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National

## Malawians' unmet health needs high

Tom Sangala • November 18, 2016 205 1 minute read

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When former president, the late Bingu wa Mutharika, described Malawi as a “sick nation” in 2011, he might have been referring to the disrespectful attitude of people towards their leaders, but a latest Education Quality Index has just confirmed the unthinkable: over half of Malawi’s population is unhealthy.

However, the worst part is that 65 out of every 100 poor people say “cost prevents them from meeting their [health] needs”.

This is one of the findings of research conducted by the Institute of Public Opinion and Research (Ipor). The findings are part of ‘Education and Health Issues in Malawi: Selected Findings from the 2016 Malawi Local Governance and Performance Index’ report presented yesterday in Blantyre.

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Ipor senior researcher, Boniface Dulani, said the unmet health needs span across areas such as mental and dental needs.

“The main issue is cost, as well as availability of treatment and distance. As a result, 32 percent have unmet contraceptive needs, 50 percent have unmet mental health needs and 52 percent have unmet dental needs. Costs are a bigger problem in the Central Region and Southern Region,” Dulani said.



Dulani added that, while 65 out of every 100 respondents who failed to access medical help due to cost implications were poor, 41 percent of the people who are considered rich also fail to meet their health needs.

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The rich were those who owned a bicycle, mobile phone, vehicle, among other parameters.

Not surprisingly, only two districts— out of 15 [although Blantyre City and Blantyre Rural were counted separately] sampled— emerged top on the Health Quality Index by District list. These are Mangochi and Kasungu. Blantyre, Lilongwe and Nsanje emerged as the poor performers.

But it was not all doom and gloom as 81 out of every 100 people reported being satisfied with quality of care offered in health facilities.

In terms of the Education Quality by District results, Chitipa, Lilongwe, Mzimba and Rumphi emerged as top performers while Mulanje and Blantyre [again] emerged as poor performers.

According to Ipor associated researcher Happy Kayuni, poor performance could be compounded by the fact that most learners continue walking to school.

“Ninety six percent of students walk to school. Of these, 25 percent spend 15 minutes walking to school, 85 percent spend less than an hour, while 17 percent take more than an hour walking to school. It is easy for students in urban areas to walk to school, since 32 percent take less than 15 minutes, than those in rural areas,” Kayuni said.

The positive thing, though, is that primary school enrolment is high, and the younger generation is getting better educated than the old, according to findings.



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