Background
Cutaneous leishmaniasis (CL) is a severely neglected tropical disease transmitted from animal reservoirs to humans through the infectious bite of a female Phlebotomine sandfly. CL affects nearly 1.2 million people annually worldwide, including nearly 12,000 people in Peru. CL is rarely fatal; however, the disease has high social and financial costs. Due to stigma and the lasting presence of scars, CL has been associated with reduced school attendance, reduced work opportunities, spousal abandonment, and domestic abuse. Injectable pentavalent antimonials are the standard treatment and are administered once daily for 20 consecutive days. As this disease often affects the poorest and rural in society, access to health care is not always available for those infected. Thus, self-treatment is common practice and may include pouring battery acid on the infected area or burning one’s lesion with a hot branding iron.

Study Area
Our study was conducted within a 2000 km² area of San Martin, Peru. This area is considered highly endemic for CL. Since 2009, nearly 800 individuals were diagnosed or treated for CL at one of our nine partner health clinics (Figure 1). Approximately 25,000 people live within the catchment areas of these clinics. The area is known for its high agricultural production of rice, coffee, and cacao.

Research Questions
For decades, CL was largely considered an occupational disease primarily affecting able-bodied men, aged 15 or older (~70% of the case burden), working in remote, enzootic environments. Preliminary data shared with our team by the Peruvian Ministry of Health showed a much different distribution of women (20%), children (40%) and men (40%) presenting with CL infections (Figure 2). Our team set out to answer the following questions:

What are the risk factors for CL infection for individuals diagnosed or treated at our partner health clinics?
Do the large number of women and children infected with CL suggest infections are occurring peri-domestically rather than in remote, sylvatic areas?