

Myopia as a Growing Global Concern: AOC Takes Action

Dr. Katherine M. De Mesa

Dean, MCU College of Optometry

Integrated Philippine Association of Optometrists

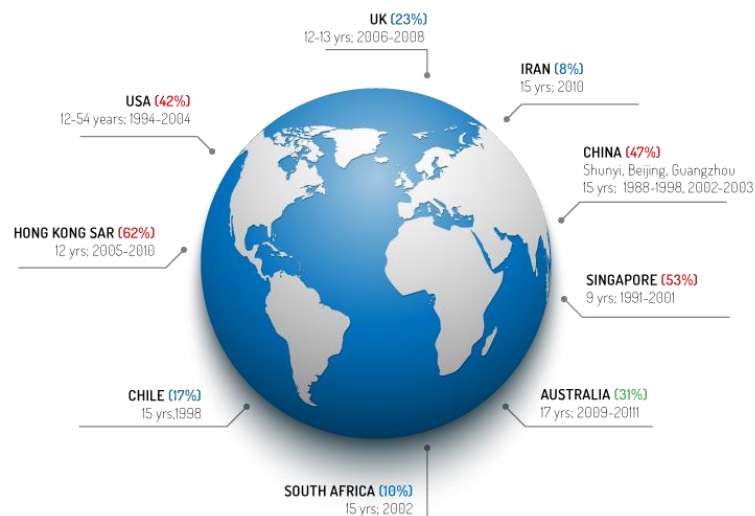
Member: Asia Optometric Congress

Myopia is a common refractive condition in which is being understood as simple as a refractive error where distant objects appear blurry while close objects can be seen clearly. It is anatomically defined as this condition occurs when the eye elongates excessively or the cornea becomes too curved, causing light to focus in front of the retina instead of directly on it.

In today's era, myopia is becoming a significant public health issue as according to the World Health Organization (WHO), it has been projected that by the year 2050, nearly half of the world's population will be affected by this condition, therefore, five billion people will become myopic and 20% or 1 billion people is projected to have high myopia.

Some people may wonder, what exactly is myopia, and why is it becoming so prevalent? Although, it may seem like a minor inconvenience, it is vital to know that untreated myopia can lead to severe eye health issues, including an increased risk of retinal detachment, glaucoma, and cataracts. Therefore, myopia is seen as becoming a leading cause of permanent blindness worldwide.

From the data of the World Health Organization, myopia has reached the epidemic proportions, particularly in Asia. Asian countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore are witnessing unprecedented rates of myopia among their populations, especially among school-aged children and young adults. According to recent studies, nearly 80-90% of high school students in some Asian countries are affected by myopia, a staggering statistic that underscores the urgency of addressing this issue.



Several factors contribute to the high prevalence of myopia in Asia. Intensive educational demands and prolonged periods of near work, such as reading and using digital devices, play a significant role. Additionally, the urban lifestyle, characterized by limited outdoor activities and exposure to natural light, further exacerbates the condition.

The impact of myopia extends beyond individual health, posing significant social and economic challenges. With a large portion of the population affected, the burden on healthcare systems and the potential loss of productivity are considerable concerns.

There are lots of efforts to combat this myopic epidemic particularly in Asia, particularly the Asia Optometric Congress (AOC). The AOC provides a unique platform for experts to share their knowledge and collaborate on addressing the pressing issues of vision health, particularly the rising prevalence of myopia in Asia.

In January 2023, the AOC Executive Council launched specialization trainings and certification courses that focus on Myopia Management for the Optometrists in Asia. AOC believes that Asian Optometrists should be competent, skilled and fully-equipped in addressing myopia, therefore, contributing to the solution for myopia epidemic. It started with the Myopia Management Course Level 1 that focused on the latest techniques and strategies for managing myopia in patients as conducted by clinical experts in the field of myopia management. This course has been offered as follows:

	DATE	Host	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	ASSESSMENT PASSERS
LEVEL 1 BATCH 1	January 30-31, 2023	Singapore	874	498
LEVEL 1 BATCH 2	July 4-5, 2023	Singapore	334	234
LEVEL 1 BATCH 3	February 4-5, 2024	Philippines	230	157
TOTAL LEVEL 1			1438	889

This was followed by the Evidence-Based Myopia Management Short course as offered in partnership with the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. This course aims to provide participants with the advanced knowledge and skills to diagnose and manage progressive myopia. To be competent in this course, the participants need to attend the 30 hours online discussion and need to successfully pass the assessment at the end of the course. This course has been conducted as follows:

	Date	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	ASSESSMENT PASSERS
LEVEL 2 BATCH 1	March-May 2023	50	47
LEVEL 2 BATCH 2	August-October 2023	60	54
LEVEL 2 BATCH 3	October-December 2023	51	46
LEVEL 2 BATCH 4	February-April 2024	75	72
TOTAL LEVEL 2		236	219

The Certification in Myopia Management Specialization culminates with the attendance to the AOC Myopia Management Workshop which aims to provide with the advanced skills training to diagnose and manage progressive myopia. To be competent in this course, the participants need to attend the 2-day hands-on workshop and need to successfully pass the assessment at the end of the course. After which, the eligible participants will proceed to the case presentation and final interview with the panel of experts. These processes will lead to the Optometrists in Asia to receive the title Fellow in AOC Academy of Myopia Management or FAAMM.

AOC is true to its mission to participate in addressing the myopia epidemic to further expand in the coming years. Asia Optometric Congress will continue to provide not only the latest developments in Optometry but also contribute in shaping the future of eye and vision care in Asia.