

Optometrists Treating and Diagnosing Binocular Vision Disorders

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Introduction

Binocular vision disorders (BVD) affect a significant portion of the population.¹ Individuals affected with a BVD are unaware of their impairment and are often not diagnosed. BVDs unnecessarily hinder an individual's ability to function efficiently and effectively.

Optometrists are the most suited professionals to diagnose and treat BVDs, however, optometrists do not regularly diagnose and treat binocular disorders. Vision therapy (VT) exists to treat many of these disorders. This survey aims to understand some of the reasons why optometrists in the United States are not treating BVDs.

Methods

A web-based survey was created and distributed within the United States to alumni organizations of all 22 optometry schools and 50 state optometric associations. Participating optometrists used the web link which directed them to the survey web page. Survey results were collected and analyzed by Survey Monkey to insure complete anonymity of participants.

Results

Fifty-two optometrists participated in the survey. The number of participants who provided VT services were evenly distributed, see figure 1.

- The majority of participants agree
 - BVDs affect a significant portion of the population (73.08%),
 - are under diagnosed (90.38%)
 - are important to patient care (96.15%)

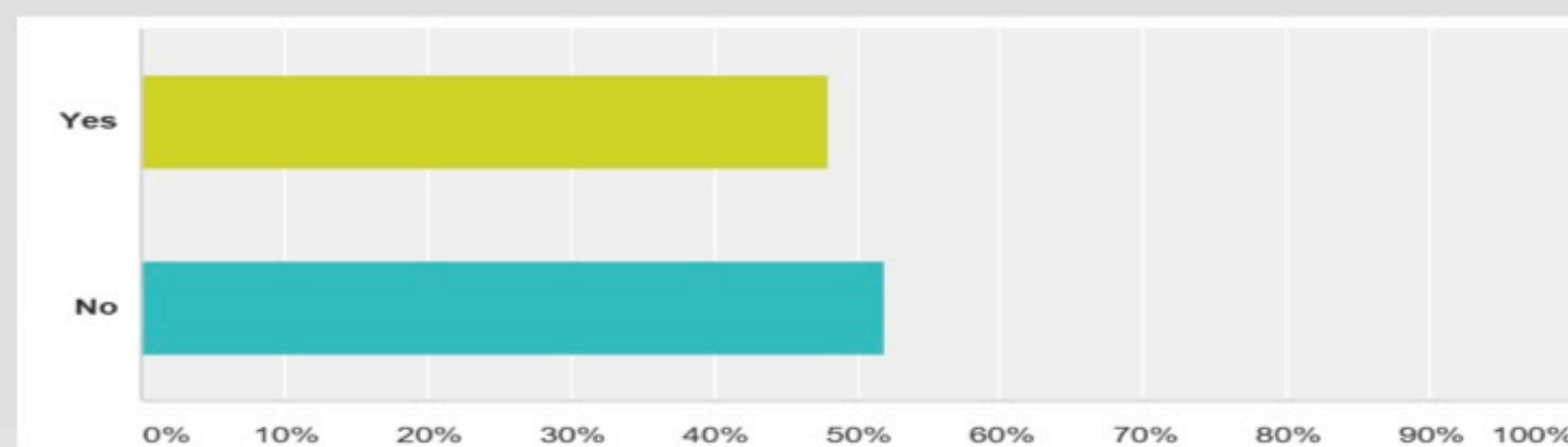


Figure 1. Percentage of participants offering VT services

- Optometrists who feel BVDs do not affect as many people performed an average of 2.72 different tests when diagnosing a BVD
- Optometrists who feel BVDs affect a significant portion of population perform ~18 BVD tests.
- The majority of participating optometrists agree
 - vision therapy is scientifically proven (75%)
 - an effective treatment for BVDs (92.31%)
 - is underutilized in treatment of BVDs (88.46%)
- The majority of optometrists agree (61.53%) vision therapy is a sustainable revenue resource in private practice optometry

See figure 2 for a list and frequency of the BVD tests used.

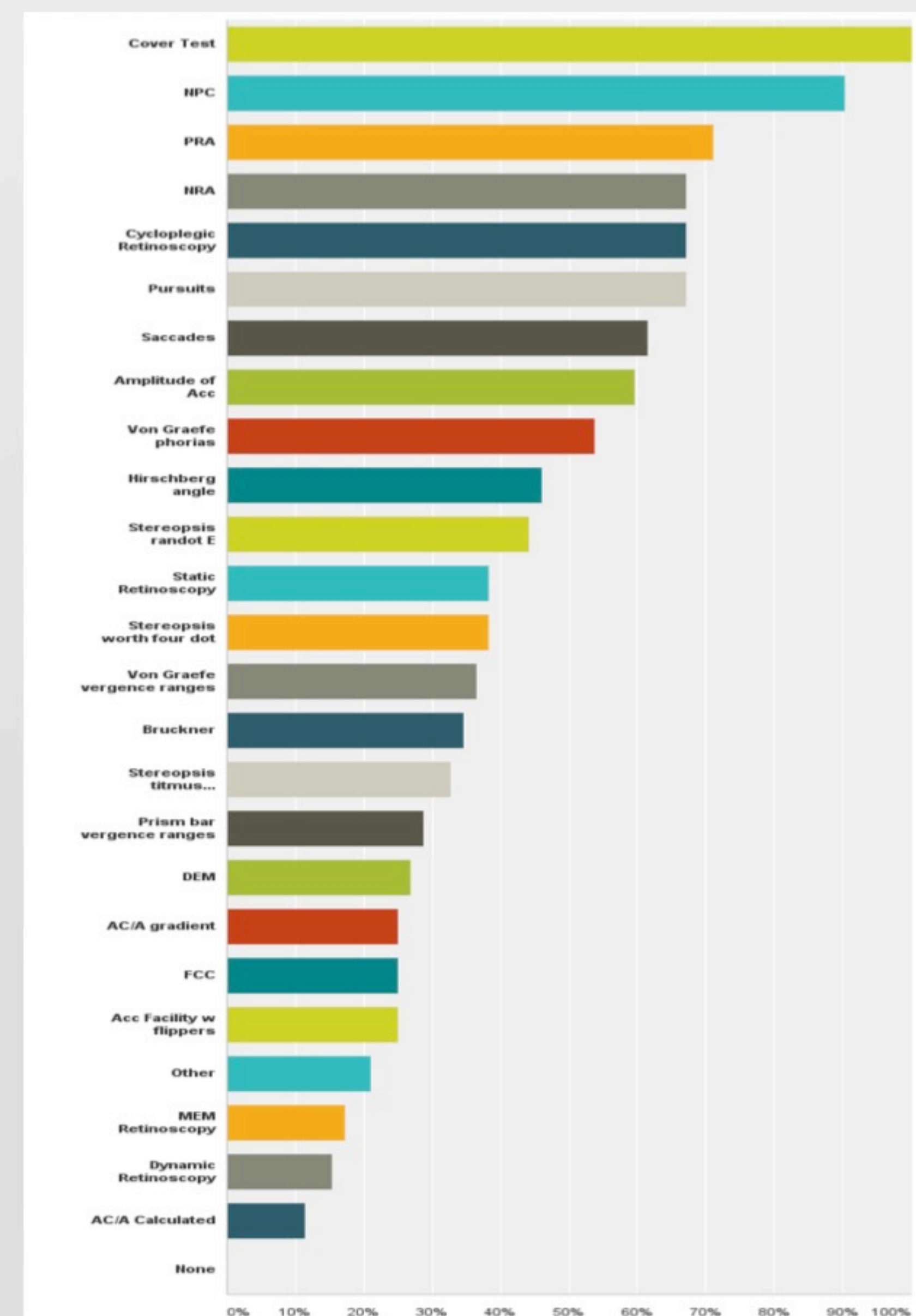


Figure 2. Tests Utilized for Diagnosing BVDs

Discussion

This survey illustrates a disparity between optometrists' attitudes and how they choose to practice optometry. Optometrists agree diagnosing and treating BVDs are important to patient care. However, many optometrists are not offering vision therapy services. This suggests something other than optometrists' attitude is affecting the under diagnosis and treatment of the BVDs.

Several comments expressed by participants show they are aware of the prevalence and treatment of BVDs, and emphasized these are not being discussed thoroughly enough at continuing education seminars and in optometry school. Surprisingly 82.69% of participants are not a members of the College of Vision Development (COVD), an organization which promotes the awareness and appropriate treatment of BVDs, see figure 3.

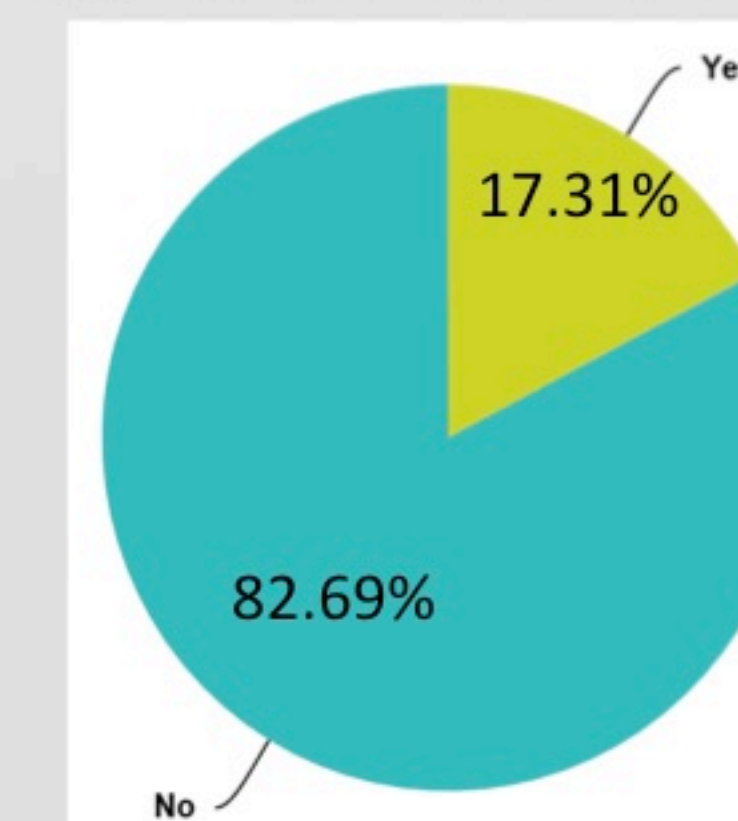


Figure 3. Participants who are COVD members

A more in depth investigation into some of the reasons optometrists are undertreating this demographic could improve patient care. As the profession for an optometrist is growing to include more ocular health related care it is important the binocular vision disorders are not forgotten by the only providers who are educated and trained to assess, diagnose and treat these vision disorders.

References

- Maino DM. The binocular vision dysfunction pandemic. *Optom Vis Sci* 2001;41:6-13.