

Eye health system in Sierra Leone in the past decade

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Background

In recent years, several countries in sub-Saharan Africa have undertaken assessments of their health systems using various standardised tools^{1,2}.

These assessments, coupled with data on epidemiological and population trends, are vital for understanding how health systems adapt their infrastructure and workforce to build resilience to increasing incidence of emergencies due to climate, conflicts and pandemics.

We draw on data from repeated visual impairment surveys - rapid assessments of avoidable blindness (RAABs) - to examine changes in the epidemiology of eye diseases in Sierra Leone in the past decade.

Methods

RAAB is a standard quantitative methodology for obtaining reliable population-based data among people aged 50 years and older. The baseline RAAB was conducted in 2011 and repeated in December 2021.

We conducted a nationally representative survey at both time points.

Conclusion

Our findings reinforce the importance and need for the government of Sierra Leone and INGOs to invest in the generation and use of data to drive change to meet the needs of the rapidly changing demographic.

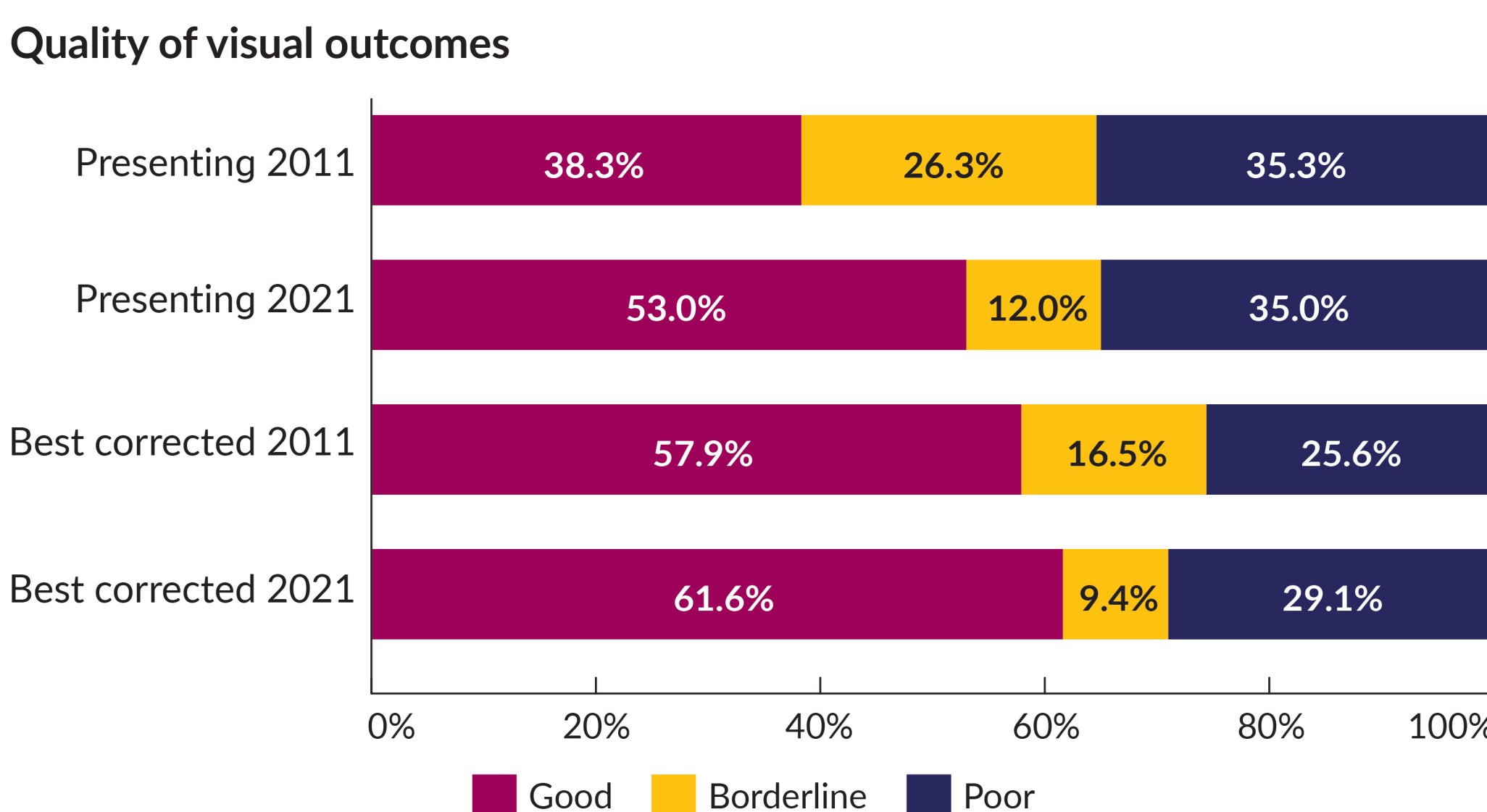
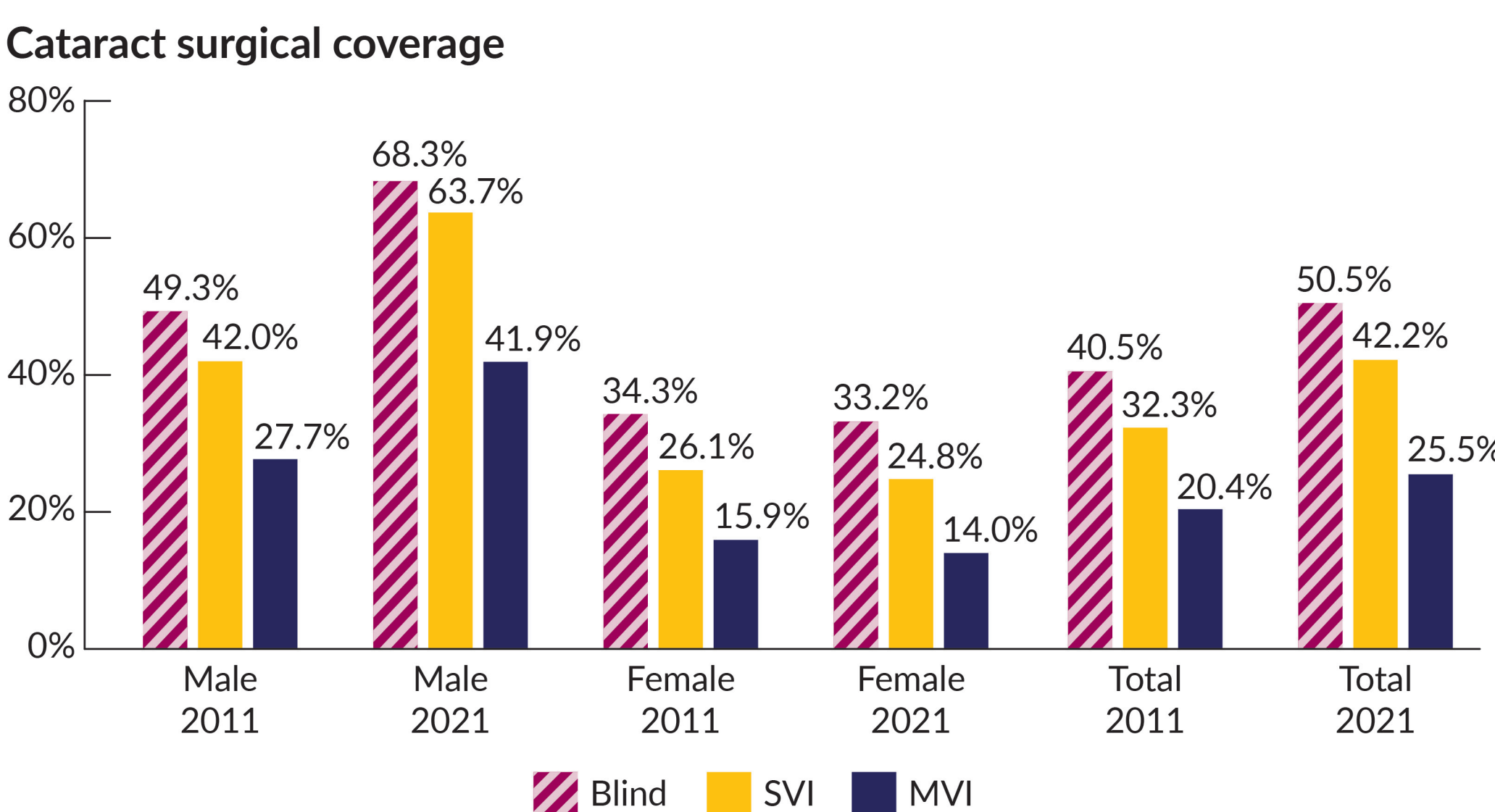
A repeat assessment of eye care infrastructure and service delivery is currently ongoing. This repeat assessment will help us to explain the epidemiological data and changes.

References

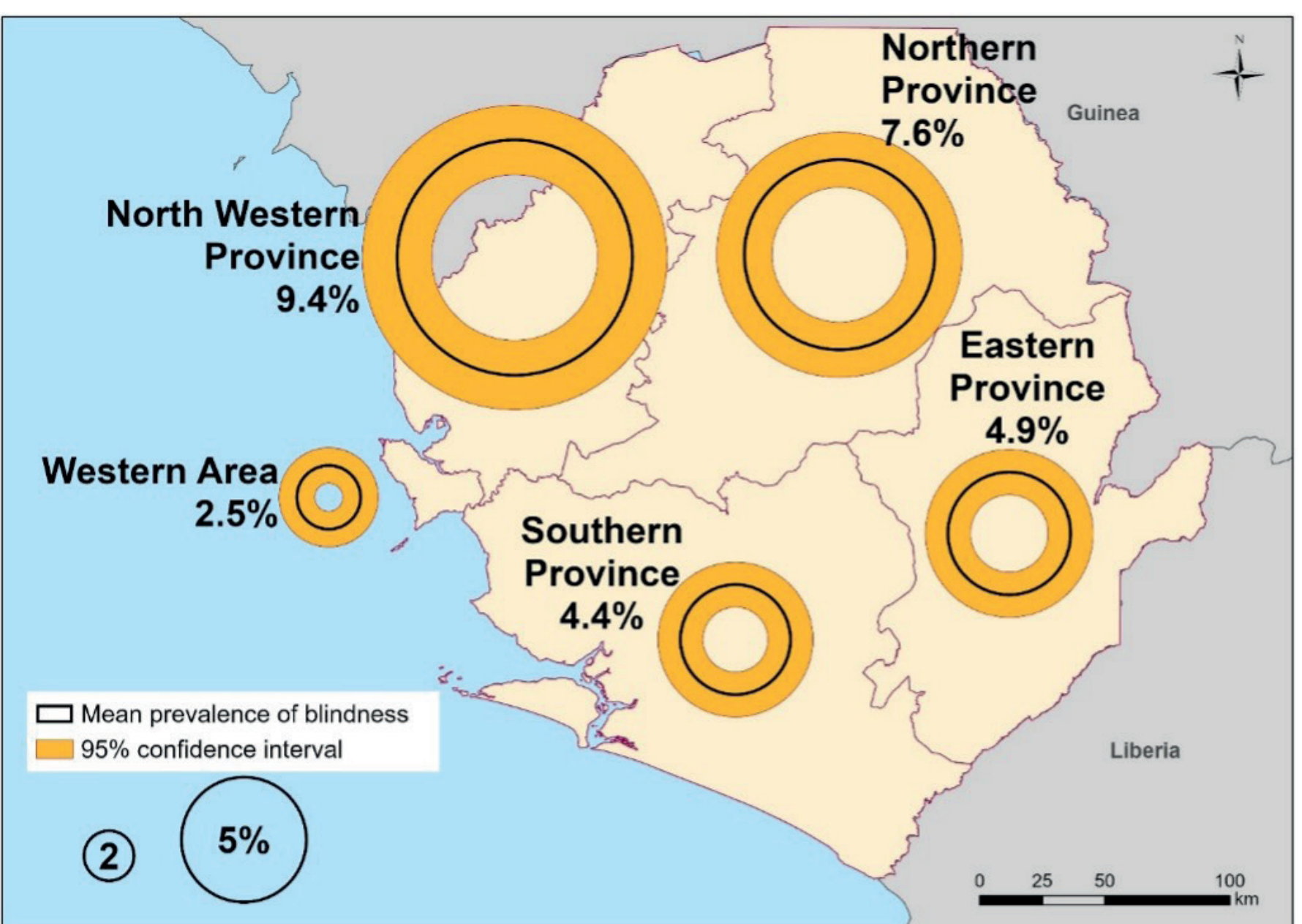
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2. McCormick I, et al. The Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness survey: Review of the methodology and protocol for the seventh version (RAAB7). Wellcome Open Research 9 (2024): 133.

Findings

The findings reveal some progress and improvements in the availability and delivery of eye care services - but many gaps in service provision, especially for women, continue to exist.

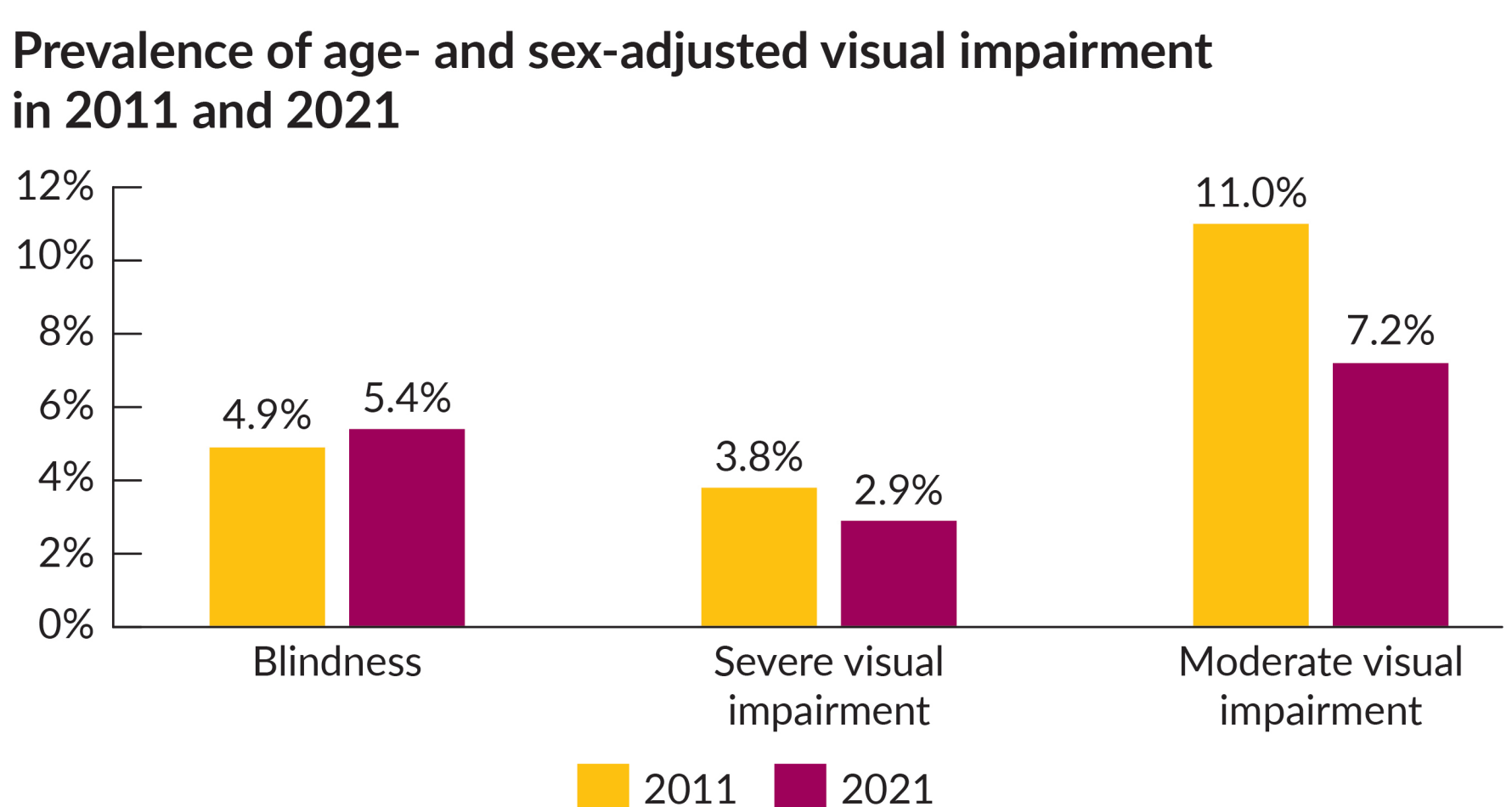


Blindness is spread unevenly throughout the country, with the North Western and Northern Provinces being the worst affected



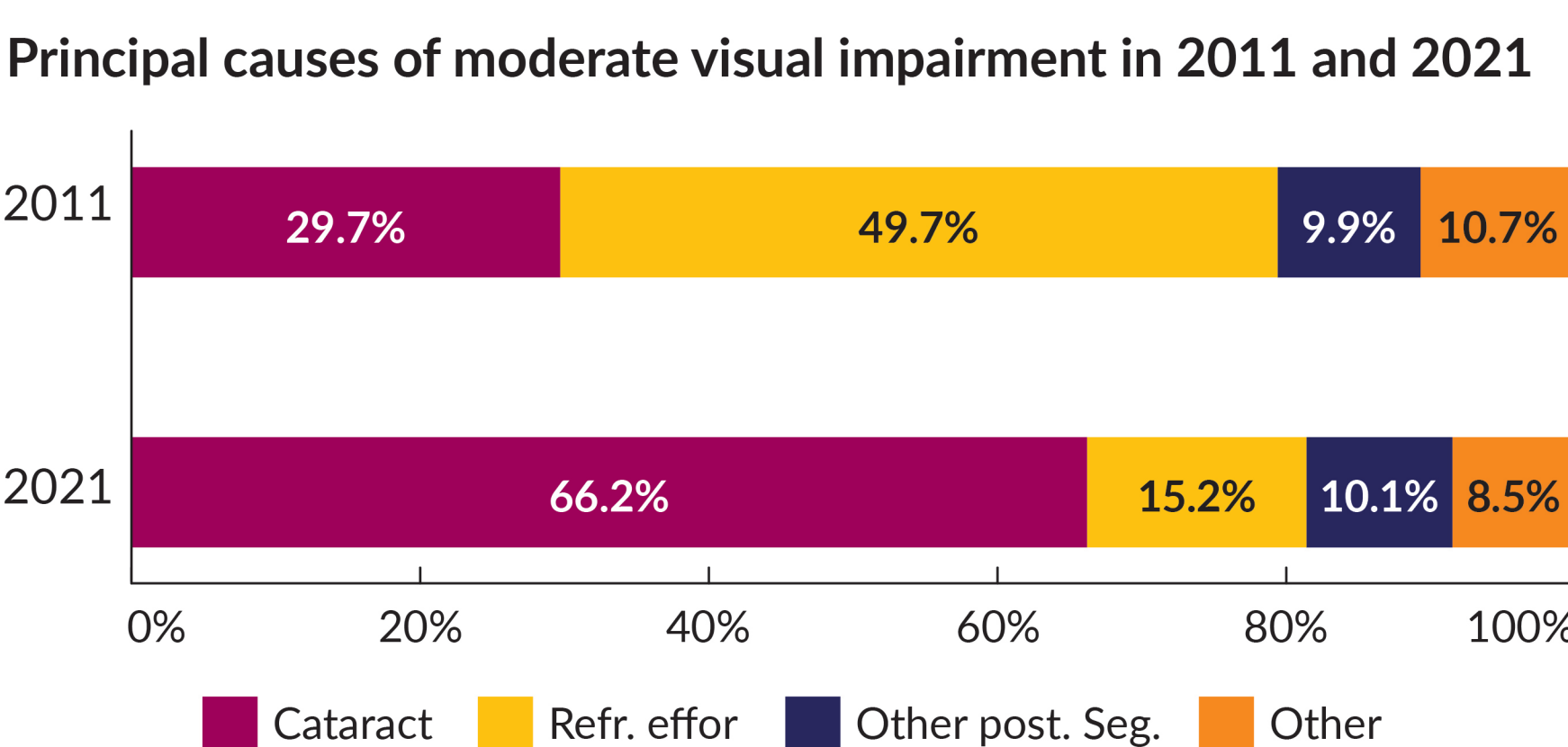
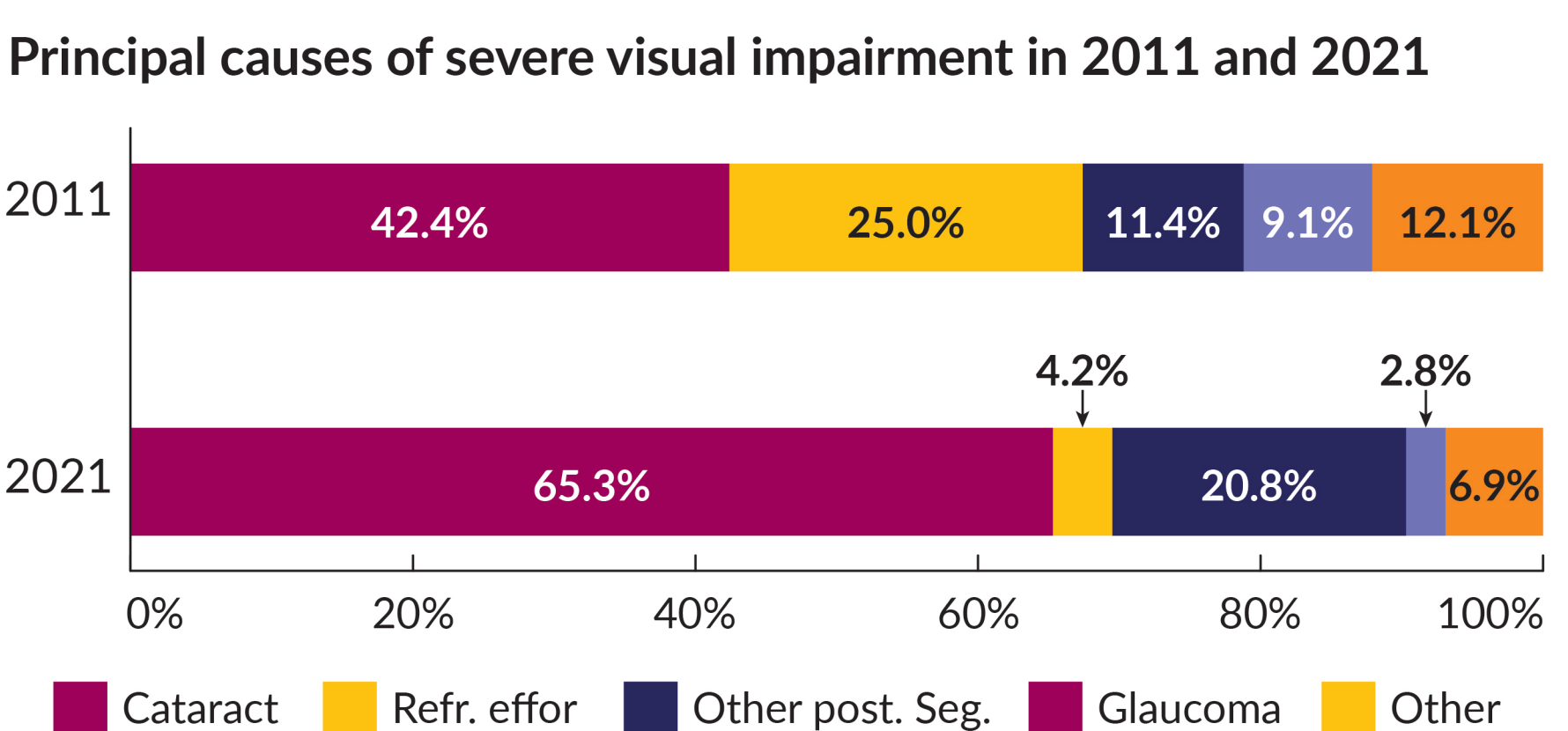
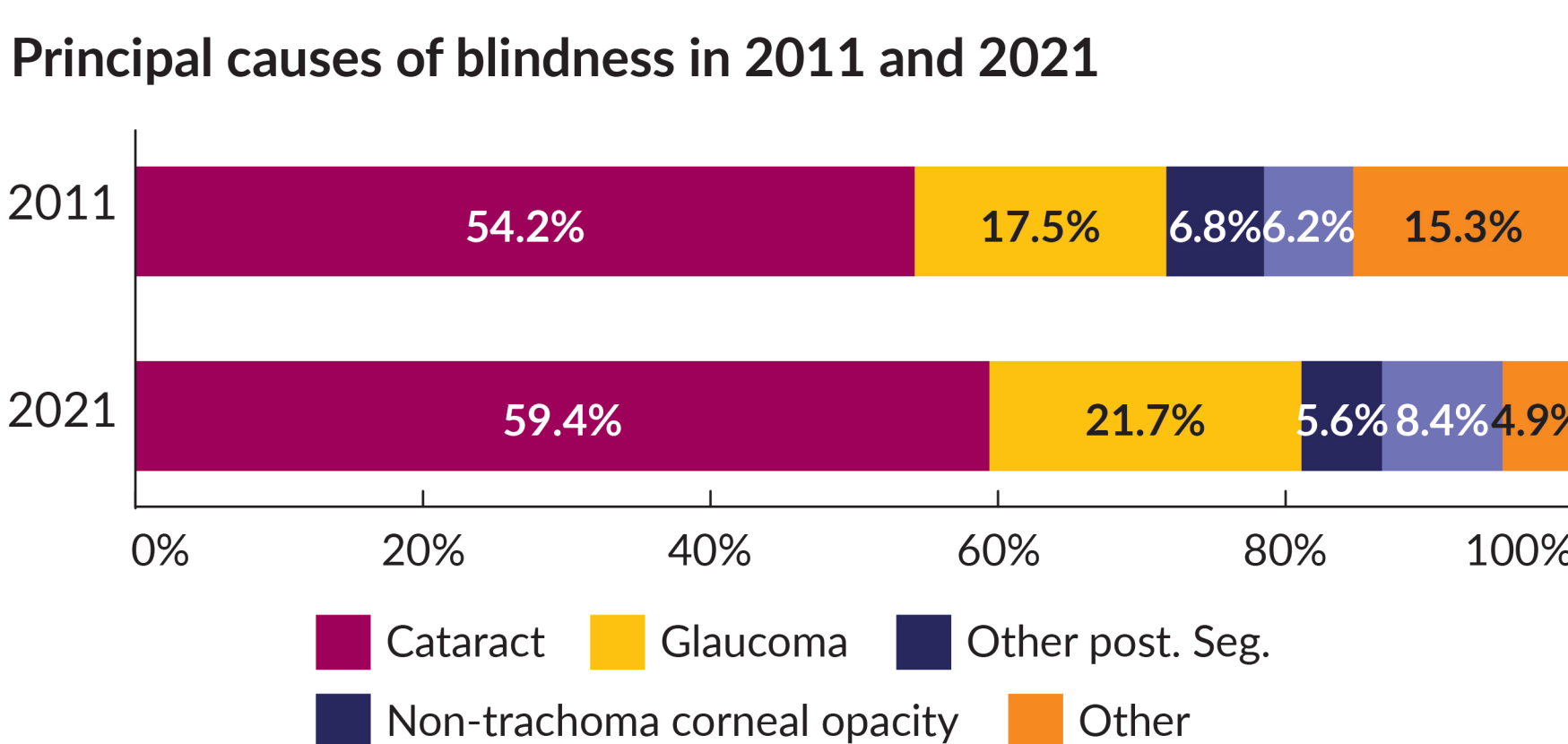
Overall, the prevalence of blindness is **22%** among people who have additional (non-visual) disabilities, and **3%** among people without additional disabilities.

An aging population means that visual impairment remains a significant public health problem in Sierra Leone, with more than one in five people aged over 50 years living with some level of visual impairment



The number of people who are bilaterally blind increased by **64%**, from **26,671** in 2011 to **43,082** in 2021.

Unoperated cataracts are responsible for more than half of all blindness and visual impairments. Glaucoma and other posterior segment diseases cause more than one in four cases of severe visual impairment and blindness. Unaddressed refractive error is responsible for 15% of moderate visual impairment, down from 50% in 2011



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