

# "PREVALENCE OF COMPUTER VISION SYNDROME AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH ERGONOMIC AND BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS AMONG SECOND-YEAR MBBS STUDENTS."

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## ABSTRACT

A group of eye and vision issues brought on by prolonged use of digital gadgets is known as Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) or Digital Eye Strain. Excessive use of smartphones, laptops and tablets puts medical students at risk. This study's goal was to determine the prevalence of CVS and how it related to behavioural and ergonomic factors in second-year MBBS students at Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College in Kolhapur. After ethical clearance and consent, 125 students by convenience sampling participated in this cross-sectional study by completing a structured google forms questionnaire. Demographic, device usage, ergonomic practices, awareness of preventive measures, and answers to the validated Computer Vision Syndrome Questionnaire (CVSQ) were collected. A CVSQ score of  $\geq 6$  was considered as CVS. Independent samples t test, the statistical analysis employed Spearman's rank correlation and the Mann-Whitney U test. Participants' mean age was  $20.07 \pm 1.23$  years; 71 (56.8%) were female and 54 (43.2%) males. CVS prevalence was 36.0%, with a mean CVSQ score of  $5.03 \pm 4.64$ . The most frequent symptoms were tearing (51.2%), headache (46.4%), itching (41.6%), foreign body sensation (40.8%), and eye pain (36.0%). There were no significant gender differences ( $p = 0.869$ ). With regular use of the 20 20 20 rule, students had significantly lower CVSQ scores ( $p < 0.05$ ). There was no correlation between total screen time and CVS severity ( $p = 0.296$ ). Prescription Glasses users had higher CVSQ scores compared to non-users ( $p = 0.0373$ ). One third of these medical students develop CVS and there are ergonomic and behavioural factors that can be modified that are associated with CVS. Following the 20 20 20 rule and other preventative measures such as awareness of digital ergonomics can help to minimize symptoms and improve eye health.

**Key words-** Computer Vision Syndrome; Digital Eye Strain; Ergonomics; Medical Students; 20 20 20 Rule; Refractive Errors.

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**Conflict of interest:** None.

## Introduction

**1.1 Background** A collection of ocular and visual symptoms that arise from extended use of digital devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones is called digital eye strain (DES), often referred to as digital display fatigue. The American Optometric Association (AOA) states that continuous screen use of up to two hours can cause DES [1]. In recent years, digital technology has been increasingly adopted for recreational and educational uses in all age groups [2]. Digital gadgets provide learning possibilities, entertainment, and social connections, but prolonged use of them can result in a set of eye symptoms known as CVS, or digital eye strain [3]. Commonly reported symptoms include blurred vision, eye strain, headache, ocular

dryness, redness, and pain in the neck and shoulder region [4]. Driven by rapid technological progress, digital devices have become deeply embedded in everyday life, serving as fundamental instruments for students across academic, literary, and recreational domains [5].

**1.2 Rationale and Objectives** CVS can be attributed to various causes, such as poor lighting, insufficient contrast on the screen, inadequate illumination of the workplace, prolonged screen usage without breaks, refractive errors and inappropriate viewing distance [6,7]. The "20 20 20 rule" and taking a 20-second break every 20 minutes to concentrate on something 20 feet away are two of the most popular suggestions [8]. There are several studies pertaining to CVS among university students in India, but very few studies have been done in Kolhapur district of Maharashtra. The

study's goal is to determine the prevalence of CVS and how it relates to ergonomic and behavioural risk factors among second-year MBBS students at Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College in Kolhapur. This information could help close a gap in the local literature.

## Materials and methods

**2.1 Study Setting and Plan** The current study was carried out in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India's Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College. The prevalence of Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) and its relationship to ergonomics and behavioural factors were assessed using a cross-sectional study methodology.

## 2.2 Participants and Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to recruit male and female second-year MBBS students. The purpose of the study were explained to all potential participants. Written informed consent was obtained after assurances of confidentiality, and participation was voluntary. Students who refused or submitted incomplete questionnaires were excluded. A total of 125 students participated, comprising 71 females (56.8%) and 54 males (43.2%).

**2.3 Data Collection Procedure** Data were collected using a structured Google Forms questionnaire after obtaining ethical clearance from the institutional committee. Researchers ensured all required fields were completed before submission, and incomplete forms were eliminated to maintain data quality.

## 2.4 Measurement Tools

**Section 1 General Questions:** It collected basic demographic information (age and gender) and also fundamental visual measures like wearing prescription vision glasses, or the particular type of refractive mistake.

## Section 2 Digital Device Usage Habits:

This interviewed the participants' digital device usage habits, including what the primary device they use was and how many years they had exposed to digital tools and how much time they spent on the device on average per day. In addition, the screen break behaviours were explored and the time spent on continuous screen use prior to initiating a screen break, and the mean duration of the rest period that follows, were documented.

**Section 3 Ergonomics & Awareness:** This section was dedicated to ergonomics and awareness, and assessed the participants' physical behaviours and visual hygiene

during screen time. This was a segment that looked at following the 20-20-20 rule (looking at an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes). Also, it collected information about their usual body posture and positioning of the screen to eye level as well as whether they use any protective devices. Lastly, it collected data on screen settings, including the participants' capabilities of adjusting the screen brightness and their preferred brightness levels.

**Section 4 Study Habits:** It investigated the participants' preferred methods of studying. Additionally, it assessed typical viewing distances by recording how far participants generally held their smartphones from their eyes during active use.

Based on earlier study, the research team created these questions on the spot.

## Section 5 CVS-Q Questionnaire

The questionnaire employed was the original version created by Seguí et al. in 2015. The 16 questions of the questionnaire were evaluated separately for the prevalence and intensity of different ocular symptoms and diseases. Two different scales were used to evaluate each symptom. A two-point Likert scale (moderate, intense) was used to assess the severity, and a three-point Likert scale (never, occasionally, often/always) was used to assess the frequency. The evaluated symptoms were: ocular burning, ocular itching, foreign body sensation, lacrimation, excessive blinking, conjunctival hyperaemia, ocular pain, feeling of heaviness in the eyelids, blurred vision, xerophthalmia, diplopia, impaired near vision, perception of coloured halos around objects, increased photophobia, feeling of diminished vision, and cephalalgia. The CVS score for each respondent is calculated by multiplying the severity values (moderate=1, intense=2) with the repetition values (never=0, occasionally=1, often/always=2). A person can be diagnosed with Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) if their total score is at least six [9].

**2.5 Statistical Analysis** The independent samples t test, the Mann-Whitney U test, and Spearman's rank correlation were employed. A p value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## Results

**3.1 Demographic Characteristics** The 125 subjects 20.07 ± 1.23 years old were included in the study, out of that 71 (56.8%) were female and 54 (43.2%) males. Most

(62.4%) said that they use prescription glasses and the most common refractive error was myopic (44.8%). The majority of students used mobile phones as their main device (94.4%) and almost half (49.6%) had accumulated 5-10 years of digital device use. Table 1 displays the pupils' demographic information.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the students

Demographic characteristics	Frequency, n (%)
Age (years), mean $\pm$ SD	20.07 years $\pm$ 1.23 SD
Gender	
Female	71(56.8)
Male	54(43.2)
Do you use prescription glasses?	
No	47(37.6)
Yes	78(62.4)
Which type of refractive error have you been diagnosed with?	
No refractive error (Emmetropia)	32(25.6)
Myopia (Near sightedness)	56(44.8)
Hyperopia (Far-sightedness)	21(16.8)
Astigmatism	1(0.8)
Not sure/Never tested	15(12)
What digital tool do you use most frequently?	
Mobile	118(94.4)
Laptop and PC	2(1.6)
Tablet	5(4)
Television	00
Years spent utilizing digital tools (total usage use of phones, laptops, etc.)	
Less than 5 years	48(38.4)
5-10 years	62(49.6)
More than 10 years	15(12)

**3.2 Ergonomic Practices** Ergonomic Practices Daily The amount of screen time was 2-5 hours (41.6%), 5-8 hours (48.8%) and more than 8 hours (5.6%). The most common break period was 30-60 minutes of continuous use (43.2%). Only 5.6% of the students always followed the 20 20 20 rule and 21.6% did not know about it. Most of the students used devices below eye level (70.4%) and adjusted screen brightness to a comfortable level (80.8%). The distribution of ergonomic practices is presented in Table 2. The data shows hours spent per day with digital devices in Figure 1.

Table 2: Distribution of ergonomic practices of students

Ergonomic practices	Frequency, n (%)
How many hours a day do you use digital devices on average?	5(4)

Less than 2 hours	52(41.6)
2-5 hours	61(48.8)
5-8 hours	7(5.6)
More than 8 hours	
After how long of continuous digital device use do you usually take a break?	
Less than 30 minutes	36(28.8)
30 minutes to 1 hour	54(43.2)
More than 1 hour	35(28)
On average, how long do you rest after each continuous session of screen use?	
Less than 20 minutes	38(30.4)
20 minutes to 60 minutes	62(49.6)
More than 60 minutes	25(20)
How frequently do you use digital devices in accordance with the 20-20-20 rule?	
Always	7(5.6)
Often	12(9.6)
Sometimes	38(30.4)
Rarely	26(20.8)
Never	15(12)
Not aware of the rule	27(21.6)
What is your usual body posture while using digital devices?	
Sitting	20(16)
Lying down	18(14.4)
Both sitting and lying down	87(69.6)
What is the level of the screen in relation to your eyes while using digital devices?	
Below eye level	88(70.4)
At eye level	36(28.8)
Above eye level	1(0.8)
Are you able to adjust the brightness of the digital device you use?	
Yes	123(98.4)
No	2(1.6)
How would you describe the brightness level of your digital device screen during use?	
Too low	22(17.6)
Comfortable	101(80.8)
Too high	2(1.6)
Do you use any protective devices while using digital screens?	
No	57(45.6)
Yes-Blue light blocking glasses	33(26.4)
Yes- Screen filter (Blue light filter/Anti-glare filter)	15(12)
Yes- Both Blue light blocking glasses and Screen filter	20(16)
What is your primary study method?	
Mostly textbooks/printed materials	37(29.6)
	33(26.4)
	55(44)

Mostly electronic methods (digital devices) Equally from both printed and electronic sources	
How far do you typically hold your smartphone from your eyes during use?	8(6.4)
Very close (< 20 cm)	62(49.6)
Close (20–30 cm)	51(40.8)
Moderate (31–40 cm)	4(3.2)
Far (> 40 cm)	

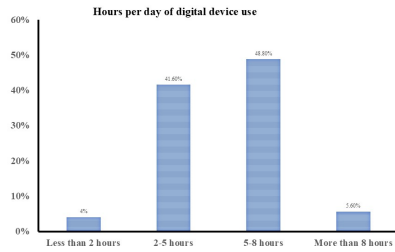


Figure .1 Hours spent using digital devices per day

**3.3 CVS Symptom Prevalence** The prevalence of CVS (CVS Q score  $\geq 6$ ) was 36.0%, with a mean score of  $5.03 \pm 4.64$ . The sexes did not significantly differ from one another ( $p = 0.869$ ).

The most frequent symptoms were tearing (51.2%), headache (46.4%), itching (41.6%), foreign body sensation (40.8%), and eye pain (36.0%). Double vision (8.0%) and coloured halos (14.4%) were fewer common symptoms. The prevalence of CVS symptoms is summarized in Table 3. The frequency and intensity of symptoms are presented in Figures 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 3: Prevalence of Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) Symptoms

Symptom	Prevalence (%)
Tearing	51.2%
Headache	46.4%
Itching	41.6%
Feeling of a foreign body	40.8%
Eye pain	36.0%
Burning	30.4%
Blurred vision	30.4%
Increased sensitivity to light	30.4%
Eye redness	29.6%
Dryness	27.2%
Heavy eyelids	24.8%
Excessive blinking	22.4%
Feeling that sight is worsening	18.4%
Difficulty focusing for near vision	16.8%
Coloured halos around objects	14.4%
Double vision	8.0%

**3.4 Association with Ergonomic and Behavioural Factors**

There is a relationship between ergonomic and behavioural factors. There is an association of ergonomic and behavioural factors.

In terms of CVS Q scores, there was a statistically significant difference between those who consistently applied the 20 20 20 rule and those who did not, but no significant differences were found using the independent samples t test. Average CVS Q score for “Always” followers ( $n = 7$ ) was  $1.29 \pm 1.38$ , compared to  $5.25 \pm 4.67$  for “Not Always” followers ( $n = 118$ ),  $p < 0.05$ . This suggests that strict compliance with the rule is correlated with less symptoms or less severe symptoms of CVS. Table 4 shows adherence levels to the 20 20 20 rules.

There was no significant relationship found between the average hours of digital devices used on a daily basis and CVS Q score by Spearman's Rank Correlation ( $p = 0.296$ ). Likewise, there was no significant relationship between the years of using digital devices and symptoms of dryness ( $p = 0.274$ ). This indicates that other factors than total screen time (such as posture, brightness, blink frequency) are likely to be more important in determining the severity of CVS.

Prescription Glasses: For this sample, there were significant differences between users and non-users of prescription glasses using independent samples t test and Mann–Whitney U test for CVS Q scores. Mean score for glasses users ( $n = 78$ ) was 5.68, compared to 3.96 for non-users ( $n = 47$ ),  $p = 0.0373$ . This suggests that pupils with refractive errors have greater difficulties with their CVS.

Table 4: 20-20-20 Rule Adherence Statistics

Adherence Level	Count	Percentage of Total Respondents
Sometimes	38	30.4%
Rarely	26	20.8%
Not aware of the rule	27	21.6%
Never	15	12.0%
Often	12	9.6%
Always	7	5.6%

Table 5. Frequency and Intensity of symptoms in Computer Vision Syndrome- Questionnaire (CVS-Q)

Reappearance of symptoms						Symptom intensity			
N	N	O	O	O	O	M	M	I	I
e	e	cc	cc	ft	ft	o	o	n	n
v	v	as	as	en	en	d	d	t	t
e	e	io	io	/al	/al	e	e	e	e
r	r	n	n	w	w	r	r	n	n
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n	%	ly	ly	s	s	te	te	e	e
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				% )	% )	n )	% )	n )	% )
Bur ning	81	64	38	30.4	06	48	69	52	01
Itc hing	68	54	52	41.6	05	4	68	54	06
Fee ling of a f o r e i g n b o d y	71	56	51	40.8	03	24	67	53	02
Te ar ing	50	40	64	51.2	11	88	79	63	03
Exc ess ive bl in kin g	92	73	28	22.4	05	4	60	48	00
E ye re d ne ss	83	66	37	29.6	05	4	64	52	02
E ye p	74	59	45	36	06	48	63	50	04

ai n									
He avy eye el ids	88	70	31	24.8	06	48	58	46	02
Dr y ne ss	80	64	34	27.2	11	88	63	50	06
B lu rr e d vi si o n	76	60	38	30.4	11	88	62	49	02
D o u bl e vi si o n	112	89	10	8	03	24	49	39	00
D if fi c ul ty f o c u si n g f o r n e ar vi si o n	102	81	21	16.8	02	16	54	43	01

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I n c r e a s e d s e n s i t i v i t y t o l i g h t	7 7	6 1 .6	38	30 .4	10	8	5 7	4 5. 6	0 4	3 .2
C o l o u r e d h a l o s a r o u n d o b j e c t s	1 0 5	8 4	18	14 .4	02	1. 6	5 2	4 1. 6	0 0	0 0
F e e l i n g t h a t s i g h t i s w o r s e n i n g	9 6	7 6 .8	23	18 .4	06	4. 8	5 3	4 2. 4	0 3	2 .4
H e a d a c h e	5 5	4 4	58	46 .4	12	9. 6	7 1	5 6. 8	1 2	9 .6

d a c h e										
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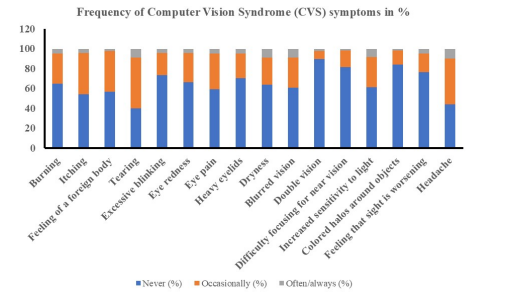


Figure 2. The percentage of people who experience symptoms of Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS).

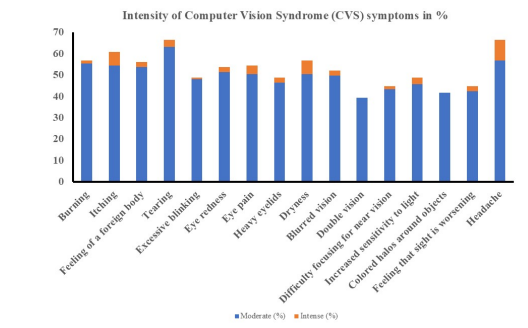


Figure 3. Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) symptom severity as a percentage (%).

**4. Discussion**

The current study sought to determine the prevalence of Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) among second-year MBBS students at Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, as well as ergonomic and behavioural risk factors linked to CVS. The results showed that 36% of the participants had a CVS-Q score  $\geq 6$ , which means they had CVS. The result indicates that digital eye strain is a significant health problem in medical school students who are increasingly using digital devices for educational and recreational activities. Other studies done on university students have also found a high prevalence of CVS related to an increase in digital screen use [10,11]. The overall CVS-Q score in the current study was  $5.03 \pm 4.64$ , pointing to a low to moderate level of symptom burden, but having a wide range of scores among the participants. The prevalence seen in this study is a little lower than that of several earlier studies done in medical and University students. The prevalence rate may differ from one study to another because of the variations in the definition of CVS, study population, duration of exposure to digital devices, and awareness about preventive measures [12].S

There were no significant differences between males and females in CVS-Q scores in the present study ( $p = 0.869$ ). In the present study, no significant association was found with gender, indicating that gender alone is not an independent risk factor for CVS in medical students, which aligns with some other previous studies [13,14]. However, there are other studies which reported higher prevalence among the females, due to hormonal effect on tear film stability and dry eye symptoms.

The most frequent symptoms reported by participants were tearing (51.2%), headache (46.4%), itching (41.6%), sensation of a foreign body (40.8%) and eye pain (36%). Extended screen viewing has been associated with a decrease in blink rate and an increase in tear evaporation, which can cause irritation to the ocular surface and reflex tearing, and headache and eye discomfort can occur as a result of continuously having to accommodate while using a digital device, glare, and bad work habits when close work is prolonged [15,16]

One important finding of the current study was a statistically significant correlation between lower CVS-Q scores and adherence to the 20-20-20 guideline. The average CVS-Q score was significantly lower for participants who always followed the 20-20-20 rule compared to participants who did not consistently follow the 20-20-20 rule. Just 5.6% of participants consistently followed the 20-20-20 rule, and those who were aware of it were not doing so. This implies that teaching kids about the elements of eye care prevention is necessary [18].

Interestingly, the present study did not obtain statistically significant results on the correlation between total daily screen time and CVS-Q scores ( $p = 0.296$ ). Likewise, years of digital device use were not significantly related to dryness symptoms. These results indicate that additional factors such as posture, brightness of the screen, distance to a screen, blink frequency and the length of time spent without a blink may be more important in the etiology of CVS than screen time alone. Previous studies have reported similar findings where ergonomic factors were the focus of discussion, not the amount of screen time [19]. In the present study, there was also a significant difference between the CVS-Q scores of the participants with prescription glasses and those without prescription glasses ( $p = 0.0373$ ). This implies that pupils who are refractive may be at a higher risk of getting digital eye strain. Myopia was the most frequently reported refractive errors of the participants. Previous studies have also shown that refractive errors and their uncorrected or insufficient correction can also lead to visual fatigue and aggravation of CVS symptoms during prolonged near work [20].

When it comes to ergonomic practices, the majority of students say they use digital devices when sitting and lying, while most use screens below eye level.

Almost half of participants had smart phones at 20-30 cm viewing distance, which could create an eye strain and accommodate stress. The adverse effects of poor posture and incorrect viewing distances are known factors that can contribute to digital viewing-related eye and musculoskeletal problems [21].

The results of this study highlight the need to educate medical students on the importance of digital eye health. The focus of education should be on proper ergonomics, optimum positioning of screens, proper viewing distance, regular blinking and keeping to the 20-20-20 rule to reduce prevalence and severity of CVS symptoms. In medical education, the use of digital learning is growing and as such, institutions should promote the adoption of healthy digital habits and the need for periodic ophthalmic evaluation of students. There are some limitations in the present study. Convenience sampling and self-reported questionnaire data could cause recall and reporting bias. Another limitation of the study is that these data are cross-sectional and do not allow for causal inferences of the relationship between risk factors and CVS. In addition, this research was done in one institution and with a small sample size, which might not ensure the generalizability of the results. The study, however, has its limitations and still offers significant baseline data for future studies on CVS among medical students in this district, the literature of which is limited.

To conclude, CVS is common among the second year MBBS students and many of the factors are modifiable which includes ergonomic and behavioral changes. Medical students' knowledge of preventive measures, particularly the 20-20-20 rule and ergonomic practices, could be useful in reducing the number and intensity of CVS symptoms.

#### **5. Conclusion**

It is proved in the present study that Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS) is one of the common problems in second year MBBS students that more than one third students are affected with the Computer Vision Syndrome. The results indicate that changes in ergonomic and behavioural factors such as following the 20-20-20 rule, using proper posture, positioning the screen correctly, and being aware of digital eye care are important to reduce the incidence and severity of CVS symptoms. It was not found that screen time was significantly related with the severity of CVS, but it was found that refractive errors and the use of prescription glasses was related to higher symptom scores. The findings highlight the need to incorporate preventive measures and ergonomic education into medical education to ensure that students' eye health is protected in the digital age.

#### **6. Conflict of Interest**

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### **7. Funding Statement**

Funding: No external funding was received for this study.

#### 8. Ethics Statement

Ethics approval: The study was conducted after obtaining ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Dr. D. Y. Patil Medical College, Kolhapur. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

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