

Reviewer's comment :

Original Research Article

The Epidemiology of Trachoma in the Lower Shire valley of Southern Malawi

Abstract

Background

Trachoma, a neglected infectious tropical disease has been historically known to be endemic in some parts of Malawi. The objectives of the study were to determine the prevalence of trachoma and associated risk factors in the Lower Shire valley of southern Malawi.

Methodology

A population based survey conducted in Nsanje district (population 238,041), and Mwanza district (population 86,314). Children aged 1-9 years and adults aged 15 and above were assessed for clinical signs of trachoma.

Results

The prevalence of trachoma follicular (TF) among children aged 1-9 years in Nsanje is 18.5% (CI 16.4-20.8), while the prevalence of TF in Mwanza is 7.8% (CI 6.6-9.2). The prevalence of Trachoma Trichiasis (TT) in adults aged 15 and above in Nsanje is 0.5% (CI 0.2-1.2) while in Mwanza it is 0.2% (CI 0.02-0.6).

Conclusion:

The prevalence rates of active trachoma infections is not uniform among districts in the Lower Shire Valley, with rates much higher than the WHO cutoff point (TF >10%) in Nsanje district, suggesting that trachoma is a disease of public health importance and full **SAFE** (Surgery, Antibiotics, Face Washing and Environmental) control strategy should be undertaken. For Mwanza district, it is recommended to focus on S, F and E components of the SAFE, at the same time identifying and treating focal areas with high TF prevalence.

Comment 1:

1. The idea is good if the data in the Lower Shire valley of Southern Malawi are none.
2. The parameter of Trachoma Follicular is clinical symptom ? It's more good if the parameter in molecular level because more specific!
3. In conclusion by suggesting you write "Safe", That is ever investigate by yours or other ?
4. So this information is informative but so simple. Its good when added another informations like gender, specific location, social-economic, and other.

Comment 2:

1. The title is not match with the conclution. Please make the title (if you agree) with stress in "SAFE" (Surgery, Antibiotic, Face Washing and Environmental).
2. Or if you don't want to like no.1, and the title like that, please don't talk about "Safe".

Author's Feedback:-

Thank you very much for your very useful comments and these have been addressed below.

Comment 1:

The reviewer has attached the original submitted version which was already revised (see revised abstract in the new manuscript). However responses are as follows:

1. The idea is good if the data in the Lower Shire valley of Southern Malawi are none.
Response: Thank you. This is study that has highlighted the trachoma situation in this area.

2. The parameter of Trachoma Follicular (TF) is clinical symptom ? It's more good if the parameter in molecular level because more specific!

Response: TF is indeed a clinical syndrome, however this is currently the official indicator recommended by World Health Organisation (WHO), the VISION2010, International Coalition for Trachoma Control (ICTC), International Trachoma initiative (ITI) and the Global Elimination of Blinding Trachoma by the year 2020 (GET2020) hence we are mandated to use this sign. The molecular parameter would be ideal, but currently the tools for this are not yet ready. We hope to use this in future for epidemiological studies.

3. In conclusion by suggesting you write "Safe", That is ever investigate by yours or other ?

Response: SAFE is a strategy that is recommended by WHO, and the survey has to demonstrate if the surveyed districts are eligible or not. The abstract has been rewritten for clarity.

4. So this information is informative but so simple. It is good when added informations like gender, specific location, social-economic, and other.

Response: Yes simple but very useful. International Trachoma Initiative need this information to decide whether to donate drugs the antibiotic or not. Table 1 and 3 (page 11-14) has information on gender, table 2 and 4 has information on socioeconomic and figure 1 (page 7) has information on location.

Comment 2:

1. The title is not match with the conclusion. Please make the title (if you agree) with stress in "SAFE" (Surgery, Antibiotic, Face Washing and Environmental).

Response: The title has been changed to include SAFE as suggested to match with the conclusion: see new title in the manuscript and below.

The Epidemiology of Trachoma in the Lower Shire valley of Southern Malawi and implications for the SAFE strategy