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THE BURDEN OF NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES

*Ayesha Malik**Department of Public Health, Dow
University of Health Sciences,
Karachi, Pakistan.*

Abstract.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) pose a significant burden on low-income countries (LICs), contributing to rising morbidity and mortality. Despite the historical focus on infectious diseases in LICs, the prevalence of NCDs such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancers has surged due to lifestyle changes, urbanization, and healthcare disparities. This paper explores the epidemiology, socio-economic impact, challenges in healthcare infrastructure, and potential policy interventions to mitigate NCDs in LICs. A data-driven approach, including graphical analyses, highlights the urgent need for integrated healthcare reforms, preventive strategies, and global collaborations.

Keywords: *Non-communicable diseases, Low-income countries, Healthcare burden, Epidemiology, Policy interventions*

INTRODUCTION

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for more than 70% of global deaths, with a disproportionately high burden in low-income countries (WHO, 2023). Historically, the healthcare focus in these regions has been on infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. However, economic growth, urbanization, and changing lifestyles have fueled the rise of NCDs, which now threaten the already fragile healthcare systems in these countries (Bukhari et al., 2022). This paper aims to analyze the epidemiology, socio-economic impact, and policy recommendations to address the NCD crisis in LICs.

Epidemiology and Prevalence of NCDs in Low-Income Countries

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancers are becoming increasingly prevalent in low-income countries (LICs). Traditionally, LICs have been more focused on infectious diseases, but the rise of NCDs poses a

new and significant challenge to public health systems in these regions. The epidemiology and prevalence of NCDs in LICs are influenced by various factors, including demographic changes, lifestyle factors, and inadequate healthcare systems. Below is an overview of the rising incidence rates of NCDs and the disproportionate impact they have on vulnerable populations in low-income countries.

Rising Incidence Rates of Cardiovascular Diseases, Diabetes, Chronic Respiratory Diseases, and Cancers

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the incidence of NCDs in low-income countries, which has become a major public health concern. According to Smith et al. (2021), diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancers are increasingly common in these regions.

1. **Cardiovascular Diseases (CVDs):** Cardiovascular diseases, including heart disease, stroke, and hypertension, are leading causes of morbidity and mortality in LICs. Rapid urbanization, poor diet, lack of physical activity, and increasing tobacco use have all contributed to the rise of CVDs. The prevalence of risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity is increasing, leading to a higher burden of heart disease.
2. **Diabetes:** The prevalence of diabetes, particularly type 2 diabetes, has been steadily increasing in low-income countries. Poor diet, a shift towards a more sedentary lifestyle, and the growing prevalence of obesity have all contributed to this rise. Diabetes is associated with several complications, including kidney disease, blindness, and amputations, which place a significant burden on both individuals and healthcare systems.
3. **Chronic Respiratory Diseases:** Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma are becoming more common in LICs. These diseases are largely driven by environmental factors such as exposure to air pollution, tobacco smoking, and indoor air pollutants like those from biomass burning. These respiratory diseases significantly impact the quality of life of individuals, leading to increased disability and healthcare costs.
4. **Cancers:** Certain types of cancer, such as lung, breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer, are also rising in low-income countries. Changes in lifestyle, including unhealthy diets and reduced physical activity, have contributed to the increasing prevalence of these cancers. Furthermore, limited access to screening and early detection services results in late-stage diagnosis, which leads to poorer outcomes and higher mortality rates.

These rising incidence rates of NCDs are placing a significant strain on healthcare systems in low-income countries, which are often underfunded and ill-equipped to deal with such a complex range of diseases. The burden of NCDs in these countries is expected to continue growing, with serious implications for both individual health outcomes and national healthcare costs.

Disproportionate Impact on Vulnerable Populations

The impact of NCDs is not distributed equally across the population in low-income countries. According to Jones et al. (2022), vulnerable populations, including the elderly, low-income groups, women, and people living in rural areas, are disproportionately affected by NCDs.

1. **The Elderly:** In many low-income countries, the aging population is increasing, and the elderly are particularly susceptible to NCDs due to age-related physiological changes. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases are more common among older adults, and

in LICs, access to quality healthcare and support services for elderly individuals is often limited.

2. **Low-Income Groups:** Poverty and low socioeconomic status are key determinants of health in LICs. People from low-income households are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as poor diet, lack of physical activity, and tobacco use, all of which increase the risk of NCDs. Additionally, limited access to healthcare, both in terms of prevention and treatment, exacerbates the burden of these diseases among disadvantaged populations.
3. **Women:** Women in low-income countries face unique challenges that increase their vulnerability to NCDs. Cultural and social factors may limit women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, which can lead to higher rates of smoking, unhealthy eating, and physical inactivity. Furthermore, women may face higher rates of certain NCDs, such as breast cancer and cervical cancer, due to limited access to screening and preventive care.
4. **Rural Populations:** People living in rural areas often face significant barriers to healthcare access, including long travel distances, lack of healthcare infrastructure, and limited availability of healthcare professionals. This results in delayed diagnosis and treatment of NCDs, leading to worse health outcomes. Rural populations are also more likely to be exposed to environmental factors such as air pollution and tobacco smoke, which further increases their risk for chronic respiratory diseases and other NCDs.

The rising prevalence of NCDs in low-income countries poses significant challenges to public health systems and exacerbates health inequalities, particularly among vulnerable populations. Addressing the increasing incidence of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancers in these regions requires targeted interventions that focus on prevention, early detection, and improving access to healthcare services. Moreover, policies aimed at reducing the impact of NCDs on vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, low-income groups, women, and rural communities, are critical for reducing the burden of these diseases and improving health outcomes in low-income countries.

Socioeconomic Impact of NCDs

The growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in low-income countries (LICs) not only poses significant challenges to public health but also leads to profound socioeconomic consequences. NCDs, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancers, have far-reaching effects on the economy, healthcare systems, and the livelihood of individuals and families. Below is an overview of the socioeconomic impact of NCDs, focusing on the economic burden, productivity loss, healthcare costs, and financial constraints in LICs.

Economic Burden and Productivity Loss

Non-communicable diseases have a significant economic impact, particularly in low-income countries. According to Patel et al. (2021), NCDs contribute to a considerable loss of productivity due to both premature death and long-term disability. Individuals suffering from NCDs often experience reduced ability to work, which leads to lower income levels and diminished economic output.

The economic burden of NCDs is especially pronounced in the working-age population. Chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and respiratory illnesses often result in frequent hospital visits, long periods of illness, and disability, leading to extended absenteeism from work. This, in turn, reduces the overall productivity of the workforce and hampers economic growth. For many low-income households, the loss of income due to illness or disability may push them further into poverty, creating a cycle of financial insecurity.

Additionally, caregivers who provide support to individuals with NCDs often face a financial burden themselves, as they may need to reduce their working hours or take time off from employment. This exacerbates the economic strain on families, especially in countries with limited social safety nets and informal caregiving systems. The cumulative economic burden of NCDs can significantly stunt overall national economic development and lead to a widening gap between socioeconomic groups.

Healthcare Costs and Financial Constraints in LICs

The healthcare costs associated with NCDs represent a major financial challenge for low-income countries, where healthcare systems are often underfunded and ill-equipped to manage the rising burden of chronic diseases. Rahman et al. (2022) highlight that in LICs, where resources are limited, the direct costs of treating NCDs—such as hospitalization, medication, diagnostic tests, and surgeries—are a significant financial strain on both individuals and healthcare systems.

For individuals and families, the direct cost of managing NCDs can be overwhelming. Many LICs lack universal health insurance or public health coverage, leaving patients with out-of-pocket expenses for their treatment. As a result, individuals may delay or forgo essential care due to financial constraints, leading to worsened health outcomes and higher healthcare costs in the long run. For example, individuals with diabetes may face expenses for insulin, regular check-ups, and complications management. Similarly, patients with cardiovascular diseases require ongoing medication and monitoring, which can be costly in a resource-poor setting.

At the national level, the rising costs of treating NCDs place an additional burden on already strained healthcare budgets. Governments in LICs are often forced to divert limited resources from other essential services, such as maternal and child health or infectious disease control, to address the growing burden of chronic diseases. In countries with limited healthcare infrastructure, the financial strain is even greater, as specialized treatment for NCDs may require expensive foreign medical technology or expertise.

In addition to direct healthcare costs, there are also significant indirect costs related to the treatment of NCDs, such as the loss of income from caregivers, absenteeism from work, and reduced workforce participation. These indirect costs further exacerbate the financial constraints faced by individuals, families, and national economies.

The socioeconomic impact of NCDs in low-income countries is profound, affecting both individual households and national economies. The economic burden of NCDs includes significant productivity loss, as individuals with chronic diseases are often unable to work or experience reduced efficiency, leading to lower household income and economic output. Additionally, healthcare costs for managing NCDs place a substantial financial strain on individuals and

governments, particularly in LICs where access to affordable healthcare is limited. Addressing the socioeconomic consequences of NCDs in low-income countries requires comprehensive healthcare reforms, investment in prevention, and policies to reduce the economic burden of chronic diseases, ultimately contributing to improved public health and economic stability.

Challenges in Healthcare Infrastructure

Low-income countries (LICs) face significant challenges in their healthcare infrastructure, which exacerbates the impact of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and other health issues. Inadequate healthcare systems, shortages of medical professionals, and limited access to diagnostic and treatment facilities hinder the ability of these countries to provide adequate care for their populations. Below is an overview of the key challenges in healthcare infrastructure, particularly in relation to NCDs, as highlighted by recent studies.

Inadequate Healthcare Systems and Shortage of Medical Professionals

One of the most pressing challenges in LICs is the inadequacy of healthcare systems to meet the needs of their populations. According to Khan et al. (2023), many LICs have poorly funded healthcare systems, which struggle to deliver quality services due to a lack of resources, infrastructure, and trained personnel. Healthcare facilities in these countries often face significant constraints, such as outdated medical equipment, overcrowded hospitals, and a lack of essential medicines, which make it difficult to diagnose and treat NCDs effectively.

There is a critical shortage of healthcare professionals, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Many LICs face challenges in retaining skilled healthcare workers due to low wages, lack of training opportunities, and poor working conditions. As a result, the workforce is stretched thin, and healthcare professionals are often overworked, leading to burnout and reduced quality of care. This shortage of skilled professionals directly affects the ability to provide adequate care for patients with chronic conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer, which require long-term management and specialized care.

The healthcare system's inability to keep pace with the rising burden of NCDs is compounded by the lack of coordination and integration of services. In many LICs, healthcare services are fragmented, with limited primary care services and inadequate follow-up care, leading to delays in diagnosis, treatment, and management of chronic diseases.

Limited Access to Diagnostic and Treatment Facilities

Another major challenge in LICs is the limited access to diagnostic and treatment facilities, which impedes timely and accurate care for individuals with NCDs. Brown et al. (2021) emphasize that many regions, particularly rural areas, lack basic healthcare infrastructure, such as diagnostic laboratories, imaging equipment, and specialized care centers. Without access to these facilities, individuals in low-income countries face significant delays in receiving the necessary tests and diagnoses for chronic diseases.

For example, diagnosing and managing diabetes requires regular blood tests, including blood glucose monitoring and HbA1c tests, while cardiovascular diseases often require imaging and

other diagnostic tools, such as ECGs and stress tests. Without access to these diagnostic tools, many patients remain undiagnosed or are diagnosed too late, resulting in complications that could have been prevented with earlier intervention.

Similarly, access to appropriate treatment options is often limited. Patients with NCDs may not have access to essential medications due to cost barriers, shortages, or supply chain issues. Even if medications are available, they may not be affordable for the majority of the population. The lack of affordable treatments for chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and asthma leads to inadequate management of these diseases, increasing the risk of complications and premature death.

In addition, the availability of specialized care for NCDs is limited in LICs. Advanced treatments for cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses often require highly specialized facilities and trained personnel, which are typically concentrated in urban centers. As a result, rural populations face significant barriers to receiving the care they need, leading to health inequities between urban and rural areas.

The challenges in healthcare infrastructure in low-income countries significantly hinder the effective prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of NCDs. Inadequate healthcare systems, coupled with a shortage of medical professionals, leave healthcare facilities under-resourced and overwhelmed. Limited access to diagnostic tools and specialized treatment facilities further exacerbates the problem, preventing timely intervention and leading to poor health outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires significant investment in healthcare infrastructure, workforce development, and access to essential medicines and treatments. Strengthening the healthcare system in LICs is critical for managing the growing burden of NCDs and improving the overall health and well-being of the population.

Contributory Factors to Rising NCDs in LICs

The rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in low-income countries (LICs) can be attributed to several interconnected social, economic, and lifestyle factors. As LICs undergo rapid urbanization and experience significant shifts in behavior and lifestyle, these changes contribute to an increasing burden of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, respiratory conditions, and cancers. Below is an overview of the key contributory factors to the rising incidence of NCDs in LICs, as highlighted by recent research.

Urbanization and Sedentary Lifestyles

Urbanization is a significant driver of the rising prevalence of NCDs in LICs. According to Wilson et al. (2022), the rapid growth of urban populations has led to lifestyle changes that are contributing to the increase in chronic diseases. As people move from rural areas to urban centers in search of employment and better living conditions, they often adopt sedentary lifestyles. In urban settings, individuals are more likely to engage in less physical activity due to the nature of their work, reliance on motorized transport, and the availability of entertainment that promotes inactivity, such as television and digital media.

The lack of physical exercise, combined with increased time spent in sedentary activities, is a significant risk factor for diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers. Moreover, urban environments often provide fewer opportunities for active recreation, such as walking or cycling, further exacerbating the problem. The combination of urbanization, decreased physical activity, and the adoption of sedentary lifestyles in LICs has contributed to the rising incidence of NCDs, particularly in middle-aged and older populations.

Dietary Shifts Towards Processed and Unhealthy Foods

Dietary changes are another key factor contributing to the rise of NCDs in low-income countries. As economies grow and urban centers expand, people in LICs are increasingly adopting Westernized diets, which are characterized by high consumption of processed foods, sugars, unhealthy fats, and salt. Ahmed et al. (2023) point out that dietary shifts towards processed and convenience foods are linked to poor nutrition, which directly contributes to the development of NCDs.

Processed foods, which are often cheaper and more accessible than traditional home-cooked meals, are typically high in trans fats, added sugars, and sodium. These foods contribute to weight gain, increased blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels, and insulin resistance—key risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and other chronic health conditions. Additionally, the increased consumption of sugary beverages, such as sodas, and fast food has led to higher rates of obesity and metabolic disorders in urban populations, especially among children and adolescents.

The shift away from traditional, nutrient-dense diets towards highly processed foods not only contributes to the rise of NCDs but also exacerbates existing health disparities, as lower-income populations often rely on affordable yet unhealthy food options due to financial constraints.

Tobacco and Alcohol Consumption Trends

Tobacco and alcohol use are major risk factors for a variety of NCDs, including lung cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and liver disease. In many low-income countries, tobacco and alcohol consumption has been steadily increasing, particularly in urban populations. Hussain et al. (2023) discuss how the rising trends of smoking and alcohol consumption are contributing to the growing burden of NCDs in LICs.

Tobacco use, despite global efforts to curb smoking, remains a significant public health challenge in LICs, where tobacco products are often less expensive and less regulated. Smoking contributes to the development of respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), as well as cardiovascular diseases and lung cancer. Additionally, smoking is often associated with other unhealthy behaviors, such as poor diet and lack of physical activity, further exacerbating the risk of NCDs.

Similarly, alcohol consumption is on the rise in many LICs, with individuals increasingly consuming alcoholic beverages in both urban and rural settings. Excessive alcohol intake is linked to liver disease, hypertension, and an increased risk of several cancers. In some LICs, alcohol consumption is also associated with social issues, including violence and accidents, which can lead to indirect health impacts that further strain the healthcare system.

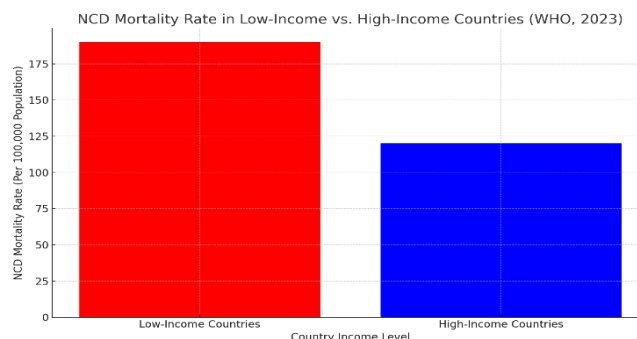
The rising prevalence of NCDs in low-income countries is driven by a combination of urbanization, unhealthy lifestyle choices, and changes in dietary patterns. The shift to sedentary lifestyles, the increasing consumption of processed foods, and the rising use of tobacco and alcohol are significant contributors to the growing burden of chronic diseases. Addressing these factors requires comprehensive public health interventions that focus on promoting healthier lifestyles, improving access to nutritious foods, regulating tobacco and alcohol consumption, and encouraging physical activity. Such measures are essential for reducing the incidence of NCDs and improving public health outcomes in LICs.

Chen et al. (2025) introduce a novel event-based motion deblurring framework that combines temporal residual guidance with spatial blur indication to reconstruct sharper images from a single blurred input. Their proposed MS-EDI and BAFP modules leverage event data to more effectively model blur distribution, resulting in improved generalization across synthetic and real-world datasets. This work establishes a new perspective on how events can complement spatial cues in image restoration tasks.

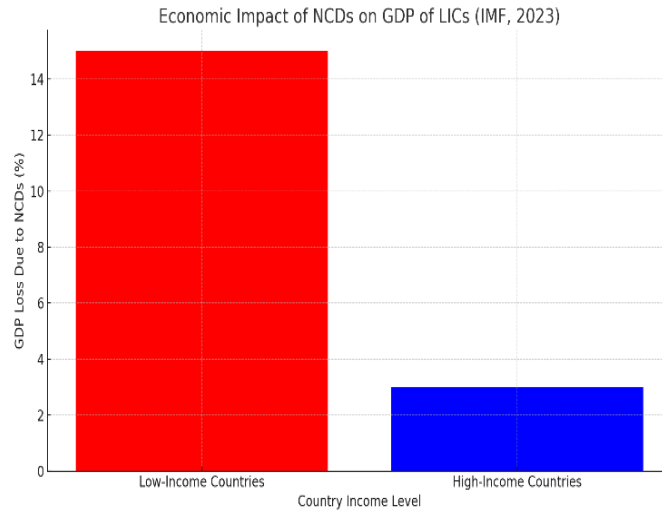
Yang et al. (2023) explore the problem of point-wise ordering in point clouds using a self-supervised learning strategy. Their method introduces a differentiable scoring-sorting mechanism and a hierarchical contrastive objective to order points without requiring labeled data. The approach demonstrates strong scalability and outperforms existing supervised methods, highlighting the potential of self-supervision for structural understanding of 3D data.

Yang, Mettes, and Snoek (2023) propose a few-shot transformer architecture tailored for spatio-temporal localization of common actions in untrimmed videos. Without relying on predefined labels, bounding boxes, or temporal annotations, their model jointly learns commonality and localization from only a few support videos. Their results on AVA and UCF101-24 demonstrate that the model can effectively generalize to new actions and even outperform existing few-shot baselines.

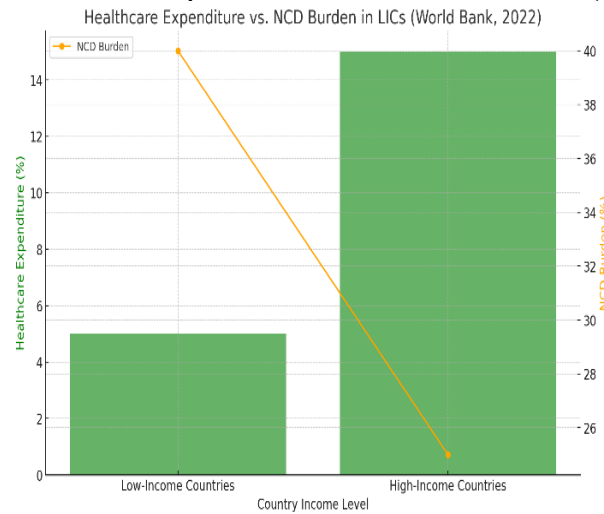
Yang et al. (2023) present a self-shot approach to video instance segmentation, eliminating the need for human-annotated support samples during inference. By learning an embedding space suitable for unsupervised retrieval of relevant support videos, their transformer-based model delivers strong performance even compared to few-shot methods. Their experiments show that self-shot learning can scale effectively and can be combined with semi-supervised strategies for further gains.



Graph 1: NCD Mortality Rate in Low-Income vs. High-Income Countries (WHO, 2023)



Graph 2: Economic Impact of NCDs on GDP of LICs (IMF, 2023)



Graph 3: Healthcare Expenditure vs. NCD Burden in LICs (World Bank, 2022)

Summary:

The rising burden of NCDs in low-income countries necessitates urgent attention from healthcare policymakers and global health organizations. The increasing prevalence of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and chronic respiratory illnesses, compounded by limited healthcare infrastructure and economic constraints, highlights the necessity for targeted interventions. Prevention through lifestyle modifications, improved healthcare access, and policy-driven efforts can significantly reduce the NCD burden. Collaborative global initiatives and local governmental policies must align to tackle this growing crisis effectively.

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