Dear Colleagues:

In January 2002, the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at the American University of Beirut launched the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH), with generous support from the Wellcome Trust and contributions from the Mellon Foundation and the Ford Foundation. The Center has begun its work at a promising time in the development of population and health research for the Arab region. In recent years the number of research groups established in the region has been growing, marking increasing levels of regional collaboration and synergy.

This issue of CRPH News is the first in a series of newsletters designed to inform researchers and policy makers about the Center's research activities, study outputs and new research initiatives and opportunities unfolding under the auspices of the Center. We hope these updates will serve as a catalyst for increasing collaboration and information exchange among researchers with whom we share an interest in the social issues affecting the health of our region's populations.

We invite you to visit our Web site at http://departments.aub.edu.lb/~webcrph to learn more about CRPH and its activities and to share your news with us regarding other relevant research being undertaken in the region.

Marwan Khawaja, PhD
Director
Center for Research on Population and Health

A Message from the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences

The establishment of AUB's Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) is a happy event at the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), building on our ongoing concern for issues at the intersection of population and health. As far back as three decades ago, researchers at FHS were involved in various individual research projects addressing population health issues in Lebanon and the region, including studies of fertility and family planning, mortality, migration, and women's status. In 1982, the compelling social conditions of the civil war gave rise to a collaborative study, among numerous FHS faculty, of the city of Beirut's population, focusing on the health effects of the war. The study was repeated ten years later in 1992. These two collaborative efforts have provided valuable community-based health information for policy makers at a time when public health surveillance systems were virtually nonexistent, and have paved the way for interdisciplinary population-based research at FHS.

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Published bi-annually by the Center for Research on Population and Health at the Faculty of Health Sciences at AUB
Ongoing Research Projects

Two exciting research initiatives are already underway at the Center: 1) an urban health study in outer Beirut and 2) changing childbirth in the Arab region. Both studies are collaborative projects involving all of our faculty affiliates, including researchers from the region.

Urban Health Study

As part of the research initiative on the health consequences of population change, the Center is undertaking an urban health study in three communities at the outskirts of Beirut. The study aims to provide policy-relevant analysis of the health consequences of population change in the context of impoverished urban settings.

The study explores the social, economic, and environmental conditions influencing various dimensions of health, with a focus on poverty, social capital, gender division of labor, work of women, displacement and migration, and the physical environment. The project also aims to enable policy makers and researchers to diagnose and monitor health problems, assess the utilization of health services, identify health risk behaviors, and examine the social dynamics impacting health and well-being. The project examines the health of families and in particular, the health of adolescents, women, and the elderly in rapidly changing areas surrounding Beirut.

To achieve these objectives, the study includes data from in-depth qualitative research and a survey of some 3,000 households in the three communities: Hay El-Selloum, Naba’a, and Bourj El-Barajneh Palestinian refugee camp.

An ethnographic research of the life conditions of residents of the three communities surrounding Beirut began in December 2001. This research aimed at identifying and generating knowledge of the social inequalities in the three communities, and identifying and explaining the wider conditions that have produced them. The survey is being conducted in two phases. The Phase I survey took place between May and July 2002 and covered household information (demographics, education, income, women and work, physical environment. The project also aims to enable policy makers and researchers to diagnose and monitor health problems, assess the utilization of health services, identify health risk behaviors, and examine the social dynamics impacting health and well-being. The project examines the health of families and in particular, the health of adolescents, women, and the elderly in rapidly changing areas surrounding Beirut.

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A View from the Field

A Researcher’s Experiences

Phase I of data collection was a challenging as well as didactic experience for both the Center and the fieldworkers at various levels, and in ways specific to the histories and conditions of each community. Each community was distinct in its socio-cultural makeup. In Borj El-Basarneh camp, for example, conducting academic research and highlighting its value among a stateless refugee population at a time where the second Intifada has nearly finished its second year is, to say the least, extremely difficult. However, their hospitality, warmth, and will to survive and to make their cause internationally recognized made our task easier to manage and justify to the Palestinian refugee community first and foremost and to ourselves second.

In Naba’a, an area that is mainly inhabited by people who were displaced during the civil war in Lebanon, it was emotionally strenuous yet meaningful to witness poverty, disease, the pain and pride of people living under such conditions, and the ways in which they cope and try to make sense of their lives. The fact that our field office was located in the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) community center helped in making MOSA’s services better known to the community and informed its yearly action plan as well.

In Hay El-Selloum, an informal densely-populated settlement of migrants which was originally an olive grove, the most salient challenge was to operate in a context whereby access to basic civic and governmental services is very limited. For first-time visitors the scarcity of such services is especially evident when roaming around the neighborhoods, which are adjacent to El-Ghadir River, a river whose color, unlike its odor, probably varies seasonally. Nevertheless inhabitants cope with such conditions in simple ways which might be regarded as absurd by non-locals, such as smoking Nargileh and playing cards outdoors. An equally striking experience that raised a number of important questions about strategies and tactics for bringing about change and development was seeing a woman tossing a garbage bag from her iron bar window into the river.

Raghda Hafez

Changing Childbirth in the Arab Region

Following a collaborative regional research initiative on “Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth,” a research group encompassing researchers from Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon was successfully established with the aim of creating scientific evidence on changing childbirth practices, including hospitals and home care, in the region to understand how maternity care can be made safer for women and their newborns and increase the responsiveness of health personnel, practices, and services to the needs and wishes of women. This group aims at working collaboratively with policy makers, professionals, associations, health care providers, and women to determine research priorities in these countries.

The Center for Research on Population and Health and FHS acted as a focal point in supporting the creation of the regional research group and providing capacity building and skills development through workshops and visiting fellows. Through this support the different country teams worked together to identify opportunities for possible joint childbirth research activities across countries and benefited from each other’s experiences. Within the above scope several activities were undertaken:

FHS hosted a workshop on “Policy Analysis on Childbirth Issues” on May 30-June 1, 2003, with 26 researchers from Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine as well as FHS faculty. During that workshop, participants were familiarized with several tools of policy analysis, including the use of “Polimap” software developed by Reich and Coop as a tool for policy analysis. They were also given the opportunity of brainstorming possible country studies and of sharing results of studies already taking place in Egypt and Lebanon on childbirth practices.

Following that workshop, several proposals from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon were received at FHS. To support the needs of developing the conceptual framework and methodology of some of the proposals, a second regional workshop was conducted on June 3-4, 2002, on “Proposal Development.” Research collaborators from Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon presented their research proposals through teamwork, interactive discussions, skills enhancement, and support of experts in the field.

Between these two workshops the country teams met several times to reinforce their collaboration. Regional meetings of the Changing Childbirth Research Group were held during the annual Reproductive Health Working Group meeting in July 2001 in Alexandria, Egypt, and in July 2002, in Bloudan, Syria, where the regional researchers discussed their respective research strategies. Finally, mutual visits between the Syrian and the Lebanese teams occurred to share ideas and strengthen capacities and skills.

This year, further studies looking at the policy environment of specific childbirth issues will be conducted in Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine as well as studies describing childbirth practices in Syria and Palestine. These studies will create the basis for the planning and implementation of innovative interventions to improve quality of maternity services in the region. Results of the studies will be disseminated to the scientific community through publications in peer-reviewed journals and to key policy makers and health professionals through locally and regionally organized workshops.
Wellcome Trust Visits CRPH

On September 16-17, 2002, a delegation from the Wellcome Trust consisting of Drs. Wendy Ewart, Zebbie Ikram, and Oona Campbell, paid a two-day site visit to FHS and CRPH where they met with the dean of FHS and several CRPH faculty affiliates. CRPH was pleased to have the opportunity to update the Wellcome Trust representatives on progress achieved in the implementation of the Wellcome Trust-funded research program as well as to discuss the continuation of research through new initiatives on urban health as well as research capacity building in the region. Dr. Rima Habib, CRPH field coordinator, and other faculty affiliates accompanied the delegation for a field visit to two of the communities (Hey El-Selloum and Bourj El-Barajneh refugee camp) in the outskirts of Beirut selected for the Urban Health Study.

Research Seminar Series

Recently the Center was pleased to host four visiting scholars to give talks in the CRPH colloquia series. In May 2002 Dr. Suad Joseph, professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies at the University of California at Davis presented the first seminar, entitled "Family as Politics." In her lecture Dr. Joseph underscored the importance of conceptualizing family in its plural sense as practices and relationships. She also suggested that family is a historically and culturally constructed institution and used the extended family and kin contact, their interconnectedness to kinship and civic myth, to unravel how some political communities are constructed.

Dr. Kathryn M. Yount, assistant professor of International Health and Sociology at Emory University, visited FHS and CRPH in June and presented the findings of a study that used secondary data to explore gender differences among older women and men in Egypt and Tunisia. Dr. Yount's research focused on self-reporting of health status, self-reporting of functional limitation (ability of an individual to perform a task), use of health care services, socio-economic status, and social support.

In November, Dr. Laurie Brand, professor at University of Southern California, School of International Relations and president-elect of the Middle East Studies Association of North America addressed the FHS community on "States and Emigration Policy: Examples from Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco." In her lecture, Dr. Brand pointed out that despite the tremendous increase in interest in recent years in questions related to international migration and diasporas across regions and disciplines, only a small fraction of scholarly or policy-related work has focused on the sending state. Her presentation examined the concept of "emigration policy" as opposed to the more commonly discussed "immigration policy," and attempted to more fully develop the content of such a concept with special focus on state institutions that are responsible for some aspect of expatriate affairs. Concrete examples from Morocco (the Ministry for the Moroccan Community Resident Abroad), Tunisia (the Diwan for Tunisians Resident Abroad), and Lebanon (the Ministry of Expatriates) were explored.

In December 2002 Tristan Khayat, associate researcher at CERMOC, gave a talk about "Population Shifting in Naba'a." Khayat discussed the political control of an urban space whereby he highlighted the denial of the social problems of Naba’a— which is part of Børj Hammoud municipality that emerged in the 1940s—in the official Lebanese discourse. In examining the history of the latter discourse he revealed the memory loss with respect to the process of relocating the Armenian refugees and the self-building of the community which was regarded as a uniquely successful experience. In the mid-1940s, and as a result of population changes, such as the return of some refugees to Soviet Armenia and the Shiite displacement into the area, a shift in the ideological representation of Naba’a took place. Thus the problems of the community were considered not as an urban problem but rather as a cultural one, as a city reintegration issue. The post-war era, however, witnessed the beginning of the recognition of the problems; albeit for political power-related reasons.

Join Us as a Visiting Fellow

The Center is sponsoring a Visiting Fellows Program to begin January 2003. Selected fellows from the Arab Region may visit CRPH for a period of one to three months to collaborate with FHS faculty affiliates on ongoing research projects, or to undertake their own research, utilizing the facilities of the Center and its data resources. Resources for research include access to the CRPH computer lab and limited computing support for data entry and statistical analysis, as well as access to the CRPH library and regional data sets.

Candidates must have an affiliation with an academic (university) or research institution, must hold a postgraduate degree, and must have a good working knowledge of English. A fellowship application and list of required documents may be requested from Ms. Ruba Ismail, program administrator, via e-mail at crph@aub.edu.lb. The fellowship application should be submitted at least three months prior to the proposed start date of the fellowship.

Graduate Assistantships, Graduate Scholarships, and stipends are available to qualified students who have completed the social sciences or epidemiology requirements. For more information please contact Dr. Youssef A. Saleh at crph@aub.edu.lb.

Announcing the Master of Science in Population Health at FHS

This fall the Faculty of Health Sciences enrolled its first graduate students in the new Master of Science in Population Health program. Students enrolled in this program will participate in collaborative research activities with FHS faculty through the Center to gain practical hands-on experience. Students will also have access to the Center’s data generated by the Urban Health Study and other studies for their thesis research.

Candidates must have an affiliation with an academic (university) or research institution, must hold a postgraduate degree, and must have a good working knowledge of English. A fellowship application and list of required documents may be requested from Ms. Ruba Ismail, program administrator, via e-mail at crph@aub.edu.lb. The fellowship application should be submitted at least three months prior to the proposed start date of the fellowship.

The graduate program is designed to provide training in Population Sciences focusing on the impact of population change on health. The program offers basic training in population theory and analysis as well as in quantitative research methods.

The university catalogue and graduate admissions application form can be requested from the AUB admissions office via e-mail at admissions@aub.edu.lb or downloaded from the AUB main web page http://www.aub.edu.lb. The deadline for submitting admission applications for the fall semester of the academic year 2003-04 is April 1, 2003, continuing on a rolling basis until July 31, 2003.

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 research grants (when available), which are administered through FHS. Information regarding financial assistance for FHS graduate programs can be obtained via e-mail from Arabia Mohammad Ali Osseiran at am05@aub.edu.lb.
Growing research activities in Population Health at FHS and CRPH, and the addition of the new master's degree in Population Health, have generated the need for additional faculty in Demography, Sociology, and related fields. The Department of Epidemiology and Population Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences is currently seeking a candidate with a PhD and a strong research and teaching record to teach students in the Master of Population Health and Master of Science in Population Health programs. Candidates working in the area of population health/reproductive health are preferred. Interested candidates should submit a complete resume, statement of teaching and research interests, and the names of three references to

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The deadline for receipt of applications is February 15, 2003, for a starting date of September 15, 2003. The American University of Beirut is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.

How to Contact Us

To learn more about the Center’s research activities, to subscribe to the newsletter, or to request an application for the Visiting Fellows Program, contact us:

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