

High costs of dental care leave many with too little money for basic necessities

April 29 2015



Having to pay for dental health care can put a considerable strain on household finances in many countries, according to an international study led by King's College London.

The new study, published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, assessed the [extent](#) of household 'catastrophic dental health expenditure' (CDHE) in 41 low and middle income countries. Expenditure was defined as catastrophic if it was equal to or higher than 40% of the household's capacity to pay.

Up to 7% of the households surveyed in these countries had incurred catastrophic dental [health expenditure](#) in the last month.

The study by King's, UCL and Universiti Teknologi MARA (Malaysia) found that wealthier, urban and larger households and more economically developed countries had higher odds of facing CDHE. In low and [middle income countries](#), the use of dental services is more a function of household's ability to pay than of people's dental needs.

The analysis did not include the indirect costs of seeking dental care, including income loss due to ill health, travel, waiting at clinics or providing care to family members and the results therefore probably underestimate the financial consequences for dental health care on these households.

Dr Eduardo Bernabe, lead author from the Dental Institute at King's College London, said: "Using dental services can cost households a large proportion of their available income and push many into poverty and long-term debt. Those needing dental treatment face both the direct costs of using the service and indirect loss of income to attend a clinic during working hours.

"Our study highlights the low level of financial protection that healthcare financing systems provides for their citizens. Dental public health advocates and international dental organizations should push for [dental care](#) to be included in current discussions about universal health coverage."

Provided by King's College London

Citation: High costs of dental care leave many with too little money for basic necessities (2015, April 29) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-high-dental->

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