Maternal Mortality, Conflict, and Research Ethics at the RHWG Meeting in July 2010

In July 2010, members of the Reproductive Health Working Group (RHWG) returned to Egypt, where the research network was established more than 20 years ago, for a lively three-day annual meeting. The meeting took place on the Red Sea in Al Ain Al Sukhna and 33 participants (one third of them young scholars joining the RHWG meeting for the first time) attended the event giving a total of 19 presentations. We were lucky to have with us Professor Jennifer Leaning, director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University and founder of the Physicians for Human Rights with extensive experience in conflict settings. She gave an introductory lecture on moving the agenda on maternal mortality. We were also joined by Professor Sherine Hamdy, an Egyptian anthropologist at Brown University, who has done extensive ethnographic research in Egypt on kidney patients.

Panels at the event addressed diverse topics ranging from living with violence and conflict (a recurring theme of the RHWG) to the medicalization of reproduction. One panel included presentations of a five-country (Egypt, Oman, Lebanon, Palestine and Turkey) comparative study on the quality of life of breast cancer patients in the region, moderated by Dr. Rita Giacaman. This study on an under-researched topic in the region was supported by seed grants to the individual country studies under the Ford Foundation grant to CRPH for the Reproductive Health Working Group. A useful round-table discussion addressed ethical dilemmas in reproductive health research in the region and the challenges in securing ethical approval for research in countries where institutional review mechanisms are not well established.

A full report of the meeting is available from the RHWG Secretariat (ngaballah@rhwg.org). The next meeting of the RHWG will be in Lebanon on July 5-7, 2011.

Family Ties and Aging: Linking Research to Policy in the Middle East

With improved living conditions and enhanced health care in many parts of the world, people now live longer than ever before. Aging is becoming a normal part of family life. Much investment around the globe centers on securing the health, social, and economic needs of aging populations. In the Arab region and in Lebanon specifically, interest in aging and the role of families in the well being of older adults is growing. Policy-relevant research in this important area, however, remains in its infancy.

In October of 2010, the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) co-sponsored one of the first conferences in the Arab region on family ties and aging with the specific intention of using research results to inform aging policies. Three universities organized the conference: the American University of Beirut (AUB), Eastern Michigan University (EMU), and the University of Michigan (UM). Funding came primarily from the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development (DIIFSD). The conference aimed to reach three goals: 1) to review current research on family ties and aging in the region; 2) to identify how research findings may inform and influence policy that enhances the well being of older adults and families; and 3) to facilitate linkages across nations and disciplines to further support links between researchers and policy makers.
Neighbors for Smiling Babies (LHMA), researchers, practitioners, and policy makers discussed critical topics for the aging population and their families in Lebanon. The first roundtable discussion centered around challenges to instituting environmental changes to make cities in Lebanon more age-friendly. The second roundtable discussion addressed a sensitive issue related to providing end of life care in a manner that is culturally and religiously accepted by older adults and their family members in Lebanon. During this discussion in which Dr. Wael Ammar, Director General of Health at the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, participated, the topics of home care and providing opioids to older adults with painful terminal illness were discussed.

The conference concluded with a discussion on how the momentum generated during the two-day event may be expanded outside the walls of the university. Future directions include organizing a special edited volume on family ties and aging for both a regional scientific journal and an international scientific journal, participating in international scientific meetings, and expending efforts in reaching out to the media as well as various community and civil society groups to increase awareness of the importance of thinking and talking about aging in Lebanon.

Research Study

Neighborhood Effect of Narghile Smoking on Adolescents: A Determining Factor for Health

By the year 2030, ten million deaths per year will be attributable to tobacco, and 70% of these will occur in “developing” countries. Morbidity and mortality estimates related to tobacco use have mostly focused on cigarettes. Recent studies have indicated that youth in developing countries are more likely to be smoking alternative forms of tobacco such as water pipe, also known as narghile. Few studies have investigated the influences on initiation of narghile smoking in adolescents. However, the available research has indicated similar patterns of influence as those suggested for cigarettes. In addition to these factors, research is increasingly pointing to the neighborhoods that people live in as a determining factor for health. The current research intended to assess the neighborhood effect on narghile smoking of adolescents.

A quantitative interview was completed with 1294 adolescents, 13-20 years, in Greater Beirut. In all neighborhoods, the neighborhoods that people live in as a stratification variable. About 60% of respondents had ever tried a narghile, about one fifth continued to smoke. Adolescents in all three communities who smoked narghile beyond their first puff tended to be not only frequently enrolled in school and had friends who smoked narghile, their health outcomes were also poorer in general. In addition, smokers in each neighborhood had characteristics of their own.

The variable found to be significant at the bivariate level dropped out in the multivariate analysis. In all neighborhoods, the influence of friends was the predominant predictor of narghile smoking. Having friends who encouraged smoking increased the odds of smoking by 2-6 times depending on neighborhood. Other factors that affected the likelihood of continuing to smoke included a protective effect of being female and exercising, and an almost four times increase in the odds of smoking among adolescents who were smoker’s father smoked in Nabaa; and a protective effect of being female, cigarette smoking, religiosity and the belief that narghile smoking is more harmful in Beirut El Barajneh.

In addition, there was a three-fold increase in the odds of smoking among older adolescents and a two fold increase among those adolescents whose fathers smoked in Beirut El Barajneh. The mechanisms of influence of neighborhoods on health are not clearly understood, but a transactional paradigm which are influential in the uptake of this behavior.

This research was made possible by generous support from the Wellcome Trust, Mellon Foundation and Ford Foundation.
The Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth (CCCC)

The Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth (CCCC) research network was recently awarded a grant of $500,000 for a study in Egypt, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territories and Syria. The proposed research, titled “Cultural, economic, social and health systems impacts on health-seeking behavior in Arab Countries’” was attended by over 150 members. The project was linked to the collaborative research carried out by the center and talked about ways to link scientific evidence to policy change, pointing to a number of research projects (local and regional) related to young people’s and women’s health including the one on Tobacco Control. From Diwan, he also mentioned the importance of bridging the gap between the academic community, civil society and policy makers to better promote public health and translate scientific evidence into reality, noting that AUB-TCRG is a good example of such initiatives.

Youth Working Group presents on Qaderoon at the IUHPE World Conference in Geneva

The 20th International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) World Conference on Health Promotion was held in Geneva from July 11 to 15. Over two thousand professionals and decision makers from all over the world attended this triennial event.

The conference was intended to provide opportunities to: present and discuss state-of-the-art knowledge and emerging issues in health promotion and sustainable development; showcase and challenge best practice in health promotion, with focus on sustainability; and initiate strong alliances and partnerships for promoting sound policies and practices that positively impact the health of people, societies and the world.

The Youth Working Group was represented by its members Professors Rima Nakkash and Judy Makhoul, Ms. Taghreed El Hajj and Ms. Pascale Haddad who presented a dissemination meeting on October 20th, 2010 for the midwives and obstetricians of Saflit Public Hospital to show the progress of a one year capacity-building intervention to improve childbirth care based on best practices, where monitoring illustrates a clear decrease in routine harmful practices.

Bedouin Health Project holds closing ceremony at AUB’s Agricultural Research and Education Center in the Bekaa.

A Community Health Volunteer receiving her award from Dr. Chatty the Principle Investigator from Oxford, Dr. Zanyuk, Director of CRPH of AUB and M. Nuwayhid, president of the Chronic Care Center and Program Advisor, talked about ways to link teaching at FHS which integrated topics over process. The project was linked to the collaborative research carried out by the center and talked about ways to link scientific evidence to policy change, pointing to a number of research projects (local and regional) related to young people’s and women’s health including the one on Tobacco Control.

The Tobacco Control Research Group: Moving forward in Policy Advocacy

Over the past 6 months, the Tobacco Control Research Group (TCRG) has been active in its efforts to encourage the government to adopt tobacco control measures, capitalising on the momentum gained from increased advocacy and awareness measures. In June, the TCRG and the Syrian Center for Tobacco Studies (CTC) collaborated with Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) Eastern Mediterranean region and the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco (SRNT) in the Middle East and at AUB on ‘Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) policies and their implementation in Arab Countries’ (June 28 to July 1, 2010). Objectives of the workshop included: identifying the recent evidence on interventions; specifying research methods needed for monitoring and evaluation; discussing application of FCTC interventions in Arab countries; sharing experiences of implementation; and developing a plan of action.

Professor Huda Zaryuk, director of the CRPH, opened with an overview of the collaborative research carried out by the center and talked about ways to link scientific evidence to policy change, pointing to a number of research projects (local and regional) related to young people’s and women’s health including the one on Tobacco Control. FHS Dean Iman Nuwayhid, also discussed the importance of bridging the gap between the academic community, civil society and policy makers to better promote public health and translate scientific evidence into reality, noting that AUB-TCRG is a good example of such initiatives.
CRPH Affiliate News

Abdulrahim, Sawsan
Assistant Professor, Department of Health Promotion and Community Health
sawsan@aub.edu.lb
Sawsan Abdulrahim is conducting a survey study, funded by the Issam Fares Institute, on the perceptions and attitudes of Lebanese citizens towards granting women after breast cancer. Mrs. Hrawi, the TCRG in collaboration with the presence of Health Minister Mohamad Khalifeh, the TCRG in collaboration with the parliamentary committee for public health, labor, and social affairs, and the Tobacco Control Program (NTCP) invited parliamentarians to a reception at AUB. Twenty-two Lebanese MPs endorsed a strong tobacco control bill under discussion in Parliament. This was attended and supported the event.

El Kä, Faysal
Senior Lecturer, Department of Health Promotion and Community Health
fla01@aub.edu.lb
In 2010, Faysal El Kä presented a poster on Lebanese doctors and the HPV vaccine, at the IPV meeting, in Montreal, Canada. He also participated as a trainer in the World Sexuality Institute Training, in Jakarta in September 2010. In October, he presented on The Burden of Sexual Health in Dubai and in November he participated both as an advisor on youth friendly services at a meeting by International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), in Istanbul and in the global workshop on cervical cancer prevention in New York.

Habib, Rima
Associate Professor, Department of Environmental Health; rima.habib@aub.edu.lb
Rima Habib organized and moderated a symposium in the EcoHealth Conference of the International Association for Ecology and Health, held at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in London August 18 to 20, 2010. Five International speakers took part in this special session entitled An EcoHealth Approach for Environmental and Social Justice. She also organized a special session for the Special International track on Environmental and Occupational Justice in the Global Health Annual Meeting held in Denver Colorado between 6 and 10 November, 2010. Habib gave a presentation on Migrant Agricultural Workers in Lebanon: Our Harvest of Shame in the session which was moderated by Nancy Kriger of the Harvard School of Public Health. Habib also organized and moderated a session entitled Child Labor in the Eastern Mediterranean Region at the 8th Eastern Mediterranean Scientific Meeting of the International Epidemiology Association, from 25 to 27 November 2010 in Beirut.

Nakkaush, Rima
Assistant Research Professor, Department of Health Promotion and Community Health; m026@aub.edu.lb
Rima Nakkaush attended and presented at the Public Health Education (SOPHE) and the Centers for Disease Control conference in Atlanta from April 7 to 9, 2010 on: Process evaluation of “Qaderoon”: a community based mental health promotion intervention for refugees (poster) and An evaluation of existing smoking ban in Lebanon: Building evidence for policy advocacy (oral). Last year she received a grant for a project on Informing tobacco control policy in Lebanon: Evaluation of the impact of pictorial warning on cigarette packs on initiation of smoking and quitting intentions from Action on Smoking and Health International in October 2009; and is Co-PI on project granted by the Qatar National Research Foundation for a project entitled: Controlling use of nargile smoking: Testing the impact of a modified Controlled Trial (RCT) of a School-based prevention program in Lebanon and starting October 2010.

Nuwayhid, Iman
Professor and Dean, Department of Environmental Health; nuwayhid@aub.edu.lb
Iman Nuwayhid presented a paper on “War, Environment and Health” at the EcoHealth Conference in London, August 2010. From October 3 to 4 he attended the WHO-EMRO regional committee meeting where he accepted, on behalf of FHS, to host the second special session of the meeting in the Eastern Mediterranean Academic Institutions Network (EMRAIN) in Public Health. Nuwayhid also attended the American Public health Association’s (APHA) 138th meeting in November 2010 in Denver, Colorado where he presented a paper entitled “War is a public health crisis, and Occupational Health in Developing Countries”. During his stay in the US, he visited a number of schools of public health, the CDC and the Fogarty International Center to meet and network with potential collaborators and stakeholders.

Wick, Laura
Midwife, Researcher, Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University; lwick@birzeit.edu
Laura Wick attended the Strengthening Midwifery Symposium and the Women’s Health Annual Meeting held in Denver Colorado between 6 and 10 November, 2010.

CRPH Seminar

Rethinking Arab Women as Subjects: Towards theories of being, solving and methodologies of knowing.

This seminar was based on a paper by the same name that queries the domain of “intentionality” or what some would call “agency”, what makes people do what they do and how would we ever know it?

The two main approaches to “intentionality” are: (a) that people have been “drive” theories and (b) relational models. By far the hegemonic approach has been “drive” theory. Formalized by Freud and psychoanalytic schools, drive theory has underwritten most approaches to the subject in the fields of Psychology, and also in Political Science. Schools, for example, Political Economy, Health, and in the popular culture. Based in Psychology, and also in Political Science, relational models were initially rejected by classical psychoanalysts, then became more accepted as a “school” in the 1980’s, particularly when feminists, such as Nancy Chodorow, Jean Baker Miller, Carol Gilligan sophisticated the relational models with gender analysis. By the 1990’s, of course, anthropologists, such as Dorinne Kondo, and the author’s (Suad Joseph) work, were adding a cultural analysis to the relational models. The paper evaluates the constraints and limitations of these approaches as “intentionality” is deployed to construct “the subject”. It then explores the suggestiv approach of Kenneth J. Gergen, Relational Being, (2009) as a segue way into interrogating the concept of “the Arab woman” as subject. The paper explores “Arab women” as subjects in the context of the various political projects which produced the concept of “the Arab woman” as a category of analytical reference. The paper concludes by raising the critical questions, the obstacles which have stood in the way of answers, and the need for more rigorous investigation which might productively be engaged to develop categories of analysis, methodologies, and a vocabulary for research about gendered “subjects” in this historically rich area of the world, which are appropriate for the realities of the 21st century.
Join Us as a Visiting Fellow
CRPH has been sponsoring a Visiting Fellows Program since January 2003. Selected fellows from the Arab region may visit CRPH for one to three months to collaborate with FHS faculty affiliates on ongoing research projects, or to use the Center’s facilities and data resources to undertake their own research. Candidates need to be affiliated with an academic university or research institution, to hold a postgraduate degree and to have good working knowledge of English. A fellowship application may be requested from Mrs. Ruba Ismail, Program Administrator, at crph@aub.edu.lb and should be submitted at least three months prior to the proposed starting date.

The MS in Population Health
The graduate program is designed to provide training in Population Sciences, focusing on the impact of population change on health. It offers basic training in population theory and analysis as well as in quantitative research methods. Students will participate in collaborative research activities with FHS faculty through the Center to gain practical experience. Students will also have access to the Center’s data generated by the Urban Health Study and other studies for thesis research. The university catalogue and graduate admission application form can be requested from the AUB admissions office via e-mail at admissions@aub.edu.lb, or downloaded from http://www.aub.edu.lb

Opportunities for qualified students to receive financial aid are available in the form of Graduate Assistantships, Graduate Scholarships, and other sources of funding, such as FHS administered research grants (when available). Information regarding financial assistance for FHS graduate programs can be obtained from Ms. Mitra Tauk at mt12@aub.edu.lb

Contact Us
To learn more about CRPH research activities, to subscribe to CRPHNews, or to request an application for the Visiting Fellows Program, contact us at:

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July 5 to 7, 2011: The RHWG Annual Meeting will be held in Lebanon.


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