puts their ocular health and their school and professional future at risk.

The epidemiological burden of myopia among schoolchildren necessitates a cross-sectoral approach, involving both health and education sectors, to ensure systematic screening, effective refractive error services, optical correction, and ongoing follow-up for affected children. Our results also highlight the critical need for public education on eye care and the development of an effective and sustainable school-age vision screening program to prevent vision impairment and blindness. By integrating public education with practical screening initiatives, we can ensure early detection and treatment, ultimately safeguarding children's vision health.

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Abbreviations

SE	Spherical equivalent
AR	Autorefractometer
VA	Visual acuity
ETDRS	Early Treatment of Diabetic Retinopathy Study
UVA	Uncorrected visual acuity
VAUC	Visual acuity with usual correction
PhVA	Pinhole visual acuity
VAR	Visual Acuity Rating
OR	Odds ratio
CI	Confidence interval
SEN	Special educational needs

Author contributions

AFN, MCBS and CAG contributed to the concept of the study. AFN and MC acquired and analyzed the data. AFN and CAG helped with the interpretation of the data. AFN and MC drafted the manuscript. MCBS and CAG supervised the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study conformed to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, and informed consent was signed by the participants' parents. The Ethics Committee of the National School of Public Health, approved this study (approval number CEENSP n° 29/2023).

Consent for publication

Not Applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Footnotes

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Prevalence of childhood myopia in Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis

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Abstract

Purpose : Myopia is a growing public health problem due to its association with sight-threatening conditions. In Africa, the problem is exacerbated by lack of ophthalmic services and spectacle coverage, such that uncorrected refractive error is the leading cause of vision impairment. This study was designed to provide contemporary and future estimates of childhood myopia prevalence in Africa.

Methods : A systematic online literature search (PubMed, Google Scholar, Cochrane Library, Africa Journals Online, Scopus) was conducted for articles on myopia ($\leq -0.50\text{D}$ or VA $\leq 6/9.5$ correctable with minus lenses) from 2001-2021 in Africa. Meta-analysis [OpenMeta (analyst)] was performed to estimate the prevalence of childhood myopia and high myopia. Freeman-Tukey double arcsine transformation was used to minimize the effects of high/low prevalence on the overall pooled estimates. Myopia prevalence from subgroup analysis for urban and rural settings were used as baseline for generating a prediction model using linear regression (SPSS V28).

Results : Forty studies from 19 (of 54) African countries were included in the meta-analysis ($N=735400$). Overall prevalence of childhood myopia and high myopia was 4.7% (95% CI: 3.8%–5.8%) and 0.4% (95% CI: 0.2%–0.8%), respectively (Fig 1). Prevalence of myopia from 2011-2020 was approximately double that from 2001-2010 for all studies combined and between 2 and 2.5 times higher for ages 5-11 and 12-18 years, for males and females and urban and rural settings, separately. Childhood myopia prevalence is expected to increase in urban settings to 11.1% by 2030, 14.4% by 2040, and 17.7% by the year 2050, marginally higher than expected in the overall population (16.4% by 2050) and noticeably higher than in rural settings (8.4% by 2050) (Fig 2).

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Conclusions : Prevalence of childhood myopia has approximately doubled since 2010, with a further 3-fold increase predicted by 2050. This trend has potentially serious implications despite the comparatively low myopia prevalence in Africa. Provision of myopia control treatments is desirable, but implementing basic myopia prevention programs, enhancing spectacle coverage and ophthalmic services as well as generating more data to better understand the changing myopia epidemiology in Africa merit greater attention.

This abstract was presented at the 2022 ARVO Annual Meeting, held in Denver, CO, May 1-4, 2022, and virtually.

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Fig 1. Pooled prevalence of myopia (A) and high myopia (B) in Africa.

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Fig 2. Urban (A), rural (B) and combined (C) childhood myopia prevalence: 2001 to 2050.

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Systematic review and meta-analysis of myopia prevalence in African school children

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Aleksandra Barac, Editor

Abstract

Purpose

Increased prevalence of myopia is a major public health challenge worldwide, including in Africa. While previous studies have shown an increasing prevalence in Africa, there is no collective review of evidence on the magnitude of myopia in African school children. Hence, this study reviews the evidence and provides a meta-analysis of the prevalence of myopia in African school children.

Methods

This review was conducted using the 2020 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Five computerized bibliographic databases, PUBMED, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Africa Index Medicus were searched for published studies on the prevalence of myopia in Africa from 1 January 2000 to 18 August 2021. Studies were assessed for methodological quality. Data were gathered by gender, age and refraction technique and standardized to the definition of myopia as refractive error ≥ 0.50 diopter. A meta-analysis was

conducted to estimate the prevalence. Significant heterogeneity was detected among the various studies ($I^2 > 50\%$), hence a random effect model was used, and sensitivity analysis was performed to examine the effects of outliers.

Results

We included data from 24 quality assessed studies, covering 36,395 African children. The overall crude prevalence of myopia over the last two decades is 4.7% (95% CI, 3.9–5.7) in African children. Although the prevalence of myopia was slightly higher in females (5.3%, 95%CI: 4.1, 6.5) than in males (3.7%, 95% CI, 2.6–4.7; $p = 0.297$) and higher in older [12–18 years 5.1% (95% CI, 3.8–6.3) than younger children (aged 5–11 years, 3.4%, 95% CI, 2.5–4.4; $p = 0.091$), the differences were not significant. There was a significantly lower prevalence of myopia with cycloplegic compared with non-cycloplegic refraction [4.2%, 95%CI: 3.3, 5.1 versus 6.4%, 95%CI: 4.4, 8.4; $p = 0.046$].

Conclusions

Our results showed that myopia affects about one in twenty African schoolchildren, and it is overestimated in non-cycloplegic refraction. Clinical interventions to reduce the prevalence of myopia in the region should target females, and school children who are aged 12–18 years.

Introduction

Uncorrected refractive error is the most common cause of visual impairment affecting an estimated one billion people globally [1]. Myopia is the most common refractive error and an important cause of ocular morbidity, particularly among school-aged children and young adults. Worldwide, myopia is reaching epidemic proportions linked to changing lifestyles and modern technology, particularly mobile devices [2]. Globally, myopia affected 22.9% of the world's population in 2000, with projections of an increase to 49.8% by 2050 affecting 4.8 billion people [2], representing a 117% increase over 50 years. According to a 2015 report, it was estimated that globally, about 1.89 billion people are myopic and 170 million have high myopia [3].

The reported prevalence of myopia in children aged 5–17 years ranges from 1.2% in Meki Zone, Nepal, to 73.0% in South Korea [4, 5]. Over 15 years, the prevalence of myopia increased from 79.5% to 87.7% in Chinese high school children with an average age of 18.5 ± 0.7 years [6]. In South African school children aged 5–15 years, the reported prevalence of myopia was only 2.9% with retinoscopy and 4.0% using autorefraction [7]. The authors reported that this prevalence increased to 9.6% at age 15 years.

The increase in myopia prevalence will have a significant economic impact because of associated ocular health problems and visual impairment. Uncorrected myopia of between- 1.50 D and- 4.00 D can significantly affect vision to be regarded as a cause of moderate visual impairment and blindness, respectively [8]. Apart from its direct impact on visual impairment, high myopia [usually defined as a spherical equivalent ≥ 5.00 D [4, 9, 10] of myopia, although the definitions used to grade myopia are variable] increases the risk of potentially blinding ocular pathologies such as retinal holes; retinal tears; retinal degeneration; retinal detachment; and myopic macular degeneration [3, 11]. Uncorrected myopia has huge social, economic, psychological and developmental implications [12]. The economic cost of refractive errors, including myopia, has been estimated to be approximately US\$ 202 billion per annum [13], far exceeding that of other eye diseases.

The increasing prevalence of myopia has led to research in the study of the possible mechanism for myopia development, which has generated two broad themes: the role of nature (genetic influences) and nurture (environmental influences including lifestyle). Understanding the mechanism for the development of myopia is also being explored in the control of myopia. Epidemiologic data from Southeast Asia has given credence to the association between near work and myopia, given the number of hours children from this region spend doing near work. Due to vast regional differences in culture, habits, socioeconomic status, educational levels and urbanization, there is uncertainty as to the exact magnitude of the myopia burden among African school-aged children and its trend over time [14].

In the last few decades, there has been a change in the lifestyle and behavior of people in Africa as a result of increasing urbanization [15]. Africa's urban population grew from 27 million in 1950 to 567 million in 2015 (a 2,000% increase), and now 50% of Africa's population live in one of the continent's 7,617 urban agglomerations of 10,000 or more inhabitants [16]. Consequently, more children and young adults in Africa are increasingly engaged in indoor and near work activities compared to earlier generations [17]. Children spend long hours doing schoolwork and, following the advent of technology, increasingly use mobile devices for gaming and other activities [18, 19]. These factors are thought to promote myopia development and/or progression [20–23].

Africa is the world's second largest and second most populous continent, after Asia, and it accounts for about 16% of the world's human population. While every global region will experience a decline in population by 2100, the African population is expected to triple. Africa's population is the youngest amongst all the continents, the median age in 2012 was 19.7 years compared to the global median of 30.4 years. This young population is an important asset for the continent's development. The challenges of the young population must be addressed in time as they constitute the bulk of the productive age of the economy. While rising myopia is a cause for global concern, it is not given due attention in Africa due to a lack of adequate prevalence data and prospective studies tracking the trend of myopia over decades [24]. Due to this, the representation of Africa is poor in studies predicting global trends of myopia [24]. The aim of this study was to systematically review the evidence and provide a meta-analysis of the prevalence of myopia in African school children which will address the knowledge gap and help understand the prevalence of myopia among this group in Africa.

Materials and methods

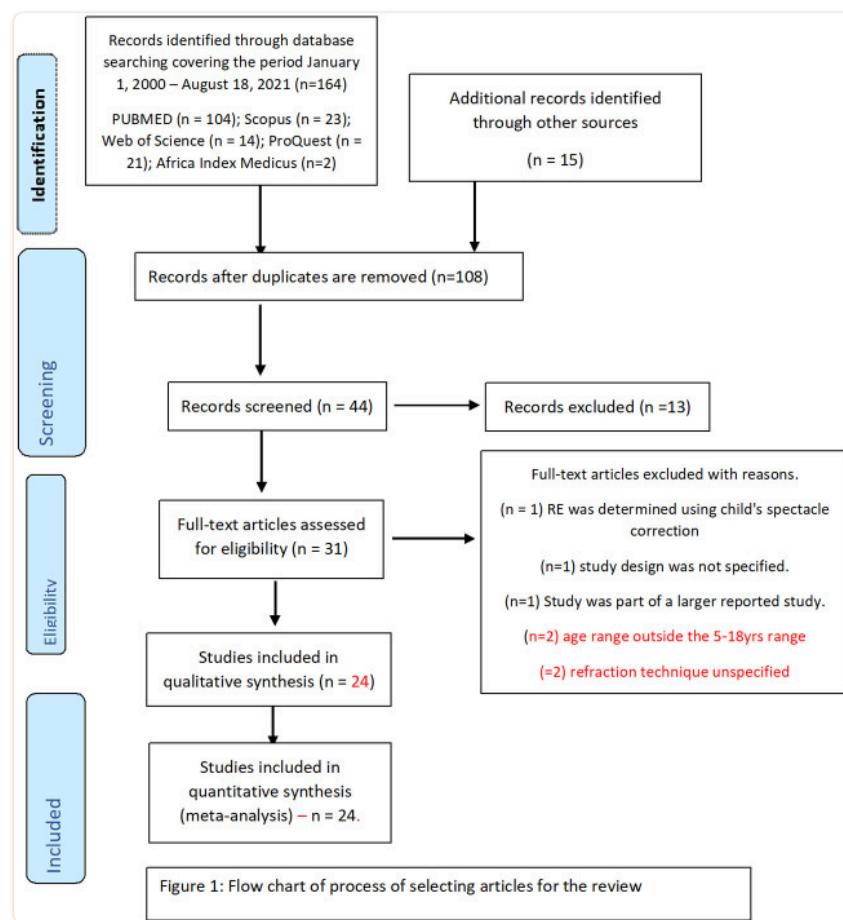
This systematic review followed the framework of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA. See Checklist in [S1 File](#)) [25]. The protocol for the review was registered with PROSPERO (#CRD42020187609).

Search strategy and quality assessment

Two review team members (GO and BE) performed an independent systematic search and review of myopia in Africa using published data spanning the last two decades. Refractive error came into reckoning as a cause of visual impairment in the last two decades, following the change in the definition of visual impairment which was based on presenting visual acuity [26]. The search was conducted on 25th May and 18th August 2021. A third reviewer, KO, adjudicated where there were disagreements. The quality of each selected article was assessed using the checklist developed by Downs and Black [27] and each included article was assessed and scored on a 10-item scale (scoring is shown in [S1 Table](#)). The search was restricted to articles available online, articles

mentioning prevalence of myopia in any region of Africa, and articles published in the English language. Searches included the following databases: Web of sciences, PubMed, ProQuest, MEDLINE, Scopus, and African Index Medicus from 1st of January 2000 to August 18, 2021.

We searched these databases using the following MeSH (Medical Subject Heading) terms and keywords: Refractive AND error AND Africa AND children AND prevalence. A number of iterations of these search terms were used, for example, "refractive error AND Africa AND children AND prevalence" or "refractive error AND Africa AND children". Further details about search strategy and MeSH terms are available in the ([S2 File](#)). A broader search also used terms such as epidemiology, myopia, and school children. We also identified and included relevant studies by manually searching through the reference lists of identified papers. The PRISMA flowchart presented in [Fig 1](#) shows the process used for selecting articles.



[Fig 1](#)

Flow chart of process of selecting articles for the review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies published between 2000 and 2021, investigating the prevalence of refractive error in male and female school children aged 5 to 18 years of age were included in the review. Studies that employed an observational cross-sectional study design; had a clear description of the sampling technique; stated the method of measuring refractive error (cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction), as well as objective or subjective refraction; stated the criteria for defining myopia (spherical equivalent ≥ 0.50 D of myopia [[2](#), [28–30](#)]; the study was either school-based or

population-based; and were published in English language, were included in the review. The decision as to whether the articles met the inclusion criteria was made independently by the two reviewers (GO and BE) and where there was a disagreement, a third reviewer (KO) was consulted.

Studies where the criteria for defining myopia were not specified; the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified for this review; or which reported findings from a hospital/clinic-based sample were excluded from the review.

Data extraction

The data extracted from each article included the following: Authors; year of publication; country of study; study design; sample size; sampling technique; the age of study participants; criteria for defining myopia; method of refractive error assessment (cycloplegic vs non-cycloplegic); method of refractive error assessment (objective vs subjective); prevalence of myopia; and the proportion of refractive error due to myopia. Where the reported prevalence was not clearly defined, the corresponding author in the published article was contacted for clarification.

Statistical methods

Meta-analysis was conducted using Stata version 14.0 (StataCorp, College Station, TX, USA). The syntax “metaprop” in Stata was used to generate forest plots and each forest plot showed the prevalence of myopia in school children, by gender, age and refraction technique in individual studies and its corresponding weight, as well as the pooled prevalence in each subset and its associated 95% confidence intervals (CI). A heterogeneity test obtained for the different studies showed a high level of inconsistency ($I^2 > 50\%$) thereby indicating the use of a random effect model in all the meta-analyses conducted. Sensitivity analysis was carried out by examining the effect of outliers, by employing similar method to that used by Patsopoulos et al. [31], which involves the process of comparing the pooled prevalence before and after eliminating one study at a time. The funnel plot was used to report the potential bias and small/large study effects and Begg’s tests was used to assess asymmetry. The prevalence was subdivided into separate datasets based on overall prevalence, males or females, cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction for a more detailed analysis of the prevalence of myopia. Also, to study a possible variation of the prevalence of myopia in terms of age, the age groups in the reported studies were divided into two categories: 5–11 years and 12–18 years. Their respective funnel plots are shown as ([S3–S7 Files](#)).

Results

Summary of included studies

From the described search strategy, a total of 164 potentially relevant titles/abstracts of articles were initially identified. [Fig 1](#) presents the flowchart of the article screening and selection process. Following a quick inspection of identified studies and removal of duplicate articles, 44 relevant articles were assessed for eligibility. Using the pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 24 of 30 articles that underwent detailed review were eligible, and data from these studies were included in this study. A breakdown of the eligible studies as well as their quality assessment scores (maximum of 10) are presented in [Table 1](#). [S1 Table](#) shows how the quality assessment scores were calculated.

Table 1

Characteristics of studies that reported the prevalence of myopia in school-aged children in Africa and were included in the meta-analysis.

First Author	Year of study	Study Country [†]	Age group	Mean age (years)	Total Sample size	Cycloplegia	Objective refraction	Prevalence of myopia (%)	Comm refrac error
Atowa [32]	2017	Nigeria	8–15	11.5 ± 2.3	1197	Yes	Objective	2.7	
Wajuihian [33]	2017	South Africa	13–18	15.8 ± 1.6	1586	No	Objective	7	
Chebil [34]	2016	Tunisia	6–14	10.1 ± 1.8	6192	Yes	Objective	3.71	
Kedir [35]	2014	Ethiopia	7–15	Not reported	570	No	Subjective	2.6	
Soler [36]	2015	Equatorial Guinea	6–16	10.8 ± 3.1	425	Yes	Objective	10.4	
Kumah [37]	2013	Ghana	12–15	13.8	2435	Yes	Objective	3.2	
Mehari [38]	2013	Ethiopia	7–18	13.1 ± 2.5	4238	No	Objective	6	
Jimenez [39]	2012	Burkina Faso	6–16	11.2 ± 2.4	315	No	Objective	2.5	
Naidoo [7]	2003	South Africa	5–15	Not reported	4890	Yes	Objective	2.9	
Yamamah [40]	2015	Egypt	6–17	10.7 ± 3.1	2070	Yes	Objective	3.1	Astign
Nartey [41]	2016	Ghana	6–16	10.6	811	No	Subjective	4.6	
Anera [42]	2006	Burkina Faso	5–16	10.2 ± 2.2	388	Yes	Objective	0.5	
Chukwuemeka [43]	2015	South Africa	7–14	9.9 ± 2.2	421	No	Objective	18.7	Astign
Alrasheed [44]	2016	Sudan	6–15	10.8 ± 2.8	1678	Yes	Objective	6.8	Myopi
Abdul-Kabir [45]	2016	Ghana	10–15	Not reported	208	No	Objective	22.6	Myopi
Ebri [46]	2019	Nigeria	10–18	13.3 ± 1.9	4241	Yes	Objective	4.8	Astign
Ezinne [47]	2018	Nigeria	5–15	9.0 ± 2.5	998	Yes	Objective	4.5	Myopi

[†] = country the study was conducted;

[‡] = authors provided data for only those aged 5–18 years.

The included studies comprised of the following: six (25.0%) studies from Ghana, four (16.7%) each from South Africa, and Nigeria, three from Ethiopia (12.5%), two (8.3%) from Burkina Faso, and one (4.2%) each from Sudan, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Somalia and Tunisia ([Table 1](#)). Of the reviewed articles, 84.2% (n = 21) were school-based, cross-sectional studies, two (8.3%) were population-based, cross-sectional studies, while one (4.2%) employed a cross-sectional study design but did not report whether it was school or population-based.

Method of measuring refractive error in African school-aged children

Of the reviewed studies, 13 (54.2%) performed cycloplegic refraction to determine the refractive error status of the children, while non-cycloplegic refraction was used in 11 (45.8%) of the studies. Regarding the technique used for refractive error measurement, over three-quarters of the studies (n = 20, 83.3%) performed objective refraction, with about one-sixth (n = 4, 16.7%) performing subjective refraction.

Prevalence of myopia in African school-aged children

The number of children aged 5–18 years included in the study ranged from 208 for a study conducted in Ghana [\[45\]](#) to 6192 for another study conducted in Tunisia [\[34, 55\]](#). The prevalence of myopia reported in these studies ranged from 0.5% [\[42\]](#) to 10.4% [\[36, 52\]](#) with cycloplegic refraction. In studies where non-cycloplegic refraction was used to determine refractive error refraction in school children, the reported myopia prevalence ranged from 1.7% [\[51\]](#) to 22.6% [\[45\]](#).

Meta-analysis of myopia prevalence in children ag 5–18 years in Africa (2000–2021)

Myopia prevalence among school children in Africa [Fig 2](#) shows a forest plot of the prevalence of myopia among African school children aged 5–18 years. The pooled estimate of myopia in the African region was significant (5.0%, 95%CI: 4.1, 5.8; p<0.001) and about 37.5% of the studies (n = 9) reported significantly higher prevalence of myopia and 50% (n = 12) reporting significantly lower prevalence compared with the pooled estimate across Africa. The study by Abdul-Kabir found the highest prevalence (22.6%) of myopia among Ghanaian children (95%CI: 17.1, 28.9) [\[45\]](#), while Anera et al. found the lowest prevalence among children in Burkina Faso (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.9) [\[42\]](#). The pooled prevalence estimates of myopia was similar to the study by Ebri [\[46\]](#) and Ezinne [\[47\]](#) (4.8%, 95%CI: 4.2, 5.5), both involving children from Nigeria [\[46, 47\]](#). Funnel plots and using Begg's test for Myopia in Africa indicated homogeneity ([S3 File](#)) and meta-regression analysis of myopia by year of publication indicated that publication of year increased as the proportion of myopia decreased but this relationship was not statistically significant (p = 0.423, [S7 File](#)).

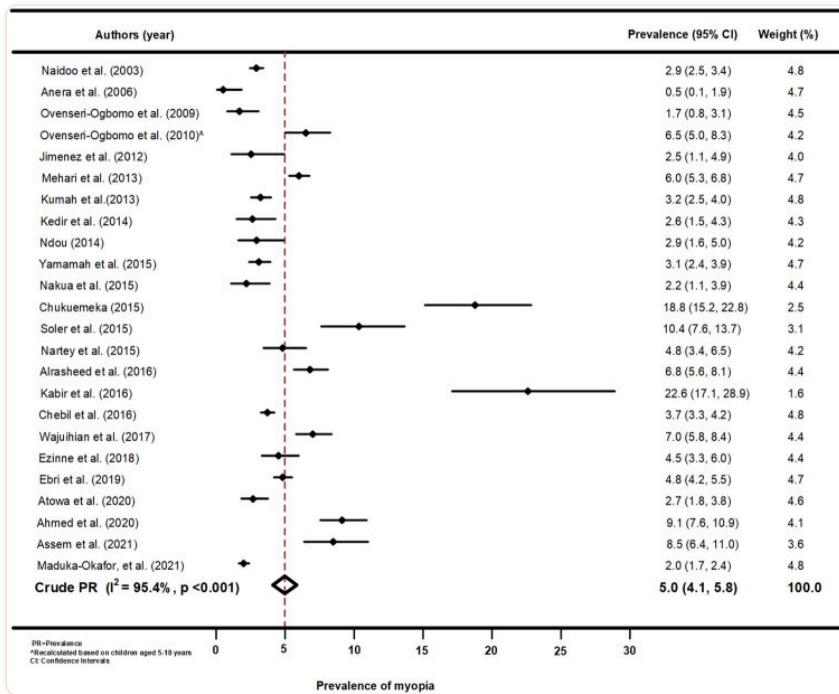


Fig 2

Forest plot of myopia prevalence from the meta-analysis of African studies.

Myopia prevalence by gender of the School children in Africa (2000–2021)

[Fig 3](#) is a forest plot for prevalence of myopia by gender among school children aged 5–18 years in Africa. The prevalence estimates varied significantly between studies in both male and female children ($p<0.001$, per gender), and the overall pooled prevalence of myopia by gender was 4.8% (95%CI: 4.1, 5.6) and similar between male and female estimates ($p = 0.297$). Compared with the overall pooled estimate, the prevalence of myopia was slightly higher in male (4.5%, 95%CI: 3.4, 5.5) children than females (5.3%, 95%CI: 4.1, 6.5) but the difference was not significant as indicated by the overlapping of the CIs with that of the overall pooled estimate. Funnel plots and using Begg's test for Myopia by gender reported absence of publication biases ([S4 File](#)).

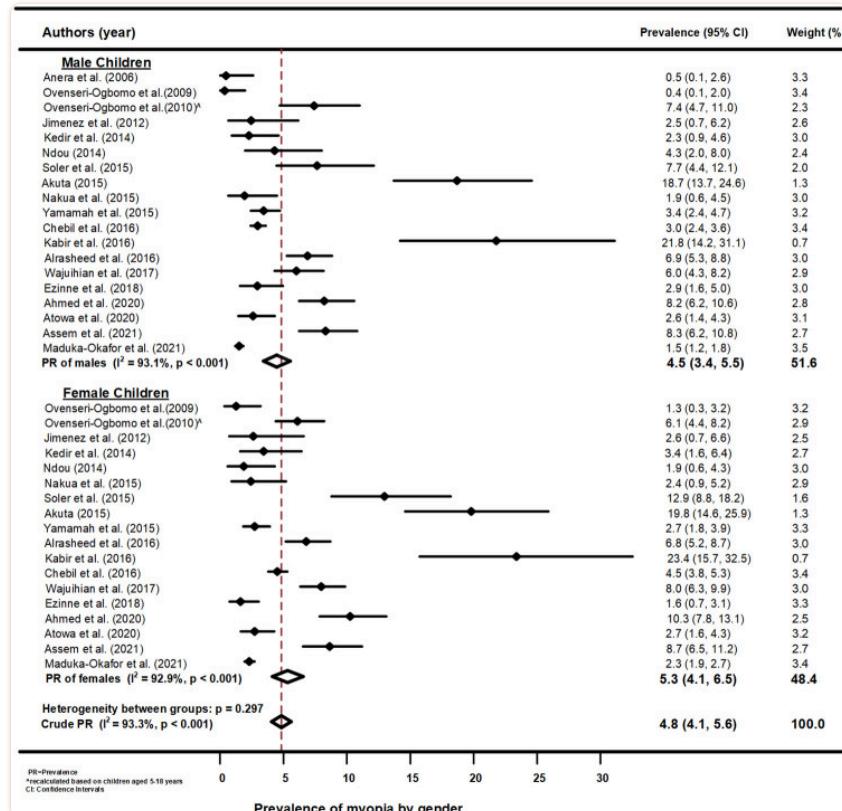


Fig 3

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by gender from the meta-analysis of African studies.

Myopia prevalence by age group of the school children in Africa (2000–2021)

The forest plot of the prevalence of myopia in children aged 5–11 years and 12–18 years is presented in Fig 4. The pooled estimate of myopia in school children aged 5–11 years and 12–18 years was lower (3.7%, 95%CI 2.6, 4.7) and higher (5.8%, 95%CI 3.8, 6.3) respectively, than the pooled estimate but none was significant as they overlapped with the pooled estimate in Africa (4.4%, 95%CI 3.6, 5.2). The heterogeneity between the groups was approaching significant ($p = 0.091$) but older children had a higher prevalence of myopia than younger children. Among those aged 5–11 years, the highest significant prevalence was reported in a Ghanaian study (16.4%, 95%CI: 13.0, 20.3) and a study conducted in Equatorial Guinea (8.2%, 95%CI: 5.8, 11.3) while school children in Ethiopia (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.5) had the lowest significant prevalence estimate of myopia. Among those aged 12–18 years, children in Ghana also showed the highest significant prevalence of myopia (20.2%, 95%CI: 16.5, 24.4), but the lowest prevalence was reported among School children in Burkina Faso (0.5%, 95%CI: 0.1, 1.9). The heterogeneity of these studies by age as subgroups analysis were low (S5 File).

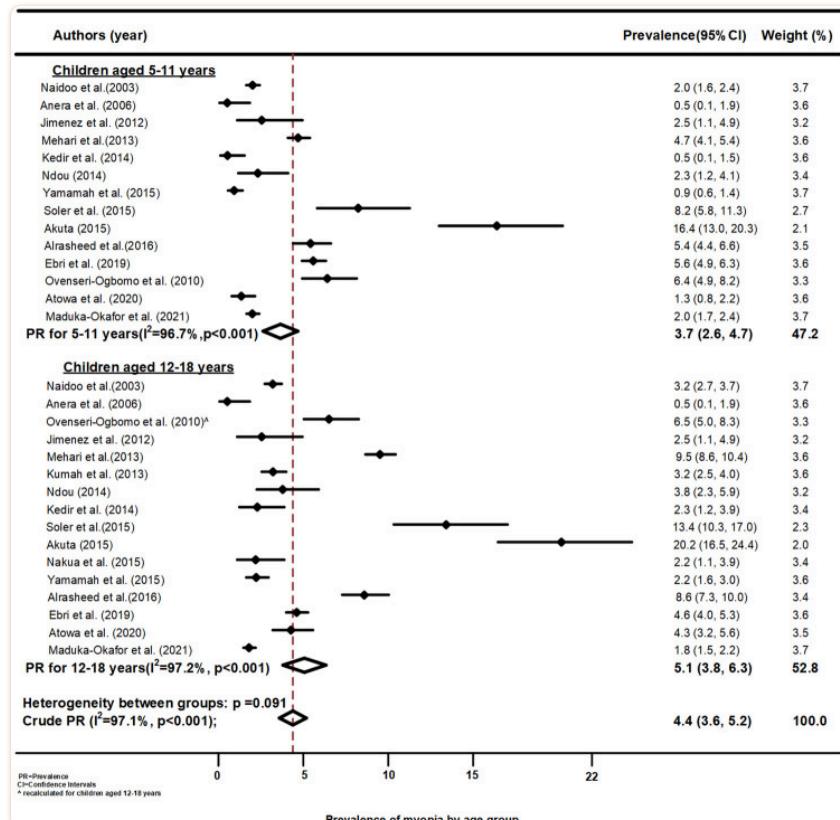


Fig 4

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by age group across African studies.

Myopia prevalence by mode of refraction among school children in Africa (2000–2021)

The forest plot displayed in Fig 5 shows the pooled estimate of myopia prevalence among school children in Africa. Using cycloplegic refraction, studies have reported significantly lower prevalence estimates of myopia among school children in Africa compared with those that used non-cycloplegic refraction (4.2%, 95%CI: 3.3, 5.1 versus 6.4%, 95%CI: 4.4, 8.4; $p = 0.046$). From the plot, it can be seen that studies that used non cycloplegic technique to determine refraction had greater variabilities in the reported myopia prevalence (ranging from 1.7 to 22.6%), but those that performed cycloplegic refraction had smaller between study variability in the reported prevalence of myopia (range from 0.5 to 10.4%). Funnel plots and the Begg's test for Myopia by refraction technique shown in S6 and S7 Files, respectively, found no publication biases.

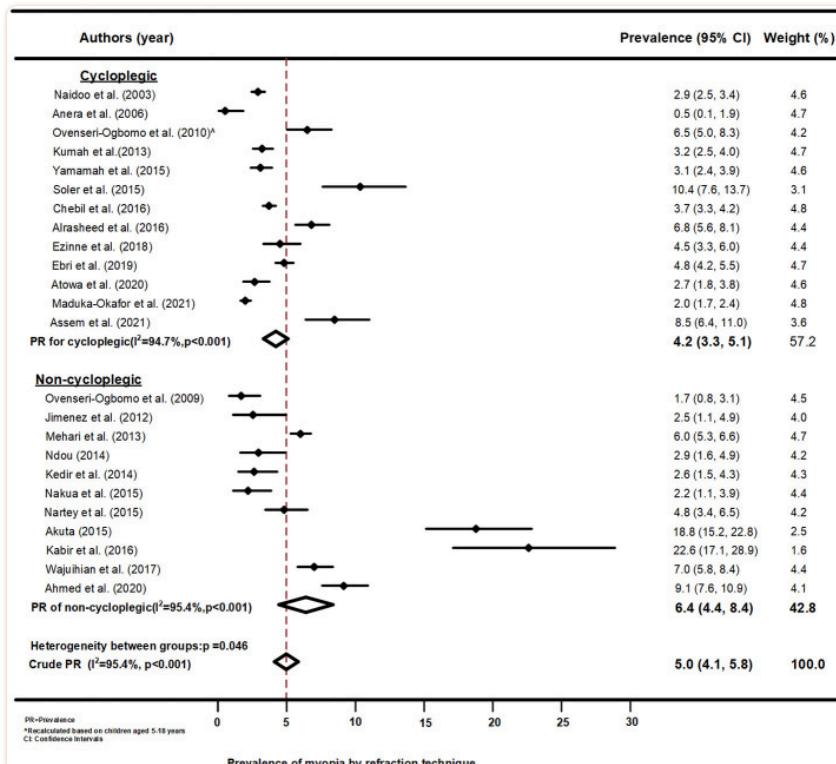


Fig 5

Forest plot of myopia prevalence by refraction technique among school children in Africa.

Discussion

Prevalence of myopia

The present study provided recent estimates of the myopia prevalence in African children using data from twenty eight studies conducted over two decades. The prevalence of myopia defined as SER $\geq 0.50\text{D}$ of myopia in school children across African countries was 4.7% (95%CI, 3.9, 5.7%) and there were wide variations within and between African countries. A significantly higher prevalence rate was observed in Ghana [45] and South Africa [43], with significantly lower rates in Burkina Faso [42] and Ethiopia [56]. In some countries like Ghana, the variation in the reported prevalence of myopia between studies reached 21% [37, 41, 45, 48, 51, 52]. Although the regional variations in myopia prevalence found in this study are consistent with the statement of Foster and Jiang who remarked that “Considerable regional difference exists from country to country even within the same geographical area” [57], it remains unclear why these variations exist. While the criteria for defining refractive error is often cited as the reason for the variation in the prevalence of refractive errors, including myopia, between studies, this may not be the case in our study because only studies that defined myopia as spherical equivalent of $\geq 0.50\text{ D}$ were included.

The overall low prevalence of myopia found across Africa is consistent with other studies that reported lower myopia prevalence in African children compared with Asian children [5, 58]. It is instructive to note that in four of the studies that were included in the current review [36, 43, 45, 52], the reported prevalence of myopia was greater than 10%. Of these, two studies [36, 52] used cycloplegic refraction, which is thought to more accurately estimate the prevalence of myopia [59]. The lower prevalence of myopia in Africa compared with the other regions may be related to the

differences in genetic predisposition to myopia development, and to culture [60–62]. Although the role of genetics in the development and progression of myopia is reported to be small [12], it is believed to have a role in an individual's susceptibility to environmental risk factors for myopia [63]. In addition, several studies have shown the major involvement of environmental factors such as near work (writing, reading, and working on a computer) in myopia development [60, 63]. In many African countries, children do not start education and learning at the same early age as in other countries of Asia. African children are therefore exposed to less near work and are more involved with outdoor activities, resulting in less risk of developing myopia compared with their Asian counterparts. This assertion is supported by the fact that in 2010, the pre-primary school enrolment rate in the most populous country in Africa (Nigeria) was 41.83% compared to 89.12% in 2012 in China (the most populous country in Asia) [64]. We acknowledge that a recent investigation [65] has shown that more precise objective measures are required to make definitive conclusions about the relationship between myopia and near work.

Notwithstanding the relatively low prevalence of myopia found among African children, there is a need to monitor myopia prevalence among children in this region given the increasing access to, and use of, mobile devices among African population [19], including children. This is important considering the reported higher increase in the prevalence of myopia in black children living in Africa (2.8% to 5.5%) compared with other black children not living in Africa (4.8% to 19.9%) after 10 years [58]. It is assumed that black children not in Africa may have more access and exposure to near work, including mobile devices, and less outdoor activities than their counterparts in Africa.

Age and gender-based differences in myopia prevalence

There was a 34.6% increase in the prevalence of myopia between the age groups with the older age group having a higher prevalence of 5.2%. The slightly higher prevalence of myopia between the two age groups shows there is a tendency for myopia prevalence to increase with age which is consistent with previous studies from elsewhere [58, 66, 67]. This increase in myopia prevalence is thought to be associated with the increasing growth of the eyeball. Although the pooled prevalence of myopia in female children was slightly higher than in male children (4.7 versus 3.7%), the difference did not reach statistical significance. The influence of gender on the prevalence of myopia has not been unequivocal in the literature [68–72] with some suggesting that the slightly higher prevalence in females may be related to the different ages of onset of puberty between boys and girls [73]. Other factors that could account for the reported apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls include limited outdoor activity time than boys [74].

Prevalence of myopia by refraction technique (cycloplegic and non-cycloplegic)

The present study demonstrated that cycloplegic refraction resulted in significantly lower estimates of myopia prevalence than non-cycloplegic refraction, which was consistent with previous studies [75–78]. It has been reported that non-cycloplegic refraction overestimates the prevalence of myopia, yields a non-reliable measurement of association of myopia risk factors [59, 76], and hence cycloplegic refraction is regarded as the gold standard for measuring myopia [59]. Over half of the studies in this review utilised cycloplegic refraction, which is particularly important in this age group where the difference between the cycloplegic and non-cycloplegic refraction is quite high [77, 78]. The fact that non-cycloplegic refraction often results in overestimation of myopia may have, in part, accounted for the high prevalence reported in one study from Ghana [45]. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that cycloplegic refraction results in a lower variability of measured refractive error than non-cycloplegic refraction (see Fig 5), which may reflect the variable accommodative state

during the refraction of children of different ages. This finding underscores the need to appropriately control accommodation when performing refraction especially in young children who have a higher amplitude of accommodation and in whom accommodation is more active.

Implications of the study

This is the first systematic review and meta-analysis to estimate the prevalence of myopia among school children in Africa and its variation with age, gender and refraction technique. As previously reported, the prevalence of myopia in Africa appears low compared to other regions such as South East Asia. This study also provides baseline data for comparison and future prevalence studies to establish a trend in myopia epidemiology in this population. A further remarkable finding in this review is the demonstration that non-cycloplegic refraction overestimated the prevalence of myopia and results in more variable estimates of refractive errors compared with cycloplegic refraction. The interpretation of myopia prevalence data obtained from non-cycloplegic refraction may be potentially misleading to researchers and policymakers. As a result, it is recommended that cycloplegic refraction be used in all studies investigating the prevalence of myopia in children.

Strengths and limitations of the review

This review has certain limitations. Firstly, this review did not investigate the trend in the prevalence of myopia among school children in Africa due to the limited number of studies. Secondly, the selection of English-only studies likely biased the results towards studies in Anglophone countries or countries where the findings were reported in English. Thirdly, the current review did not explore the various factors influencing the epidemiology of myopia in this population. Despite these limitations, a major strength of this study is the selection of studies that used a uniform definition of myopia (i.e. $\geq 0.50\text{DS}$ of myopia) which allowed for a better comparison in the reported prevalence of myopia. In addition, the study excluded studies that were conducted in unselected groups such as hospital-based studies and studies that did not report any evidence of sampling in the study. In addition, the selected studies were evaluated for robustness in the study designs employed in each study.

Conclusions

In summary, this systematic review and meta-analysis have shown that the prevalence of myopia among schoolchildren in Africa is lower than other regions of the world. The use of non-cycloplegic refraction for estimation of myopia prevalence can be misleading as it returns higher and more variable prevalence estimates. There is a need to monitor the trend of myopia as more children in this region are increasingly being exposed to identified risk factors for myopia development including access to mobile devices, increased near work, increased online or remote learning, and limited time outdoors. Future studies are needed to understand the role of ethnicity on the myopia prevalence in Africa as the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about whether significant differences in the prevalence of myopia among different ethnicity in Africa exists.

Supporting information

S1 Table

Quality assessment of full-text articles included in review.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (23K, docx)

S1 File

PRISMA 2020 checklist.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (32K, docx)

S2 File

Search terms for refractive error Africa children prevalence filters (2000–2021).

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (13K, docx)

S3 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S4 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by gender.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S5 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by age in categories.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S6 File

Funnel plots and 95% confidence intervals of Myopia by refraction technique.

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (15K, docx)

S7 File

A meta-regression analysis of Myopia by year of publication.

The vertical axis is the log proportion of Myopia, and the horizontal axis represents year of publication. Each dark dot represented one selected study, and the size of each dark dots corresponds to the weight assigned to each study. Given the slope of the regression line has descending slightly in this figure, this could be interpreted as publication of year increased, the proportion of myopia decreased and, this relationship did not differ statistically ($p = 0.5512$).

(DOCX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (37K, docx)

S8 File

Data used in the analysis.

(XLSX)

[Click here for additional data file.](#) (46K, xlsx)

Acknowledgments

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The authors received no specific funding for this work.

Data Availability

All relevant data are within the paper and its [Supporting information](#) files.

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Decision Letter 0

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

13 Dec 2021

PONE-D-21-28841 Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children. PLOS ONE

Dear Dr. Osuagwu,

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to PLOS ONE. After careful consideration, we feel that it has merit but does not fully meet PLOS ONE's publication criteria as it currently stands. Therefore, we invite you to submit a revised version of the manuscript that addresses the points raised during the review process.

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Reviewer's Responses to Questions

Comments to the Author

1. Is the manuscript technically sound, and do the data support the conclusions?

The manuscript must describe a technically sound piece of scientific research with data that supports the conclusions. Experiments must have been conducted rigorously, with appropriate controls, replication, and sample sizes. The conclusions must be drawn appropriately based on the data presented.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

2. Has the statistical analysis been performed appropriately and rigorously?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

3. Have the authors made all data underlying the findings in their manuscript fully available?

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Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: No

4. Is the manuscript presented in an intelligible fashion and written in standard English?

PLOS ONE does not copyedit accepted manuscripts, so the language in submitted articles must be clear, correct, and unambiguous. Any typographical or grammatical errors should be corrected at revision, so please note any specific errors here.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

5. Review Comments to the Author

Please use the space provided to explain your answers to the questions above. You may also include additional comments for the author, including concerns about dual publication, research ethics, or publication ethics. (Please upload your review as an attachment if it exceeds 20,000 characters)

Reviewer #1: The authors conducted a review and meta-analysis of articles on the prevalence of myopia in African children.

This study follows the recommendations for this type of review.

Several points of detail should be reported

1 ° In the inclusion criteria, the authors report having excluded studies in which the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified. But they did not clearly define the age ranges of this review themselves.

2 ° Two articles have been included but pose a problem in my opinion.

- They did not report whether it was school- or population-based. The inclusion / exclusion criteria are not clear at this level

- They did not specify the method used to determine the refractive error. However, it is clearly specified in the inclusion criteria "stated the method of measuring refractive error - cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction, as well as objective or subjective refraction"

I think we should exclude these articles or change the inclusion criteria

3 ° in the table, in addition to the age limits, the median or average of the ages must be included in each article. Moreover, the authors specify it for an article: In another study (43) however, the children were aged 4 - 24 years but with a mean age of 12 years.

4 ° in the discussion, when the authors evoke the fact that fewer children await early education and learning in many African countries, compared with Asian countries, means that the children do less near work and are more involved with outdoor tasks, nuances must be made.

In a meta-analysis, Gajjar (Acta ophtahlmol 2021) show that the role of near vision is still questionable and that the study of the literature does not allow a conclusion. On the other hand, Tang Y (J Glob Health. 2021) shows the existence of a difference in the prevalence of myopia in China depending on whether the children live in the city or in the countryside.

5° The authors said that "the apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls may be due to girls having ... shorter axial length than boys". That surprising !!!

Reviewer #2: This is a good Meta-analysis regarding the myopia prevalence in Africa

it is good structured and well-written; however, it would be better if you add a figure showing prevalence of myopia by ethnicity (black vs white vs asian in the same region) to show if it affects the prevalence of myopia or not

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Reviewer #1: No

Reviewer #2: No

[NOTE: If reviewer comments were submitted as an attachment file, they will be attached to this email and accessible via the submission site. Please log into your account, locate the manuscript record, and check for the action link "View Attachments". If this link does not appear, there are no attachment files.]

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Author response to Decision Letter 0

13 Jan 2022

Response to Reviewers comments

Dear Aleksandra Barac

Thanks for the very useful comments which has strengthened our manuscript. We have revised the article according to the suggested comments. We have provided a point-by-point response to all reviewers comments for clarity.

The changes made in the revised manuscript and supplementary files were highlighted using red font for easy identification.

Journal Requirements:

When submitting your revision, we need you to address these additional requirements.

1. Please ensure that your manuscript meets PLOS ONE's style requirements, including those for file naming. The PLOS ONE style templates can be found at

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Response: Done

Comments to the Author

1. Is the manuscript technically sound, and do the data support the conclusions?

The manuscript must describe a technically sound piece of scientific research with data that supports the conclusions. Experiments must have been conducted rigorously, with appropriate controls, replication, and sample sizes. The conclusions must be drawn appropriately based on the data presented.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

2. Has the statistical analysis been performed appropriately and rigorously?

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

3. Have the authors made all data underlying the findings in their manuscript fully available?

The PLOS Data policy requires authors to make all data underlying the findings described in their manuscript fully available without restriction, with rare exception (please refer to the Data Availability Statement in the manuscript PDF file). The data should be provided as part of the manuscript or its supporting information, or deposited to a public repository. For example, in addition to summary statistics, the data points behind means, medians and variance measures should be available. If there are restrictions on publicly sharing data—e.g. participant privacy or use of data from a third party—those must be specified.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: No

Response: We have included the study data used in the analysis as a spread sheet inline with PlosOne policy

4. Is the manuscript presented in an intelligible fashion and written in standard English?

PLOS ONE does not copyedit accepted manuscripts, so the language in submitted articles must be clear, correct, and unambiguous. Any typographical or grammatical errors should be corrected at revision, so please note any specific errors here.

Reviewer #1: Yes

Reviewer #2: Yes

5. Review Comments to the Author

Please use the space provided to explain your answers to the questions above. You may also include additional comments for the author, including concerns about dual publication, research ethics, or publication ethics. (Please upload your review as an attachment if it exceeds 20,000 characters)

Reviewer #1:

The authors conducted a review and meta-analysis of articles on the prevalence of myopia in African children.

This study follows the recommendations for this type of review.

Several points of detail should be reported

1 ° In the inclusion criteria, the authors report having excluded studies in which the ages of the participants were either not specified or outside the age range specified. But they did not clearly define the age ranges of this review themselves.

Response: Agreed and we have excluded the 4–24year-old range study (Yareed et al) and the 5-19 year study (Ovenseri-Ogbomo et al) as they do not meet our stipulated inclusion criteria of 5-18 year.

2 ° Two articles have been included but pose a problem in my opinion.

- They did not report whether it was school- or population-based. The inclusion / exclusion criteria are not clear at this level. They did not specify the method used to determine the refractive error. However, it is clearly specified in the inclusion criteria "stated the method of measuring refractive error - cycloplegic or non-cycloplegic refraction, as well as objective or subjective refraction"

Response: The inclusion and exclusion criteria were made clearer and as suggested, we excluded these studies as the two stipulated criteria are not specified [Rushood (39) and Woldeamanuel (47)]

3 ° in the table, in addition to the age limits, the median or average of the ages must be included in each article. Moreover, the authors specify it for an article: In another study (43) however, the children were aged 4 - 24 years but with a mean age of 12 years.

Response: We have included the mean age in Table 1 and the study with age range 4-24years was excluded based on the exclusion criteria.

4 ° in the discussion, when the authors evoke the fact that fewer children await early education and learning in many African countries, compared with Asian countries, means that the children do less near work and are more involved with outdoor tasks, nuances must be made.

Response: In a meta-analysis, Gajjar (Acta ophthalmol 2021) showed that the role of near vision is still questionable and that the study of the literature does not allow a conclusion. On the other hand, Tang Y (J Glob Health. 2021) showed the existence of a difference in the prevalence of myopia in China depending on whether the children live in the city or in the countryside. However, we agree with the reviewer and have made the following revision in the discussion section:

In addition, several studies have shown the major involvement of environmental factors such as near work (writing, reading, and working on a computer) in myopia development(62, 65). In many African countries, children do not start education and learning at the same early age as in other countries of Asia. African children are therefore exposed to less near work and are more involved with outdoor activities, resulting in less risk of developing myopia compared with their Asian counterparts. This assertion is supported by the fact that in 2010, the pre-primary school enrolment rate in the most populous country in Africa (Nigeria) was 41.83% compared to 89.12% in 2012 in China (the most populous country in Asia) (66). We acknowledge that a recent investigation(67) has shown that more precise objective measures are required to make definitive conclusions about the relationship between myopia and near work.

5° The authors said that "he apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls may be due to girls having ... shorter axial length than boys". That surprising !!!

Response: Zadnik et al study was referring to a specific context in their study, where they found that girls tended to have steeper corneas, stronger crystalline lenses, and shorter eyes/axial length than boys. These findings are specific to their study and cannot be used to explain any result where a higher prevalence of myopia in girls is found. For example, we know that shorter axial length is generally associated with hyperopia and not myopia.

However, the new analysis after removing the 4 studies, showed no statistically significant difference in myopia prevalence between gender. Therefore, we have removed this statement and the revised section now reads:

The influence of gender on the prevalence of myopia has not been unequivocal in the literature (70-74) with some suggesting that the slightly higher prevalence in females may be related to the different ages of onset of puberty between boys and girls (75). Other factors that could account for the reported apparent higher prevalence of myopia in girls include limited outdoor activity time than boys (76).

Reviewer #2

This is a good Meta-analysis regarding the myopia prevalence in Africa. It is good structured and well-written; however, it would be better if you add a figure showing prevalence of myopia by ethnicity (black vs white vs asian in the same region) to show if it affects the prevalence of myopia or not

Response: Thanks for the suggestion. Although the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about the differences in the prevalence of myopia between ethnic groups in Africa, studies that have been conducted in Africa did not specify the different ethnicities. However, we think there is need for such comparison between black vs white vs Asian and this could be another research interest with a different research aim for another manuscript. We have suggested this in the conclusion for future study direction. The section now reads:

Future studies are needed to understand the role of ethnicity on the myopia prevalence in Africa as the inclusion and comparison of the different ethnicities (Black vs White vs Asian) in the same region would add useful information about whether significant differences in the prevalence of myopia among different ethnicity in Africa exists.

6. PLOS authors have the option to publish the peer review history of their article (what does this mean?). If published, this will include your full peer review and any attached files.

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Do you want your identity to be public for this peer review? For information about this choice, including consent withdrawal, please see our Privacy Policy.

Reviewer #1: No

Reviewer #2: No

Response. Thanks for your comments

Attachment

Submitted filename: *Response to Reviewers comments.docx*

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Decision Letter 1

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

17 Jan 2022

Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children.

PONE-D-21-28841R1

Dear Dr. Osuagwu,

We're pleased to inform you that your manuscript has been judged scientifically suitable for publication and will be formally accepted for publication once it meets all outstanding technical requirements.

Within one week, you'll receive an e-mail detailing the required amendments. When these have been addressed, you'll receive a formal acceptance letter and your manuscript will be scheduled for publication.

An invoice for payment will follow shortly after the formal acceptance. To ensure an efficient process, please log into Editorial Manager at <http://www.editorialmanager.com/pone/>, click the 'Update My Information' link at the top of the page, and double check that your user information is up-to-date. If you have any billing related questions, please contact our Author Billing department directly at authorbilling@plos.org.

If your institution or institutions have a press office, please notify them about your upcoming paper to help maximize its impact. If they'll be preparing press materials, please inform our press team as soon as possible -- no later than 48 hours after receiving the formal acceptance. Your manuscript will remain under strict press embargo until 2 pm Eastern Time on the date of publication. For more information, please contact onepress@plos.org.

Kind regards,

Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

PLOS ONE

2022; 17(2): e0263335.

Published online 2022 Feb 3. doi: [10.1371/journal.pone.0263335.r004](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263335.r004)

Acceptance letter

[Aleksandra Barac](#), Academic Editor

24 Jan 2022

PONE-D-21-28841R1

Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Myopia prevalence in African School children.

Dear Dr. Osuagwu:

I'm pleased to inform you that your manuscript has been deemed suitable for publication in PLOS ONE. Congratulations! Your manuscript is now with our production department.

If your institution or institutions have a press office, please let them know about your upcoming paper now to help maximize its impact. If they'll be preparing press materials, please inform our press team within the next 48 hours. Your manuscript will remain under strict press embargo until 2 pm Eastern Time on the date of publication. For more information please contact onepress@plos.org.

If we can help with anything else, please email us at plosone@plos.org.

Thank you for submitting your work to PLOS ONE and supporting open access.

Kind regards,

PLOS ONE Editorial Office Staff

on behalf of

Dr. Aleksandra Barac

Academic Editor

PLOS ONE

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Updated on May 30, 2024 · 5 min read

Global Prevalence of Myopia (2024)



Written by
[Mara Sugue](#)



Medically Reviewed by
[Dr. Melody Huang, O.D.](#)

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In this article

[Global Myopia Prevalence: Key Statistics and Trends](#)

[Trends in Myopia Prevalence Over Time](#)

[Causes of the Myopia Epidemic](#)

[Potential Solutions and Interventions](#)

Myopia, or nearsightedness, is a condition that continues to affect millions worldwide. As the world becomes more urbanized and digitalized, the rates of myopia have been on the rise, prompting researchers and healthcare professionals to investigate the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to this growing epidemic.

This article will explore the current global prevalence of myopia, highlighting the most significant statistics and trends across different age groups and regions. We'll also discuss projected trends in myopia, along with potential solutions and interventions to address this growing public health concern.

Global Myopia Prevalence: Key Statistics and Trends

Myopia Rates by Age Group

- In several Asian countries, the prevalence of myopia among late teenagers and young adults (Korea, Taiwan, and China) is reported to be between 84% and 97%.
-

In the United States, approximately 41.0% of children aged 5 to 17 in urban areas have myopia, with a nationwide prevalence estimated at 36.1%.

- Nearly 224 million people worldwide, or almost 3% of the population, are highly nearsighted. This means they need glasses or contacts stronger than -5.00 diopters to see clearly.

Myopia Prevalence in Developed vs. Developing Countries

The prevalence of myopia varies significantly between developed and developing countries. Higher rates are observed in developed regions, particularly urban East Asian countries.

Region	Myopia Prevalence
Urban East Asia	80–90%
United States	42%
Germany (adults 35–74)	35.1%
United Kingdom (adults 48+)	23.0%
Australia (adults 49+)	15.0%
Nigeria (adults 40+)	16.1%

Projected Myopia Rates by 2050

- Nearly 50% of the world's population is projected to be myopic by 2050, which equates to almost 5 billion people
- The projected prevalence of high myopia, in particular, is expected to reach almost 10% of the global population by 2050, translating to around 1 billion people at a significantly increased risk of permanent vision impairment
- In the United States, it's predicted that between 27% and 43% of cases of uncorrectable visual impairment in 2050 may be directly attributable to myopia

Economic Burden of Myopia Worldwide

- The global potential productivity loss associated with vision impairment (VI) and blindness due to uncorrected myopia in 2015 was estimated at \$244 billion
- Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Asia were the regions significantly affected by lost productivity due to myopia, with productivity loss estimated at \$40 billion and \$35 billion, respectively
- The East Asia region, which includes China, had the greatest potential burden of productivity loss, around \$150 billion

Trends in Myopia Prevalence Over Time

Studies have shown that the prevalence of myopia has been increasing rapidly over the past few decades, particularly in East Asian countries.

In Taiwan, for example, the prevalence of myopia among 7-year-old children increased from 5.8% in 1983 to 21% in 2000. Similarly, in Seoul, South Korea, the prevalence of myopia among 19-year-old males increased from 18.3% in 1955 to 96.5% in 2011.

This trend isn't limited to East Asia; other regions have also experienced a significant increase in myopia prevalence. In the United States, the prevalence of myopia among adults aged 12 to 54 years increased from 25% in 1971–1972 to 41.6% in 1999–2004.

Causes of the Myopia Epidemic

Several factors have been identified as potential contributors to the increasing prevalence of myopia worldwide:

1. **Increased near work and screen time:** The rise in digital device use and extended periods of near work, such as reading and studying, have been associated with a higher risk of myopia development.
2. **Reduced outdoor time:** Spending less time outdoors has been linked to an increased risk of myopia. Exposure to natural light and distant focusing may protect against myopia development.
3. **Urbanization and education:** Urban environments and higher levels of education have been associated with a higher prevalence of myopia. This is possibly due to increased near work and reduced outdoor time.
4. **Genetic factors:** While environmental factors play a significant role in myopia development, genetic predisposition also contributes to an individual's risk of developing myopia.

Potential Solutions and Interventions

To address the growing myopia epidemic, several potential solutions and interventions have been proposed:

1. **Outdoor time:** Encouraging children to spend more time outdoors, particularly during daylight hours, may help reduce the risk of myopia development and progression
2. **Eye breaks and visual hygiene:** Promoting regular eye breaks during extended near work, such as the 20–20–20 rule (looking at an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes), can help reduce eye strain and potentially slow myopia progression
3. **Myopia control therapies:** Interventions such as atropine eye drops, orthokeratology (ortho-k) lenses, and multifocal contact lenses have shown promise in slowing myopia progression in children
4. **Education and awareness:** Increasing public awareness about myopia, its risk factors, and the importance of regular eye examinations can help promote early detection and intervention
5. **Research and innovation:** Continued research into the causes, mechanisms, and potential treatments for myopia is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat this growing epidemic

The global prevalence of myopia has reached epidemic proportions, with rates continuing to rise across all age groups and regions. The projected rates of myopia by 2050 paint a concerning picture. Nearly half of the world's population is expected to be myopic, and a significant portion is at risk of permanent vision impairment due to high myopia.

The economic burden associated with myopia is substantial, with productivity losses in the billions of dollars, particularly in regions such as East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Investing in vision correction services and myopia control measures could potentially lead to significant savings in productivity and improve the quality of life for millions of individuals worldwide.

Several factors, including increased work and screen time, reduced outdoor time, urbanization, and genetic predisposition, have been identified as potential contributors to the increasing prevalence of myopia. A multifaceted approach involving outdoor time, visual hygiene, myopia control therapies, education, and research is necessary to address this growing public health concern.

As the world continues to evolve and become more urbanized and digitized, it's crucial to address the growing myopia epidemic through proactive interventions and innovative solutions. By understanding the current prevalence, projected trends, causes, and potential solutions, we can work towards developing effective strategies to prevent, control, and manage myopia.

Updated on May 30, 2024

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1. Holden, et al. “[Global prevalence of myopia and high myopia and temporal trends from 2000 through 2050.](#)” *Ophthalmology*, 2016.
2. “[Uncorrected myopia cost global economy US\\$244 billion in lost productivity in 2015.](#)” Brien Holden Vision Institute, 2016.

3. Wolffsohn, et al. "[IMI–Myopia control reports overview and introduction](#)." *Investigative ophthalmology & visual science*, 2019.



Mara Sigue

Content Contributor

Mara Sigue, with a B.A. in Social Sciences, is a dedicated web content writer for Vision Center. She is committed to making eye health research accessible and understandable to people from diverse backgrounds and educational levels. Her writing aims to bridge the gap between complex vision health topics and readers' needs for clear, factual information.



Dr. Melody Huang, O.D

Medical Reviewer

Melody Huang is an optometrist and freelance health writer. Through her writing, Dr. Huang enjoys educating patients on how to lead healthier and happier lives. She also has an interest in Eastern medicine practices and learning about integrative medicine. When she's not working, Dr. Huang loves reviewing new skin care products, trying interesting food recipes, or hanging with her adopted cats.



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