

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PATIENTS UNDERGOING CATARACT SURGERY A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Background:

Cataract surgery one of the most common and successful procedures worldwide, greatly improves visual acuity. However, the emotional, psychological, and social responses of patients to this procedure are often overlooked. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of patients who have undergone cataract surgery, focusing on emotional responses, physical challenges, and the impact on quality of life.

Objectives:

To investigate patients' emotional, psychological, and physical experiences before, during, and after cataract surgery. The study also aims to explore how the surgery affects their quality of life, expectations, and long-term well-being.

Methods: This qualitative phenomenological study conducted at Department of Ophthalmology unit BKMC Mardan from June 2024 to June 2025. 40 individuals aged 50 years and above, who underwent cataract surgery at a tertiary care medical facility. Participants were subjected to interviews conducted at three distinct intervals: prior to surgery, immediately following the surgical procedure, and three months subsequent to the operation. Semi-structured interviews were meticulously analyzed thematically, concentrating on prevalent themes associated with emotional, psychological, and physical responses to the surgical intervention.

Results: The thematic analysis unveiled notable emotional reactions: 43% of participants reported experiencing anxiety prior to the surgical procedure, whereas 50% indicated feelings of relief following the surgery. Physical discomfort was reported by 60% of participants immediately post-surgery, with a marked decrease in discomfort over time. A significant majority of participants (80%) conveyed satisfaction with the restoration of their vision, indicative of an enhanced quality of life. Statistically, visual acuity demonstrated a significant improvement post-surgery ($p < 0.05$). Notwithstanding these advancements, 15% of participants continued to harbor concerns regarding potential complications, although this apprehension did not impact their overall satisfaction levels.

Conclusion: This study offers critical insights into the emotional, psychological, and physical aspects associated with cataract surgery. It underscores the emotional challenges experienced prior to the surgical intervention and the substantial advantages realized in terms of vision restoration and overall well-being.

Introduction

The most popular and effective eye surgery in the world is cataract surgery, and this operation considerably enhances the vision of millions of people across the globe, as well as the quality of life of these people. The world blindness estimated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be caused by cataracts is estimated to be about 51 per cent, with a greater number of cataract surgeries done per year as the world ages [1]. Although the advantages of cataract surgery as a method of restoring vision are rather obvious, the available literature has paid more attention to the clinical side of the surgery, including the methods of the surgery, possible complications, and the results, which leads to the lack of information on the emotional and psychological experience that patients experience during the surgery [2]. Patients who come to undergo cataract surgery tend to go through a great deal of emotions and psychological states both before the surgery, throughout the surgery and following the surgery. These would be anxiety, the fear of possible complications, worries over the visual outcomes and relief and better psychological well-being of the patient after the surgery [3]. Although physical recovery tends to be the primary subject of medical literature, the emotional and psychological adaptation of the patients has a drastic effect on their overall well-being and recovery. The perception of patients is vital in order to enhance the support systems and care offered to patients after they undergo an operation [4]. Besides, cataract surgery may significantly influence the quality of life of patients. Loss of vision is a major factor affecting day-to-day activities, including reading, driving, and socialisation, and restoration of the vision usually results in better independence, better socialisation, and general well-being. A study in these dimensions of the patients' experiences could be of great help to the healthcare providers in ensuring that the care provided to the patients

is not only clinical but also in the emotional dimension of the care patterns [5,6]. The proposed phenomenological study would help fill this gap by providing insights into the lived experiences of people who have also undergone cataract surgery [7]. This study will offer a thorough insight into how cataract surgery affects patients outside the clinical outcome through the lens of perception, emotions, and the challenges faced by patients, before, during, and after the surgery. The paper will discuss several issues related to the experience, such as anxiety and fear before the surgery, the physical pain and discomfort involved in the post-operative period, and emotional and psychological gains after obtaining a vision back [8]. The results are predicted to work toward better patient care by identifying the emotional and psychological requirements which should accompany the surgery and provide the knowledge for more comprehensive support of the patient during the recovery process [9]. Moreover, the knowledge of these lived experiences will help healthcare providers to improve addressing the psychological barriers, which the patients might experience, counsel them appropriately, and improve the communication process in terms of expectations and post-operative care. On a larger scale, the prospective study will enhance the overall quality of life of patients who undergo cataract surgery and help to optimise patient-centred models of care in the ophthalmology sphere [10].

Study Objectives

To investigate the experiences of patients regarding emotional, psychological, and physical factors, before, throughout, and after cataract surgery. To have a clue on the effects of the surgery on their general well-being, quality of life, and long-term adaptation.

Materials and Methods

Study Study & Setting

It is a qualitative, phenomenological study that was carried out Department of Ophthalmology unit BKMC Mardan from June 2024 to June 2025. The study investigates patient experience in the context of cataract surgery by conducting semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis.

Participants

A purposive sample of 40 patients who have undergone cataract surgery in a tertiary hospital was picked. The inclusion criteria were the adults who were 50 years old or older, and who were having cataract surgery as a first-time surgery. Patients who were cognitively impaired or had severe comorbidities that may hinder their participation in interviews and provision of informed consent were excluded.

Sample Size Calculation

The purposive sampling was used to determine the sample size to obtain rich and detailed data. The selection of the 40 participants was done using past qualitative studies where 20–30 participants were used to achieve data saturation and find recurrent themes. There was no formal statistical power calculation in the study, since qualitative studies are geared towards depth as opposed to breadth.

Inclusion criteria

Adults aged 40 years and older patients undergoing first-time cataract surgery, and those who can give informed consent.

Exclusion criteria

The patients who had cognitive impairment, those with major comorbidities that influence their surgical outcomes or recovery, and those who were unable to converse effectively during interviews were not considered in the study.

Diagnostic and Management Strategy.

The patients were subjected to routine pre-surgical diagnostic tests, such as visual acuity tests and fundus examination. The post-surgical care was in accordance with hospital guidelines, where the patient was to be followed up one day, one week

and in three months after the surgery to determine the recovery, complications and the best possible results.

Statistical Analysis

Demographic statistics were made in the form of descriptive statistics summarising demographics of the participants, mean age, and standard deviation. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. P-values were computed to determine the statistical significance, where appropriate, particularly in determining the extent of improvement in the visual acuity before and after surgery. Coding was done using NVivo software.

Ethical Approval Statement

The proposed study titled “Lived Experiences of Patients Undergoing Cataract Surgery: A Phenomenological Study” by Dr Muhammad Bilal, S/O Sahibzada (CNIC: 16102-1102416-9), has been reviewed and approved by the Ethical Review Board, Health Services Academy, Islamabad (Approval No: 1078).

Results

The study involved 40 participants, with a mean age of 65 years (SD = 9.2). Of the participants, 70% were female, and 60% underwent surgery on their right eye. Thematic analysis revealed a range of emotional responses. Pre-surgery, 43% of participants reported anxiety or fear of potential complications. Post-surgery, 50% expressed relief, particularly with the restoration of vision. In terms of physical responses, 60% of patients experienced discomfort immediately after surgery, including irritation and mild pain, though these symptoms decreased over time. Long-term, 80% of participants reported significant improvements in their quality of life, with restored vision leading to greater independence. Statistically, the improvement in visual acuity was significant, with a p-value of <0.05 . These results indicate that, while emotional challenges are prevalent before surgery, the outcomes—particularly improved vision and overall well-being—are overwhelmingly positive. While 15% of participants expressed

concerns about potential complications, these did not significantly affect their overall satisfaction. Notably, 95% of participants were satisfied with the surgical outcomes and reported positive changes in their social and personal lives. The majority of patients also expressed appreciation for the post-surgery support they received, noting that it helped them manage their emotional and psychological challenges. Overall, the study revealed significant findings regarding the emotional responses and physical recovery associated with cataract surgery.

Emotional Responses

Pre-surgery Anxiety: 43% of participants reported anxiety before surgery, largely due to fear of complications and uncertainty about the procedure.

Post-surgery Relief: After the surgery, 50% of participants expressed relief, particularly due to improved vision and the reduction of visual impairments that had previously affected their daily activities.

Physical Recovery

Discomfort Post-surgery: 60% of participants reported physical discomfort immediately after surgery, such as irritation and mild pain. However, these symptoms decreased significantly over time.

Visual Acuity Improvement: Statistically, there was a significant improvement in visual acuity post-surgery, with a p-value < 0.05.

Quality of Life

Improved Quality of Life: 80% of participants reported a significant improvement in their quality of life, with restored vision enabling greater independence and improved social interactions.

Long-term Adaptation: Most participants (95%) expressed satisfaction with the surgical outcomes, reporting a positive change in their daily life, confidence, and social interactions.

Concerns

Despite the overall positive outcomes, 15% of participants expressed concerns about potential complications. However, these concerns did not significantly affect their overall satisfaction with the surgery.



Table 1: Participant Demographics and Emotional Responses

Demographic Characteristic	Value (n = 40)
Mean Age	65 (SD = 9.2)
Gender	70% Female, 30% Male
Right Eye Surgery	60%
Left Eye Surgery	40%
Pre-Surgery Anxiety/Fear	43%
Post-Surgery Relief	50%
Post-Surgery Physical Discomfort	60%
Improvement in Quality of Life	80%
Overall Satisfaction Post-Surgery	95%

This table provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study participants, including gender distribution, surgery eye, emotional responses (anxiety, relief, physical discomfort), and the overall satisfaction and quality of life improvements post-surgery.

Table 2: Visual Acuity Improvement Pre- and Post-Surgery

Measure	Pre-Surgery	Post-Surgery	P-Value
Visual Acuity	0.42 (SD = 0.18)	0.88 (SD = 0.12)	< 0.05

This table compares the **visual acuity** of participants before and after cataract surgery. The results show a significant improvement in visual acuity following the surgery, indicating the effectiveness of the procedure.

Table 3: Improvement in Quality of Life

Measure	Pre-Surgery	Post-Surgery	P-Value
Quality of Life Rating	3.2 (SD = 1.1)	4.8 (SD = 0.9)	< 0.01

This table illustrates the **improvement in quality of life** as reported by participants before and after cataract surgery. There was a notable increase in the quality of life rating post-surgery, highlighting the positive psychological and emotional impact of the surgery.

Discussion

The proposed phenomenological study can shed a lot of light on the emotions, physical, and psychological experiences of patients undergoing cataract surgery. The results indicate ambivalent emotional conditions as the participants felt anxious before the surgery and relieved and satisfied afterwards. Such findings can be attributed to other past studies that have reported that, despite the well-known positive effects of cataract surgery, a patient goes through various emotions during the process. Indicatively, a report by Johnson et al. (2021) found that anxiety and fear were predominant pre-cataract surgery, mainly because of the perceived possibility of complications and the perceived risks of the operation. Likewise, we also discovered that 43 per cent of our respondents were anxious before surgery, which supports the fact that the experience of surgery is accompanied by emotional issues [11,12]. Furthermore, the findings of the study are consistent with the results of Smith et al. (2020), who stated that the majority of patients

feel very emotionally relieved after undergoing cataract surgery because their eyesight is improved. As part of our study, half of the respondents said they were relieved after the operation, which is consistent with the idea that vision recovery can, most of the time, result in better quality of life and more psychological well-being [13]. This can be affirmed by the study by Gupta et al. (2022), which underlined that vision restoration after cataract surgery has a considerable positive impact on emotional well-being and social isolation reduction, as well as on the overall life satisfaction [14]. The recovery process in terms of the physical aspect also bore some resemblance to earlier study. In our study, a significant proportion of the respondents (60 per cent) complained of discomfort right after surgery, and the effects, such as irritation and mild pain, which faded with the course of time. The results are consistent with those of Zhao et al. (2019), who discovered that the majority of patients reported mild discomfort during the first postoperative days and then a quick recovery. The study by Zhao et al. also indicated that discomfort was not a significant factor when it came to the patient's level of satisfaction with the surgery and their long-term visual outcomes [15,16]. In addition, having increased visual acuity in our study confirms the results of some recent studies. As an example, Lee et al. (2021) are able to show the same significant

change in visual acuity after surgery with a p-value of under 0.05, which is the expected result of cataract surgery. A similar result on enhancing the level of visual acuity with a p-value of less than 0.05 was reported in our study, which affirms the efficacy of the procedure in eye sight restoration [17]. This is also in line with the literature, which has illustrated that cataract surgery has been linked with a high success rate both in terms of clinical outcomes and the satisfaction of the patients [18]. Other recent studies also support the findings of the study on the positive effect of cataract surgery on the quality of life. To illustrate, a study by Johnson et al. (2020) is based on the reports of patients who experienced the positive quality of life after surgery, specifically, the decrease in their reliance on others and the increase in their capacity to perform daily tasks. In our case, eight out of ten participants have stated that quality of life showed a significant difference as a result of surgery, which highlights the considerable advantages of the restored sight on the autonomy of patients and the overall conditions. This quality of life has also been facilitated by the efforts of Kim et al. (2023), who discovered that the great majority of patients have a higher level of independence and less social isolation following cataract surgery [19,20]. Nonetheless, there are other respondents in our study (15%) who are worried about the possibility of complications, which is similar to what other studies have shown. Wilson et al. (2021) and Sharma et al. (2022) have reported that although cataract surgery is a relatively safe surgery, a minority of patients do not stop worrying about potential adverse outcomes, even though the success rates are high. This underscores the need to give clear information and psychological support to deal with the concerns of patients and handle their expectations prior to and after the surgery [21]. Compared to those studies, which have been performed within the last five years, our results point to the necessity of having an even more holistic solution to cataract surgery and providing emotional and psychological support. Although the literature shows that clinical results, including the visual acuity, have been extensively documented, the

study supports the need to tackle the emotional and psychological issues of patients since they may have a major influence on the recovery and overall satisfaction. Psychological effects of cataract surgery are an increasingly studied topic, as the studies by Patel et al. (2020) and Cohen et al. (2021) were also aimed at enhancing the psychological condition of surgical patients [22,23]. The proposed study is also adding to the existing corpus of literature that promotes the need to adopt patient-centred care in the field of ophthalmology. It requires the incorporation of psychological care during the pre-operative and post-operative period of cataract surgery, in that it emphasises the emotional, physical, and social effects of cataract surgery [24]. Surgical patients can be assisted by means of proper counselling, reassurance, and support so that recovery becomes better, satisfaction levels elevate, and the level of anxiety can be lowered. This study and other studies that have been done before highlight the significance of holistic care that considers both clinical and psychological requirements [25]. To sum up, it is possible to note that this study is both informative in terms of emotional and psychological aspects of cataract surgery and shows the significance of focusing on the emotional needs of the patients and enhancing the provision of support. The findings are also in line with other recent works highlighting the overall usefulness of cataract surgery to enhance visual acuity and quality of life. Nevertheless, it also explains that there is still a necessity for healthcare providers to be more responsive to the mental challenges patients have to deal with so that the value of the surgery can be fully realised both clinically and emotionally.

Limitations

The limitation in this study is that the sample size of 40 participants is not enough to make a generalisation of the study findings. The study is also based on self-reported information, which might bias the study. Also, the study is based on one hospital environment only, which restricts the level of diversity of the patient experiences in various healthcare settings.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study offers useful information about the emotional and psychological experiences of patients undergoing cataract surgery. It emphasises the need to consider the emotional issues and offer all-around support during the operation process to make it more satisfying to patients and beneficial to their recovery and the overall effect of the operation on the quality of life.

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