

Are elderly women living in the dark? Factors determining visual impairment and eye care seeking among elderly women in the Indian Sundarbans

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Background

- Worldwide **670¹ million people are visually impaired**
- **64% of blind people are women²**
- This disparity is due to women's: longer life expectancy, limited access to resources, time, lack of mobility, and low perceived value of their own illness which make them most.

Objective

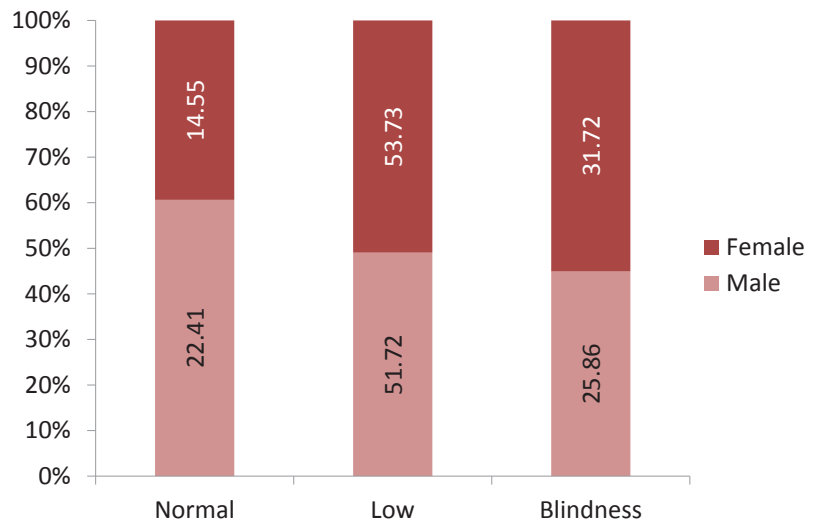
To explore how gender cross cuts with other social stratifiers to influence the prevalence of eye problems and health seeking for visual impairments among women and men 50 years and above in the Indian Sundarbans.



Methodology

- Mixed method study
- Eye screening conducted by optometrists; three levels of visual impairments were examined (normal vision, low vision and blindness)
- 442 individuals from 12 villages were interviewed; 24 in-depth interviews were conducted in total

Figure 1: Level of visual impairments by Sex (%)



Results

- Elderly females are less likely to seek eye care despite being more likely to develop eye problems following low perceived severity.
- Elderly educated males are less likely to suffer from eye problems.
- Elderly women with male partners or sons were found to have less decision-making power than single women or widows.

Policy Recommendations

- Given the multi-dimensional nature of barriers to access eye health care it is important to adopting a multi-sectoral approach to address the social determinants of eye health status among the elderly.

References

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2. Lewallen, S., Courtright, P. (2002). Gender and use of cataract surgical services in developing countries. *Bulletin of World Health Organization*. 80(4): 300-303.

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