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**The impact of visual impairment on quality of life among
older persons in rural Northeast Thailand**

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in
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ABSTRACT

Worldwide, those who are visually impaired are found to be older, in poorer health and less well-off economically than those who are not. The majority live in developing countries with the highest proportion found in Southeast Asia. Visual impairment has been found to have an overwhelmingly negative impact on quality of life (QOL) among those so affected. Thus, the rate of visual impairment among older Thais living in rural areas of Northeast Thailand, the poorest and most rural region in the country, is expected to be high and QOL to be low.

This study examined the rate of visual impairment and its impact on QOL among a representative sample of older persons living in rural areas of Northeast Thailand along with other variables thought to impact QOL. As expected, a high rate of visual impairment was found in this area. Those who were visually impaired were found to be significantly older, worse off economically and to have lower overall perception of health than those who were not. As also expected, they were found to be worse-off on all of the measures of QOL assessed. However, when age, overall perception of health and economic status were controlled for, no differences on QOL were found between those who were visually impaired and those who were not. Visual impairment, therefore, was not found to have the overwhelmingly negative impact on QOL expected. This finding was unique to this study but not altogether surprising as the lifestyle of these participants was very different than that of those previously studied. Older Thais in rural areas primarily live in extended families with their care provided for by their children as a matter of respect. The assessment of other variables thought to impact QOL revealed that overall perception of health, physical health, psychological well-being, environment and intimacy were found to

make a unique contribution to variance in QOL among the sample as a whole. Recommendations to improve the environment, including economic conditions, and physical health for all were made as a means to improve QOL for those who were visually impaired as well.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADL	Activities of Daily Living
AMD	Age-related Macular Degeneration
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ANCOVA	Analysis of Covariance
BMI	Body Mass Index
EUREYE	The European Eye Study
GDP	Gross domestic product
HCIS	Health Centre Information System
IADL	Instrumental Activities of Daily Living
ICF	The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
MUHEC	The Human Ethics Committee of Massey University Human Ethics Committee
NEI-VFQ-25	National Eye Institute Visual Functioning Questionnaire - 25
QOL	Quality of Life
SD	Standard Deviation
SEE	The Salisbury Eye Evaluation Study
SPSS	The Advanced Statistics Package for the Social Sciences
UNFPA	The United Nations Population Fund
VI	Visual Impairment
WHO	The World Health Organization
WHOQOL-BREF	The World Health Organization Quality of Life-BREF
WHOQOL-OLD	The World Health Organization Quality of Life-OLD