

# For and against the iris diagnostics: the ophthalmologist's opinion

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction**—The iridologists use iris diagrams, dividing the iris of the eye into 12 hours. Bulgaria also has a tradition of studying the iris, for example Peter Dimkov and his work "Ocular Diagnosis. A Practical Guide". However, according to most reputable international publications, "Iridology is not supported by any published studies and is considered a pseudoscience to most physicians."

**Aim**- To study the awareness of the population and the opinion of medical specialists on the issue of iris diagnostics in Bulgaria.

**Materials and Methods** – it's a survey design, conducted at Eye Clinic "St. Nikolay", over a period of 3 months: May - July 2023.

**Results**- A total of 300 participants were surveyed, including 123 medical professionals. The female respondents are more - 81.5%, about 90% are active population aged 20-60 years. Most respondents- 68.1% don't know where such examinations are performed. The majority don't even know by who they are done: respectively 41.6% think they are done by eye doctors, and 24.2% they have no opinion. Almost 77.9% of respondents don't know any specialists in iris diagnostics, but 57.2% would do such a consultation and would even pay not small amount of money for it – 50BGN. Nearly 42.3% of the respondents would trust the method. Until the time of the survey only 13% have already had such a consultation.

**Conclusion** - The eye is a window to our health. Although iridology has its appeal, evidence-based medicine doesn't support the use of iridology in practice. The iris diagnostics is simply a way of possibly identifying a possible health problem.

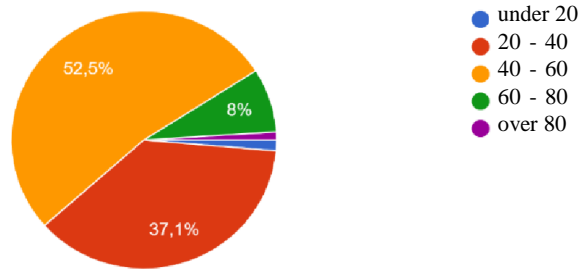
**Key words** -eye disease, iridology, iris map, ophthalmologist

## Introduction

The foundations of iris diagnostics were laid by Philippi Meyers in 1670. The Viennese ophthalmologist Georg Joseph Beer (1) wasn't familiar with his views on iris analysis, but in 1813 he wrote in his publication, "Everything that affects the organism of the individual cannot be without an effect on the eye, and vice versa." The discipline was further developed by Ignaz von Peczely in 1881 and by Nils Liliequist in 1890. The story of Peczely, who found an owl with a broken leg and noticed a prominent black stripe in the iris of one of the owl's eyes, has gained wide popularity (2). After the bird healed, he noticed that the black line had disappeared, replaced by sparse white lines. Iridology is considered an alternative medicine in which the patterns, colors, and other characteristics of the iris are examined to gather information about the patient's general health condition. The iridologists use iris charts, dividing the iris of the eye into 12 hours and seven circles that start at the pupil and go outwards. The iris is divided into 60 different zones, each representing a different part of the body. This is called a "map" or an iris diagram of the right and the left eye. (Fig. 1).



11 . How old are you ?  
299 answers

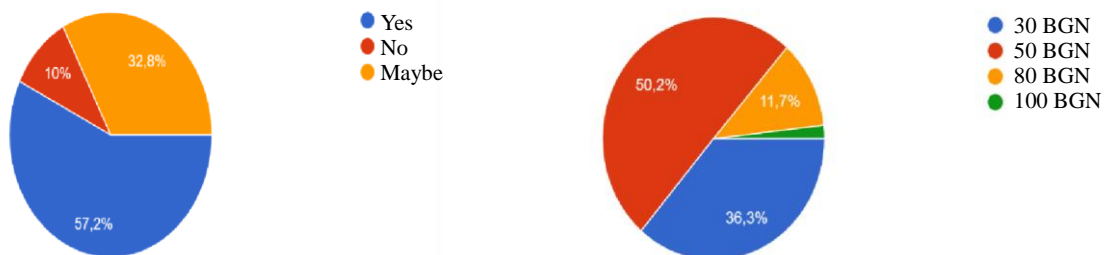


**Fig. 2. Answers to a question 11- the age distribution**

Out of all participants 17.4% are with secondary education, respectively with higher education are 244 out of 299 respondents. A very high percentage of respondents - 73.3% are familiar with their diagnosis, most of them are health professionals. The topic is interesting for most of the respondents in 82.2%, but 11.4% (34 participants) think that it isn't a serious medical activity. Most of them— 20, are medically trained various specialists. Most respondents 68.1% don't know where such examinations are performed. The majority don't even know who do such consultation: respectively, 41.6% think - by eye doctors, 34.2% think just the opposite, and the remaining 24.2% have no an opinion.

3. Would you do such a consultation ?  
299 answers

4. How much would you pay for such a consultation ?  
281 answers

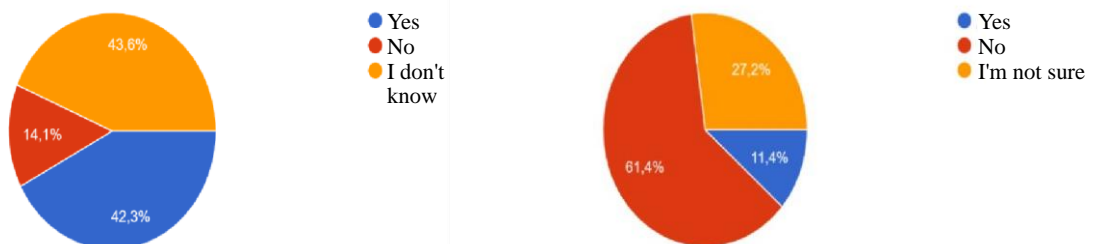


**Fig. 3. Answers to a question 3 and a question 4**

Almost 77.9% of the respondents don't know specialists in iris diagnostics, but 57.2% would do such a consultation. Half of the respondents would even pay not a small amount of money for it - 50 BGN. These are basic questions of the survey structure given in Fig.3.

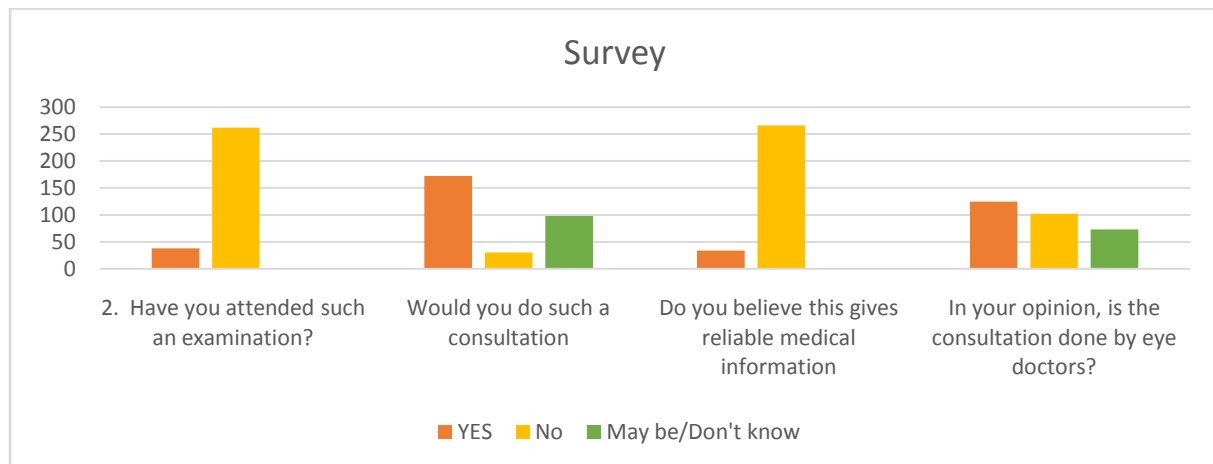
5. Do you believe this provides reliable medical information ?  
298 answers

9. Do you consider this a frivolous and non-medical activity ?  
298 answers



**Fig. 4. Answers to a question 5 and a question 9**

The Question N:5 about the reliability of iris diagnostics, is also a basic question. The question N:9 is a control question, checking whether the attitude on the subject matches. Nearly 42.3% of the respondents would trust the method. Even higher percentage of 61.4% not considering it as a non-medical activity (Figure 4). However, only 13% had attended such an examination up to the time of the survey. A summary analysis is given in Fig. 5.



**Fig.5. A summary analysis**

## Discussion

In our survey we found that: there is an unclear knowledge of the subject, a lack of clarity about who and where the consultation is provided by, such reviews aren't often done, but there is a strong interest and willingness to pay for this service.

Bernard Jensen (8) disagrees about the anatomy and physiology of the eye, that: "nature has provided us with a miniature television screen, showing the most distant parts of the body by nerve reflex responses". By the structure and function of the iris, of course, much medical data can be interpreted. It remains constant throughout life, unless it becomes altered by a trauma or a surgery. This feature is used in the modern world, like fingerprints, for identification, as a substitute for personal data. In the past, good clinicians and diagnosticians made unmistakable diagnoses after examining the external scars of the body and the organs. For example, in paediatrics and infectious diseases, a very common method is the mandatory examination of the tongue, which leads us unmistakably to the identification of conditions and diagnoses.

However, this doesn't elevate the study of the tongue, for example, to the science of 'glossology', as the role given to the study of the iris.

Anatomically, by the state of all the structures of the eye, not only the iris, we guess about the presence of many diseases of the body as a whole. The examples are many, but the most prominent of them are:

1. Arcus senilis: a gray-white ring around the edge of the cornea indicating excessive cholesterol and arteriosclerosis.

2. Yellowing of the sclera is a sign of diseases of the gallbladder and bile ducts.

3. In thyroid diseases, the eyes have a whole range of symptoms: lagophthalmos, infrequent blinking (*Stellwag's symptom*), upper eyelid delay when looking down (*Graefe's symptom*), convergence insufficiency (*Mobius' symptom*), eyelid hyperpigmentation (*Elinek's symptom*), diplopia, etc.

4. Iris nevi are pigment accumulations and are usually harmless. The melanoma of the eye is extremely rare but can develop in 2% of people with an iris nevus.

5. Iris nodules are associated with various types of uveitis. They can develop in people with metastatic infection, sarcoidosis, Vogt-Koyanagi-Harada syndrome, multiple sclerosis, rheumatological diseases, etc.

6. Rubeosis iridis is a condition in which new blood vessels develop on the iris, usually in diseases such as diabetes and retinal vessel occlusion.

7. The deposits on the cornea also indicate many diseases, e.g. Kaiser's Flasher ring of copper deposits. It occurs in Wilson's disease, which is characterized by impaired processing of copper by the liver. *Hudson's line* is characterized by iron deposition that is asymptomatic, corneal keratopathy (cornea verticillata) due to amiodarone deposition, Kruckenberg's spindle represents a vertical spindle-shaped area due to increased melanin pigmentation, etc.

8. Changes in the size and function of the pupils are also a serious neurological sign - e.g. the triad "ptosis-myosis-enophthalmos" - in Claude-Bernard-Horner syndrome. Absent pupillary reflexes, or pathological ones suggest the use of certain medications, anesthesia, tumors, trauma, etc.

The ocular manifestations and symptoms of a number of rare syndromes, diseases and abnormalities are described in detail in the monograph of assoc. prof. Koev (9), which provides a broad interdisciplinary approach to the diagnosis of rare diseases with an emphasis on the eye. Due to surgical interventions and trauma to the eye itself, the iris can be significantly damaged, compromising the possibility of any iris diagnostics at all. These are a few of the features of the eye, which as an external organ can "predict" some diseases and conditions of the human organism. That is why for a good ophthalmologist, can figuratively say is also a good "iridologist". Knowing well enough the eye diseases he can recognize many common pathologies of the organism.

However, there are many publications that reject the seriousness of iris diagnostics. In 2000, Dr. Edzard Ernst (7) published a thorough analysis of the publications about iris diagnostics so far. It was found that none of the "positive" studies had a proper implementation design. In 1985, in the Scandinavian ophthalmological journal *Acta Ophthalmologica*, Bergren (10) concluded that, "Good patient care is incompatible with fraudulent methods and iridology must be regarded as medical fraud." Many concurrent consultations between two or more iridology specialists have been made in which the diagnoses already established are not confirmed (11). In a study in 2005 (12) out of 68 patients with proven heterogeneous cancer, only 3 cases had the diagnosis confirmed by iris diagnostics. It can be concluded that just as false positive diagnoses can worry patients and cause harm, false negative diagnoses are very dangerous because significant complaints and diagnoses can be neglected or missed. If in previous decades, when medicine didn't have modern high-tech devices and examinations, iris diagnostics could be even theoretically admitted and used, today with the availability of artificial intelligence, relying on these findings is too frivolous, even dangerous. In countries, usually in the former Eastern bloc, where the organization and level of medical culture and prevention aren't high, such holistic methods of diagnosis and treatment have a wide field for development. However, in our country there isn't established system for training and qualification of such personnel, as, for example, in China, Russia and even the USA. (13). The available 'specialists' in an iridology are very few in number.

## Conclusion

After the literature review and analysis of the survey results, we can draw some conclusions: the women are always more likely to participate in surveys as well as alternative medical examinations and manipulations. The organization of medical activity in Bulgaria makes it possible to carry out this activity (iris diagnostics), although most patients haven't used it, don't know by whom and where it is practiced. They would make such a consultation, for which they would even pay more money.

The eye is a window to our health. The ophthalmologists, as the only ones enlightened in the mysteries of the eye, would benefit the most by combining knowledge and experience in

diagnosing some systemic diseases. Although the iridology has its appeal, an evidence-based medicine doesn't support the use of it in the practice. Keep in mind that the iris diagnostics is simply a way of possibly identifying a possible health problem.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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## Appendix 1

### SURVEY

**1 . Do you know what is an iris diagnostics?**

a/ YES b/ NO

**2. Have you attended such an examination?**

a/ YES b/ NO

**3. Would you do such a consultation?**

a/ YES b/ NO c/ May be

**4. What price would you pay for such a review?**

a/ BGN 30 b/ BGN 50 c/ BGN 80 d/ BGN 100.

**5. Do you believe this gives reliable medical information ?**

a/ YES b/ NO c/ I don't know

**6. Do you know where such examinations are performed?**

a/ YES b/ NO

**7. Do you know any specialists in the iris diagnostics?**

a/ YES b/ NO

**8. In your opinion, is the consultation done by eye doctors?**

a/ YES b/ NO

**9. Do you consider this a frivolous and non-medical activity?**

a/ YES b/ NO c/ I'm not sure

**10. You are?**

a/ a man b/ a woman

**11. How old are you?**

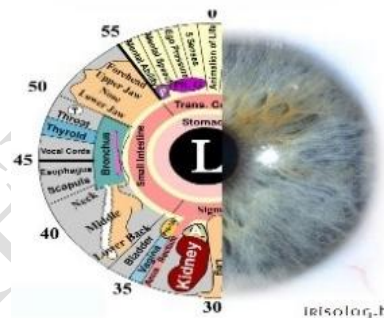
a/ under 20 years old b/ 20-40 c/ 40-60 d/ 60-80 e/ over 80 years old

**12. What is your education?**

a/ primary b/ secondary c/ higher

**13. Is the topic of the iris diagnostics interesting for you?**

a/ YES b/ NO



**14. Are you a medical specialist?**  
a/ YES b/ NO

UNDER PEER REVIEW