



Women in Surgical Research Grant “WiSURG”: Supporting Female Surgeons and Trainees to Conduct Impactful Research in the ECSA Region

2025 WiSURG Grant

WISA, RCSI, COSECSA and J&J Foundation

Background

The WiSURG programme is a collaborative effort aimed at fostering increased participation of female surgeons and surgical trainees in high quality clinical research in the East, Central and Southern African (ECSA) region. While female enrolment to the College of Surgeons of East, Central and Southern Africa (COSECSA) has increased, there remains a need to continue to encourage greater female choice of surgery as a career, greater female representation in surgical leadership and increased participation of female surgeons in research activities. Authorship in the “global surgery” literature is predominantly male worldwide, but this disparity is significantly more pronounced in low- and middle-income countries (Ravi et al., 2021). Ultimately, the development of the next generation of female leaders in surgical research and practice in the COSECSA region will contribute towards building an expanded, enhanced surgical workforce providing more high-quality surgical care for populations in East, Central and Southern Africa. There is also a great need for translation of clinical data into sound research that will subsequently inform local and regional policy with regards to safe and sustainable surgery in the ECSCA region. Women in Surgery Africa (WISA) is deeply committed to supporting women to conduct quality, impactful surgical research (Odera, Tierney, Mangaoang, Mugwe, & Sanfey, 2019). The long-term goal of WiSURG is to provide a framework for emerging and mid-career female surgical researchers to produce high-quality

research, supported by grant funding, research methodology training, supervision and mentorship. Ultimately the research produced will benefit the surgical patient in ECSA region.

WiSA operates under the auspices of COSECESA. COSECESA recognises the importance of supporting female trainees, Members and Fellows and has been a long term advocate for women surgeons. COSECESA has worked in close collaboration with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) since 2007. WiSA has been supported by the RCSI/COSECESA Collaboration from its conception to date.

The overall objective is to foster the development of the next generation of female leaders in surgical research and practice in the COSECESA region.

The Grant

An online research methodology training course for prospective grant applicants will be held in October 2024. This course will both prepare prospective applicants to formulate higher quality applications for this grant programme, and additionally serve as a useful training for all who attend – whether or not they ultimately submit or are successful with their proposals.

Seven successful applicants will receive the following support:

- A US\$7,500 financial grant
- At least two opportunities to present to the RCSI/COSECESA research group throughout the grant year, and receive constructive feedback. To this meeting will be invited experts with an interest in the particular topic or methodology of the research. These experts will be drawn from RCSI, COSECESA, J&J and beyond.
- Arising from the initial presentation of the project, and as needed, mentorship and supervision from designated experts.

Eligibility

Successful candidates for the grant will be individuals who show promise to lead research initiatives and activities related to patient-centered surgical research on the continent.

In order to be eligible candidates must:

- Be a WiSA member or join WiSA during application

AND

- Be a female surgical trainee, in training in COSECSA MCS or FCS programmes

OR

- Be a female Fellow (by Examination) of COSECSA, having graduated a maximum of three years before the award.

Applications from early career researchers (with 0-2 papers as a first author or senior author) will be reviewed preferentially, with applications from mid-career researchers (2-4 papers as a first author or senior author) also reviewed favorably. Applications from more established researchers may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

NB: MMed dissertations shall not be considered for this award.

Topic

Applications are welcomed on any surgically related topic. However two areas are particularly of interest to this programme - **obstetric fistula** and **cleft lip and palate**, and applications in these areas will be considered favorably. Of the seven grants awarded at least one, and possibly more, will be related to each of these areas of interest. Original research and reviews will be considered.

Applicants may wish to consider secondary analysis of already collected data. The **COSECSA electronic logbook database** presents one such opportunity. It is a large database of >500k procedures recorded by COSECSA trainees, which may potentially be interrogated to answer surgical education, and other, research questions. Any potential applicant interesting in potentially undertaking research on this dataset should contact Dr Lawa Shaban to discuss (lawashaban@rcsi.ie).

Application and Grant Process

Applicants are strongly recommended to attend the online research methodology course for prospective grant applicants to be held in October 2024. Applicants will complete the application form, and upload two references - at least one of which should be from a WISA/COSECSA Fellow in good standing.

1. Online research methodology course for prospective applicants on October 15th 2024.
2. Applications will be accepted from October 15th until November 15th 2024.
3. Applications will be reviewed and award winners announced at the Annual WiSA event in December 2024.
4. The grant period will be 12 months, beginning on January 1st 2025 and covering the calendar year.
5. All research projects must be presented at the WISA annual conference in December 2025.
6. A final report must be submitted by December 31st 2025.

Detailed information on the application process will be made available shortly. While the grant period is for one calendar year, it is recognized that research projects may not be complete within this timeframe, and that it may take significantly longer before the work is published.

Applicants are strongly recommended to attend an online research methodology course on **Tuesday Oct 15th** from 2-6pm Central Africa Time, 3-7pm East Africa Time. This course is aimed at prospective WiSURG grant applicants, but is open to all. It is free, but registration is required, please register here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZErd-mrqD0rE9buIdJx5LfZdZZ250IhZ--T>

Selection Criteria

Applicants will be selected by the WiSA Grant Selection Committee. The WiSA Grant Selection Committee will contain at least one member from each of WiSA/COSECSA, J&J and RCSI. Selection will be made based both on the research proposed, and on the applicant's potential to develop as a global leader in surgical research.

Applications will be reviewed against criteria in the following areas:

1. **Impact** – The potential impact of the proposed research project on surgical care provision in East, Central and Southern Africa
2. **Feasibility** – Proposed research projects should be realistic, and possible to undertake in the limited time period.
3. **Profile** – Potential for publication in high impact factor journal
4. **Participation** - Active demonstrated participation in WiSA activities at a country and / or regional level.

5. **Personal Statement** - Candidates must provide a rationale for how they will contribute to the development of high-quality surgical research projects that will ultimately impact surgical care provision in the COSECSA region. Candidates should also demonstrate their interest and ability to commit to WISA/ COSECSA activities over the long term.

Grant Administration

Funding will be supplied by J&J to RCSI, and dispersed to awardees by RCSI, as directed by WISA.

Disbursement to candidates will be directly to their nominated bank accounts, in two tranches. The first tranche of \$4,500 (60% of total) of the grant will be disbursed in January 2025, following awardee completion of the grant agreement. The second tranche of \$3,000 (40%) will be disbursed in August 2026, following achievement of the following three milestones (in any order):

1. Evidence that necessary ethics approvals have been obtained has been submitted to the WiSURG grant management team
2. A detailed research protocol has been submitted to the WiSURG grant management team
3. The project has been presented (at least once) to the RCSI/COSECSA Research Forum online meeting

Where the above milestones have not been achieved to the satisfaction of the WiSURG grant management team, the second tranche may be withheld until such time as milestones are achieved.

Registration for the WiSURG online research methodology training is here.

An online application link will be made available on October 15th.

References

- Odera, A., Tierney, S., Mangaoang, D., Mugwe, R., & Sanfey, H. (2019). Women in Surgery Africa and research. *The Lancet*, *393*(10186), 2120. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)31106-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)31106-7)
- Ravi, K., Bentounsi, Z., Tariq, A., Brazeal, A., Daudu, D., Back, F., ... Sharma, D. (2021). Systematic analysis of authorship demographics in global surgery. *BMJ Global Health*, *6*(10), e006672. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006672>