The Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth Research Network held a two-day conference to disseminate 10 years of research on maternal and newborn health in Lebanon and the region. The conference took place on May 17 and 18 at the Riviera Hotel and included local, regional and international participants.

Housed at the CRPH, the aims of the CCCC network are to create scientific evidence on childbirth practices in the region and to understand how maternity care can be made safer and more satisfactory. The specific objectives of the network are producing and publishing high-quality research, disseminating research findings through media and various activities with stakeholders, and encouraging evidence-based practice by health care providers.

Professor Jocelyn DeJong, CCCC Regional Coordinator, gave a historical overview of the network. She said that it started as “B-WELL” group of researchers addressing maternal health in Lebanon and was subsequently joined by researchers in Egypt, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territories interested to document and improve ‘normal childbirth’ (or pregnancies that are not high-risk). The network’s research has resulted in over 40 peer reviewed publications collectively many of which document the lack of full adherence to evidence-based practices for normal birth in hospitals and problems in the quality of care. The region has seen a rapidly increasing rate of cesarean section for example. Moreover, some unnecessary medical procedures (such as routine enema or episiotomy or IV infusion during labor which restricts women’s mobility) are often routine despite not being warranted by the latest scientific evidence.

Ms. Laura Wick from Birzeit University’s Institute of Community and Public Health and coordinator of the Palestinian team summarized research by the network on women’s perspectives of childbirth. She noted that women are not empowered to discuss issues related to their obstetric care and that few women’s groups address maternal health issues.

Dr. Hyam Bashour of Damascus University and coordinator of the Syrian team reported on research by the network that has tested whether certain types of interventions can improve quality of health care.

Professor Tamar Kabakian of FHS, coordinator of the Lebanese team, talked about the network’s research on postpartum care which has documented the underutilization and deficiencies in the type of postpartum services provided. She also spoke about an initiative in Lebanon to produce the “Salamet Hamlik” (Safe Pregnancy) newsletter to provide much needed information on pregnancy, delivery and postpartum issues to women. Dr. Faysal El Kak of FHS and President of the Lebanese Society for Obstetrics and Gynecology spoke of the critical role of professional organizations in the improvement of maternal health care.

Dr. Metin Gulmezoglu of the World Health Organization in Geneva, described some international efforts to improve the quality of maternal health care. Professor Oona Campbell, Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, talked about causes of maternal death and the need to improve quality of care, a focus of

### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRPH News</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Highlights</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Project Updates at CRPH</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRPH Affiliates News</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsored Research Publications</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRPH Seminar</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcements</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About CRPH</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upcoming Events</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measuring Developmental Assets among Youth in the Developing World

A workshop conducted in coordination with Save the Children and World Vision

The CRPH in collaboration with World Vision and Save the Children, hosted a workshop on “Measuring Developmental Assets among Youth in the Developing World” on May 19-20, 2011. This regional workshop aimed to: share experiences of using the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) in various developing country settings; critically analyze the use of the tool by various institutions; and identify implications for prevention programs with youth. About 45 participants who have used, or plan to use the DAP tool attended the event. Participants came from Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, and the US and gave a total of 10 presentations. In addition to participants from country offices of Save the Children and World Vision, there were also representatives from International and Middle East and Eastern Europe World Vision offices, and Middle East and Eurasia Save the Children offices. The Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education was also represented at this workshop. Professor Huda Zurayk, Director of the CRPH, launched the event by welcoming everyone. Then, Rima Nakkash, Assistant Research professor at the CRPH summarized the workshop objectives and agenda, and opened the floor for participants’ introductions and presentations. The keynote speech was given by Mr. Eugene Roelhekparta, Executive Vice President at Search Institute, in which he briefly introduced Search Institute and DAP to the participants, presented results of DAP use outside the United States, and outlined future directions.

The first day’s presentations were on research and practice with DAP in both the Eastern Mediterranean Region and internationally. On the second day, presentations were more about general feedback and a forward look at DAP. Two working groups also addressed, in parallel sessions, these topics: a) Achieving consensus on one Arabic DAP tool; and b) Use of DAP with youth not at school, and with younger age groups. The workshop ended with a summary of lessons learned, and future plans of participants based on their learning experience during this event. Future directions include networking to continue sharing experiences of using DAP, maintaining collaboration with Search Institute and following up on the tool that is being developed by them for younger age groups (9-12 years old); increasing efforts to adapt the tool for vulnerable populations; expanding the coordination between the Arab countries using DAP; and organizing broader meetings.

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a relatively new approach in science aiming at including all community members and institutions under study. That is, the community being studied turns from being merely a “passive subject” to a vital participant whose ideas are taken into account. Furthermore, CBPR exchanges knowledge between researchers and the community and assures ethical conduct by achieving its goals with the active participation and consent of the community itself.

This paper discusses both the successes and the challenges of implementing the CBPR approach in Hay el Sellom, while conducting a community-based randomized trial among currently married women (aged 18-49) complaining of medically unexplained discharge and low to moderate levels of common mental distress. The trial, funded by the Wellcome Trust, was led by a multidisciplinary research team from both the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Medicine at AUB. After the termination of the research project, an evaluation of the CBPR experience was carried out using various qualitative methods: interviews, focus groups, and field notes.

In general, the evaluations showed that the CBPR adopted in Hay el Sellom was perceived to be successful. Understanding the community, ownership of the project, giving the women voices, establishing trust, and challenges encountered were the main five themes brought up by the community in this evaluation. In fact, the community was pleased and surprised that such a diverse set of ideas and courses of action. Women felt a sense of ownership towards the project; they also felt that this project served to take them away from their routines, and helped increase their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Both the Local Women’s Committee (LWC) as well as the Community Advisory Boards ensured the holistic outreach and appropriateness of this project for the women.

Some of the challenges with the CBPR approach included: difficulties in understanding certain scientific and methodological complexities; heavy workload with delayed results and outcomes. Other concerns included the annoyance by some stakeholders that the research team was continuously changing their plans and significant concern over sustainability beyond the research project. In response to this, CRPH is currently assisting the established LWC to set up an NGO, whose focus will be health promotion and awareness in the community.

In all, the CBPR experience was a fruitful one, as it allowed women with limited educational backgrounds to learn about scientific methods of research and it improved their leadership skills. It also helped them gain insights about mental and reproductive health issues of concern to them. The research team gained experience in knowledge extrapolation and practice.


Policy-Makers need to consider Bedouin Health Provision

Bedouins in Lebanon are estimated to represent 2-3% of the population, where most of them benefited from the 1994 normalization law and are domiciled. Living in rural areas and underprivileged neighborhoods, Bedouins continue to suffer from issues like social exclusion and poor health care provision. The aim of this research was to assess the awareness and knowledge of policy-makers regarding the health policies and health status of the Bedouin community in the context of Lebanon. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine health policy makers from the government, private, non-governmental organization sectors, and UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF) on topics related to Bedouin status and livelihood, health policies and current health provision and utilization in relation to reproductive and child health, and interventions towards improving access to and quality of reproductive and child health and well-being.

Results showed that most of the policy-makers interviewed had little to no knowledge of the Bedouin population estimates, identity and status and livelihood, health policies and current health provision in relation to reproductive and child health, and interventions towards improving access to and quality of reproductive and child health and well-being. Policy-makers need to consider Bedouin Health Provision Bedouins in Lebanon are estimated to represent 2-3% of the population, where most of them benefited from the 1994 normalization law and are domiciled. Living in rural areas and underprivileged neighborhoods, Bedouins continue to suffer from issues like social exclusion and poor health care provision. The aim of this research was to assess the awareness and knowledge of policy-makers regarding the health policies and health status of the Bedouin community in the context of Lebanon. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine health policy makers from the government, private, non-governmental organization sectors, and UN agencies (UNFPA, UNICEF) on topics related to Bedouin status and livelihood, health policies and current health provision and utilization in relation to reproductive and child health, and interventions towards improving access to and quality of reproductive and child health and well-being. Results showed that most of the policy-makers interviewed had little to no knowledge of the Bedouin population estimates, identity and status and livelihood, health policies and current health provision and utilization in relation to reproductive and child health, and interventions towards improving access to and quality of reproductive and child health and well-being.

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Research Project Updates at CRPH

Women’s Reproductive Health Working Group conducts research with overarching sustainability

Sustaining the The Relaxation Exercise and Social Support Trial (RESS) in Hay el Sollom was the main concern raised by the community after the completion of this community-based randomized trial in Hay el Sollom, which was coordinated by the CRPH and funded by the Welcome Trust. In response to this concern, the CRPH assisted the community women, particularly the established Local Women’s Committee (LWC), in setting up an NGO in Hay el Sollom to cater to some of the community’s health and social issues and continue the implementation of the psycho-social intervention package (combined relaxation exercise and semi-structured support groups) delivered in RESST.

Women approached by this NGO would include any women in the community between 18-50 years, irrespective of social or educational background.

The objectives of the NGO are as follows: 1) Integrating the women of Hay el Sollom in the local community and giving them a forum for expression; 2) by engaging women’s mental health by implementing the semi-structured support groups and relaxation exercises delivered in RESST; 3) raising health awareness at large.

For the NGO to be set up, the LWC first needed assistance in legal, administrative, and financial matters. Beyond Reform & Development - Irada Group (BRD-I Group), a social enterprise working on governance and political reform in Lebanon and the Arab World, contributed its time and expertise and conducted capacity building workshops for the women. The workshops focused on setting the NGO’s mission and vision, developing the internal structure as well as developing roles and responsibilities. The women were also coached for designing yearly action plans and setting measurable indicators to evaluate desired outcomes, as well as writing up proposals to solicit funding, and developing communication strategies to increase the NGO outreach.

Youth Working Group holds Writers’ Retreat

The Youth Working Group made up of 6 faculty members (Sawsan Abud rahman, Rima Affifi, Mayada Kani, Jihad Malhouth, Rima Nakkaah, and Ziyad Mahfoud, and 4 research assistants (Hala Alalou, Dima Bteidini, Taghreed El-Hajj and Pascale Haddad) gathered for a 3-day writing retreat from the 22nd to the 24th of February, 2011. The purpose of the retreat was to focus on writing three papers related to the ‘Qaderoon’ or ‘We are capable’ project. The retreat took place in the old REP conference room from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm.

The group was joined by Dr. Trudy Harpham, the scientific advisor of the Youth Working Group. Harpham is an Emeritus Professor at London School Bank South University and Honorary Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in the UK.

‘Qaderoon’ is a project that focused on a priority health problem (mental health) in a group of low income urban refugee youth that used an innovative conceptual framework (positive youth development) with evidence of effectiveness to guide the intervention design. More specifically, it assessed the impact of a social skills and social support intervention on the mental health of Palestinian refugee children ages 10 to 13 years living in Beirut using an experimental pre post control group design. The intervention focused on: developing the internal structure as well as developing roles and responsibilities; the women were also coached for designing yearly action plans and setting measurable indicators to evaluate desired outcomes, as well as writing up proposals to solicit funding, and developing communication strategies to increase the NGO outreach.

The three papers are: “Community based participatory interventions in complex settings: clean minds, dirty hands” -Determinants of mental health among Palestinian refugee youth in Beirut” and “Mental health of youth in a Palestinian refugee camp: Evaluation of a social skills intervention in Beirut, Lebanon”.

The benefits of a writing retreat are that it provides the team a venue to concentrate on moving manuscripts forward, on discussing results and writing without the interruption of daily schedules. Writing together in a collegial, supportive atmosphere fueled with a variety of refreshments made it a productive and enjoyable experience.

Bedouin Health Working Group

Following up on the Bedouin Health Project that was part of the GIZ community-based research projects (2007 – 2010), the FHS Outreach and Practice Unit (OPU) has produced the Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) Manual, a hands-on manual to help CHVs in their community health work. The CHV Manual was designed and designed by external resource persons and published in some local newspapers.

A student art project workshop for lawyers on “Tobacco Control Litigation and Legal issues”, with the collaboration of “Human Rights Institute” part of the Lawyers Syndicate. The training aimed at informing and training a group of recruited Lebanese lawyers about current tobacco control policy, how litigation is used to advocate for tobacco control, and to review the most recent draft law.
The Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Project

This research is made possible by a generous 2-year grant (May 2011 and 2012) to the Lebanese Healthcare System, and the second will address sexuality education in the MENA region.

In February 2011, the team coordinated and led a three-day workshop in AUB on youth reproductive and sexual health knowledge and teaching skills. Participants included public school counselors selected by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Upcoming training activities include a series of one-day workshops targeting health educators in all public schools. Besides sexuality education, YSRHP is also involved in improving the integration of sexuality and sexual health in public schools. Besides sexuality education, YSRHP is also involved in improving the integration of sexuality and sexual health in public schools.

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CRPH Seminars

In India, Muslim children exhibit lower child mortality than Hindu children, in part because Muslim mothers are poorer and less educated —characteristics typically associated with higher child mortality. Using data from the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-3, 2015) and the NFHS-2, 2005-06, we find that Muslim mothers are less likely than Hindu mothers to have completed any formal education, and they are also less likely to engage in social activities, such as participating in community organizations. These differences persist even after controlling for socio-economic status. However, they found no evidence for this hypothesis in the NFHS-3 data. They did, however find that those who are poor and have lower education and social status also have higher child mortality.

Osman has been actively involved in the establishment of a National Committee on Palliative Care and Palliative Care which will be working to set a national strategy for the development of palliative care in Lebanon. She has also been investigating opportunities to set up a palliative care research network.

In May 2011 she presented her work on palliative care at the International Primary Palliative Care Research Group in Lisbon, Portugal on the development of palliative care in Lebanon and the potential for developing research networks in the MENA region.

Abla Sibai

She has recently been appointed to the Eastern Mediterranean Region of the International Network for Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA). She also developed and launched the Center for Palliative Care (CAP) website (http://www.csa.org.lb), providing up-to-date information on the activities of the Center and the other associations and partners involved in the well-being of the seniors, in Lebanon and the Region.

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CRPH Seminar

Hindu-Muslim Differences in Child Mortality in India, 2015

Presented by Professor Michel Guillot, School of Arts & Sciences, University of Pennsylvania

In India, Muslim children exhibit lower child mortality than Hindu children, in part because Muslim mothers are poorer and less educated —characteristics typically associated with higher child mortality. Using data from the National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-3, 2015) and the NFHS-2, 2005-06, we find that Muslim mothers are less likely than Hindu mothers to have completed any formal education, and they are also less likely to engage in social activities, such as participating in community organizations. These differences persist even after controlling for socio-economic status. However, they found no evidence for this hypothesis in the NFHS-3 data. They did, however find that those who are poor and have lower education and social status also have higher child mortality.

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Announcements

Visit us here: http://www.aub.edu.lb/fhs/crph/ for more news and information on research projects, events and publications

Upcoming Events

July 5-7, 2011 The Reproductive Health Working Group will be meeting in Tyre, Lebanon, for its 23rd Annual Conference

About CRPH

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

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