Strabismus and employment: the opinion of headhunters

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Abstract. Purpose: The aim of this study was to determine the influence of strabismus on an individual's ability to find employment based on the opinion of Swiss headhunters. Methods: Forty Swiss headhunters retrieved from a Swiss online telephone directory were interviewed using a validated questionnaire in order to determine if strabismus would have an impact on a person's ability to find employment. Photographs of a strabismic man and woman as well as of other computer-generated facial anomalies could be downloaded from the Internet during the interview. Results: 72.5% of headhunters judged that strabismic individuals would have more difficulties in finding a job than orthotropic persons. These difficulties were judged to be stronger in women than in men (P = 0.006), and in exotropic compared to esotropic persons (P = 0.01). Asked about seven facial anomalies, exotropia was found to have the third and esotropia the fourth (women) or fifth (men) most strongly negative impact on finding employment, after having strong acne and a visible missing tooth. Headhunters judged that persons with strabismus are significantly perceived as less attractive and less intelligent by potential employers. Conclusion: Visible strabismus negatively influences individuals' ability to find a job and therefore has an impact on their economic status. Successful strabismus surgery realigns the visual axes, producing a normal facial appearance and therefore eliminating the negative impact of strabismus on employability.