

## Women are disproportionately affected by TT and may be overlooked by surgical programs in Rural Tanzania

*Alex Msumanje<sup>1</sup>, Lali Chania<sup>1</sup>, Kerry Dobies<sup>1</sup>, Nancy Stroupe<sup>1</sup>, Saidi Mgata<sup>1</sup>,  
Ntuli Mwaigwisya<sup>1</sup>, William Ngella<sup>1</sup> and Oscar Kaitaba<sup>2</sup>*  
2019

### ABSTRACT

Trachoma is one of the oldest infectious diseases and the leading cause of preventable blindness in the world. Transmitted through fly to human and then human to human contact, repeated infections can eventually cause sight loss. This resulting condition is known as trachomatous trichiasis (TT). IMA World Health (IMA) via the SAFE program implements TT outreach surgery in rural communities to lessen the debilitating effects of TT by stopping the progression toward blindness.

In endemic communities, children are most affected by trachoma, and because women and girls are the primary caregivers of children, they are exposed to more repeated trachoma infections than boys or men. They also develop TT more often than men, accounting for 60% of cases.

Despite the highest disease burden among women, they are sometimes overlooked in surgery outreach interventions. For example, in the Masasi district council, where IMA implemented TT outreach surgery from 2018-2019, there were 2.3 times as many confirmed TT cases among women than men (584 women versus 251 men). Of those with confirmed TT, 51% of the women (296) had eyelid surgery, compared to 63% of the men (157) during the intervention period. As the surgical camp schedule for these types of interventions is tight, women might be overlooked due to needing to care for newborns or sick family members, among other reasons.

Noting this lower surgical uptake among women, IMA consulted community case finders, local leaders and government health employees in the area to convey relevant health messages about the disease to the entire community, including an emphasis on counselling women who previously refused the surgery. The outreach improvements helped to increase surgical uptake among women to 71% by May 2019. This case study informs trachoma intervention programs to have special consideration to women as they are the most affected members in the society and, are more likely to be overlooked by surgical programs.

<sup>1</sup> IMA World Health

<sup>2</sup> Neglected Tropical Diseases Control Program, Tanzania