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## UGC to review PhD theses over last 10 years

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NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission has launched a review of PhD theses in Indian universities – Central, State and private – over the last ten years, amid concerns that doctoral degrees are being granted to candidates whose theses lack originality and quality.

“The scope of study will involve the PhD theses in different disciplines in various Central universities, State universities, State private universities and deemed-to-be universities in the last 10 years,” said a UGC notification, calling for proposals to conduct the study, to be completed over the next six months. While the study is to cover the whole country, findings may

be given at the national as well as State-level.

The evaluation of the theses would indicate the “quality aspects proposed by the interested parties,” said the notification.

“I hope they use global criteria, not invent their own parameters which are India-specific. R&D [or research and development] is global. We should be able to compete with the best,” said acclaimed geneticist Deepak Pental, a former Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University.

“Higher education in India has expanded a lot over the last decade. But with growth in quantity, keeping a tab on quality becomes a major concern,” said UGC member Sushma Yadav, explaining the rationale of the study.



# Kids with high myopia up by 6% in 10 yrs: Study

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**Bengaluru:** Cases of high myopia — extreme nearsightedness leading to vision-threatening complications — are rising among Bengaluru children, a study by a city hospital has found.

While 16% of 1,227 children with nearsightedness who were availing follow-up treatment at the hospital for 3-4 years were found to be high myopes in 2008, the incidence touched 22% in 2018.

The study was conducted by Apollo Hospitals, Bengaluru, based on their paediatric patient data from 2008 to 2018.

The study also revealed that lifestyle changes are leading to early myopia among city children. In 2008, kids aged 7-8 needed spectacles, but in the past five years, younger children (4-5 age group) have been complaining of blurred vision, say doctors. The study also showed that increased screen time and declining out-

## 15-20 FRESH CASES SEEN EVERYDAY

According to Dr Samprathi, the number of fresh cases has climbed to 15-20 a day at present from 7-10 five years ago. "Children as young as two and a half years are battling myopia without any genetic predisposition. That means lifestyle changes have led to the condition, which could have been avoided. Limited exposure to outdoor activities has increased screentime for



children," he explained.

Dr Shetty mentions in her study that every child should be outdoors for at least 30-45 minutes a day during school time. "We are in talks with policymakers and schools to introduce a structured health education programme to modify the lifestyle of schoolchildren, so that healthy kids can turn into healthy adults. We are also working with parents to encourage outdoor activities," she added.

door activities were impacting children's eyesight.

Myopia can cause blindness when an affected child reaches adulthood. It's the result of an eye that is longer than normal, which makes distant objects appear blurred. Although the exact cause of myopia is not known, major factors

that affect the condition are genetic and environmental.

Dr Shalini Shetty, senior consultant and HoD, department of ophthalmology, Apollo Hospitals, who conducted the study, said myopia is spreading at an alarming rate. "I was shocked when the parent of a four-year-old who was diagno-

sed with myopia said his child spent seven hours a day staring at the laptop. Recently, I saw a two-year-old glued to a digital device for five hours continuously. As a parent and doctor, I worry about the harmful effects of digital exposure. Parents and school authorities should look into this serious-

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Myopic children in the age group of 6-10 had a screentime of 1-2 hours before 2012. The figure exceeded 2 hours after 2012
- Kids in age group of 10-16 were spending 2-3 hours on near-work activities (eye interaction with a nearby object — for example, reading) till 2012, but the time has increased to 3-4 hours in the past 5 years, which needs to be red-flagged

ly," added Dr Shetty. She recalled her conversation with a two-year-old child who was left with a nanny at home for 7-8 hours a day as both parents were working. "The child gets hooked to digital screens till the parents return home, and refuses to eat without watching videos, which is not a healthy trend," rued Dr Shetty.

Other ophthalmologists have also raised concerns. Dr Arun Samprathi, a city-based paediatric ophthalmologist, agrees with the study and says there's been an increase in the rate of progression.

"Without any genetic disposition, myopia rate is drastically increasing among the affected children. The average rate of progression was 0.5 points every year, which has now increased to 1-1.5. At this rate, a person with -2 dioptre would end up with -3 dioptre within a year, which is scary," said Dr Samprathi. Dioptre is the unit of measurement of a lens' optical power.