

Snakebites cost Sri Lanka more than \$10 million

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Every year, snakebites cost the Sri Lankan government more than 10 million USD, and lead to economic loss of nearly 4 million USD for individuals. Credit: Gihan Jayaweera, Wikimedia Commons

Snakebites are a major public health problem in many rural communities

around the world, often requiring medical care and affecting victims' ability to work. Every year, snakebites cost the Sri Lankan government more than 10 million USD, and lead to economic loss of nearly 4 million USD for individuals, according to a new study in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*.

The victims of snakebites in poor [rural communities](#) in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are often young individuals who are earning a wage and have a considerable remaining life expectancy. Moreover, they often work in farming or other labor intensive jobs that they must take time off from in order to recover from a [bite](#).

In the new work, David Lalloo, of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK, and colleagues from the University of Kelaniya used data from a nation-wide household survey conducted in Sri Lanka in 2013 and 2013 to estimate the number of snake bites and deaths from [snake bites](#) annually. To estimate the costs of the bites, they used additional household questionnaires and information gathered from hospital cost accounting systems.

79% of victims, the study found, suffered economic loss after a snake bite, with a median out of pocket cost of \$11.82 and a median loss of income of \$28.57 for those employed and \$33.21 for those self-employed. To put this in context, the mean per capita income per month for people living in the rural areas studied was only \$74 USD. The total annual economic burden on households was \$3.8 USD. In addition, each year, the bites cost the national healthcare system \$10.3 million USD—which is 0.7% of the country's total healthcare costs—and lead to more than 11,000 years' worth of disability time, the researchers calculated. The numbers were comparable to Sri Lanka's annual spending on meningitis and dengue.

"It is unlikely that these costs will reduce in the near future as there is no

indication that the high incidence of bites is declining," the researchers say. "Even more concerning is the [economic burden](#) that snakebite places on victims and their households... It is highly likely in Sri Lanka that snakebite drives the same catastrophic [costs](#) for the poor as many other diseases."

More information: Kasturiratne A, Pathmeswaran A, Wickremasinghe AR, Jayamanne SF, Dawson A, Isbister GK, et al. (2017) The socio-economic burden of snakebite in Sri Lanka. *PLoS Negl Trop Dis* 11(7): e0005647. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0005647

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