# Economic Burden of Treatment for Child Undernutrition in Low and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review

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**Background**: Undernutrition is highly prevalent in low and middle-income countries with sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia accounting for majority of the cases. Apart from the human impacts including mortality and morbidity to affected children, there are huge economic impacts to households, society and the government that need further exploration.

**Objectives:** The main aim of this study was to determine the current state of knowledge on the costs of child undernutrition treatment(s) to households, health providers, organizations and governments in low and middle-income countries (LMICs).

**Methods:** We conducted a systematic review using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Literature search was done for articles published up to November 2017 for studies done in low and middle-income countries. Databases searched included PubMed-Medline, Embase, Popline, Econlit and Web of science. Additional articles were identified through bibliographic citation searches and Google scholar. Only articles including costs of child undernutrition treatment(s) were included.

**Results:** The literature search yielded 6177 articles, among these, only 44 met our inclusion criteria. The studies varied in the interventions studied, perspective(s) adopted and costing methods used with some studies reporting costs as low as US$0.44 per child and as high as US$1344 cost per child. The main cost drivers for households and community volunteers were the opportunity cost of time spent away from normal duties while seeking treatment. Personnel costs and therapeutic food were the main drivers of costs incurred by the government, health providers and organizations funding interventions aimed at managing undernutrition in children. One of the coping strategies adopted by the households was employing people to take care of their duties while seeking treatment.

**Conclusion**: There is need to address the economic burden of child undernutrition on households, health providers and the government through collaborative and sustained effort. Researchers and other development partners need to team up to identify locally appropriate evidence based and cost-effective interventions. Further, this review recommends a standardization of the methods used and results reported in economic evaluations to facilitate meaningful interpretation and provide a useful means for comparing costs and cost-effectiveness of interventions.