INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of myopia is increasing dramatically in certain Asian regions and has been most well characterized in individuals of Chinese descent.1–3 The gene/environment interactions which cause myopia, however, remain unclear. Urban living has emerged as a major environmental factor associated with the development of myopia. This has been demonstrated in surveys from several countries that have compared refractive error between children in urban and rural areas.4–7 A tendency for less academically rigorous classes and lower educational pressures in rural areas, leading to reduced near work, possibly explains the lower prevalence of myopia.8 However, the data regarding the associations between near work and outdoor activities and the development of myopia have not always been consistent.4,10,14

Estimates of the prevalence of myopia in different ethnic groups are available from a number of studies. The prevalence in Caucasian populations has been estimated in the United States15 and Australia.16,17 In the United States, the overall prevalence of myopia in 12- to 17-year-olds has increased from 24.5% in 1971–1972 to 34.8% in 1999–2004.15 In Australia, it has been reported to be as low as 1.4% in 6-year-olds,16 increasing to 5.1% in 12-year-olds.17 In the 12-year-old children of East Asian descent however, the prevalence of myopia was 41.6%.17 In the Nepalese and Indian population, the prevalence of refractive error is also relatively low. The prevalence of myopia in Nepal was estimated at...