In This Issue:

Welcome to the second issue of the Center for Research and Population Health (CRPH) news. This issue provides information on the Center’s work with community stakeholders in the Urban Health Study (UHS). It also provides an update on the progress of the UHS and another collaborative research project currently underway on changing childbirth in the Arab region, which has received generous support from the Wellcome Trust, the Mellon Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

In addition, we introduce the interdisciplinary team of CRPH Affiliates from the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at AUB and other institutions in the Arab world. Information on activities undertaken under the auspices of the Center is provided as well.

Urban Health Study

Lebanon is considered to be a test case of the rapid demographic transitions and socio-economic changes taking place in the Arab world. These transformations have been accompanied by epidemiological changes, with a noticeable rise in chronic diseases and health risk behaviors. The study, which involved nearly all of our faculty affiliates, seeks to highlight the impact of those changes on the health and well being of individuals and families in an impoverished urban context, as a step towards improving the quality of life of ‘marginalized’ communities.

The survey was conducted in two phases. Phase I looked at household information like income, demographics, education, and women and work. Phase II consisted of three main themes: reproductive health, adolescent health and the health of the elderly. The section on reproductive health concentrated on the reproductive health of women in the areas of reproductive choice, successful childbearing, gynecological disease and risk, and dignity. The section on adolescent health assessed the prevalence of risk behaviors among adolescents with special emphasis on tobacco use, the age adolescents are initiated into these behaviors and the context within which these behaviors occur. Phase II also assessed the relationship between socio-economic status and retirement and its effects on the mental and physical health of the elderly.

Dissemination and Outreach

CRPH held a meeting during May 2003 to share the initial findings of Phase I of its Urban Health Study with stakeholders from the three communities.

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A CRPH dissemination meeting

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Changing Childbirth in the Arab Region

Planning Intervention Studies

The Regional project on Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth, which aims to make maternity safer and more satisfactory for women, has been running since April 2001. A number of studies are currently ongoing in the four countries participating to examine the policy environment for specific childbirth issues and describe childbirth practices.

The projects were selected to complement the knowledge accumulated by previously conducted research about childbirth practices in the Arab region. The ultimate aim is to provide a solid foundation for planning future intervention studies. For this purpose, CRPH and FHS hosted a two-day workshop during July 2003 as part of the Childbirth Research Group’s activities.

Collaborating researchers from Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon participated along with Dr. Jocelyn Deljoum from the University of Manchester. A number of working sessions were carried out with the aim of brainstorming the development of intervention studies. Examples of the identified potential areas of intervention include: raising women’s awareness on postpartum health issues in Syria, improving providers’ performance in specific procedures in Egypt, providing choices to women for companionship during labor and delivery and improving physician’s C-section practices in Lebanon. The group also discussed the importance and the challenges in targeting providers’ behaviors in the Arab region might face.

Readers Present Their Work

The Regional Childbirth Research Group presented their work in a session during the Reproductive Health Working Group (RHWG) meeting which took place in Beirut during July. A number of studies looking at C-section practices and the prevalence of the procedure in the region were presented. Some studies used DHS and PAKHILD data to gain a comparative view of the situation in the region, while others like the study in Palestine used hospital records.

Preliminary findings from the Lebanon study indicate that C-section rates increase with the risk of preterm birth, a woman’s age, high social class and with smoking in pregnancy. At the regional level, the findings show that the rate ranges from 1.5% in Yemen to 16% in Bahrain, with Egypt and Sudan having the highest rates (20%). As reported by the Palestine team, previously conducted research suggests a national C-section prevalence rate of about 8.8% and a hospital rate of 15%, with road closures and other restrictions during the first and second trimester apparently having an effect on the rate. At the Mughassel Hospital, the site of the Palestinian birthing study, about 28% of C-sections performed were elective while 72% were emergency procedures.

The Egypt team presented a description of the steps and phases of their project on postpartum practices in a teaching hospital. After identifying these practices as problematic, the group will then ascertain the stated policy, clarify the actual policy, and try to understand the obstacles to following the policy by analyzing the viewpoints of the stakeholders. The group will concentrate on the roles stakeholders play in either obstructing the policy or in carrying it out. Following the analysis, recommendations will be made to address the most pressing problems affecting normal childbirth at the study hospital and a participatory workshop to operationalize the findings will follow.

The Syria study, which employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, was also presented. This study focuses on understanding women’s perceptions, the preferences and choices of caregivers as well as gaining an insight into their childbirth experiences. A total of 500 women residing in Damascus and rural Damascus were recruited using the national birth register, from which 30 were selected for the semi-structured in-depth interviews.

CRPH is closely involved in the qualitative part of the Syrian birthing study by providing technical advice and support. Mutual visits between the team and staff members are currently underway for the purpose of working on the analysis and development of research papers.

Preliminary insights from the qualitative part of the project indicate that for women who are facing economic hardship, the question of choice in relation to caregiver is not an issue for women rather its lack and limitation. Switching caregivers does not appear to be based simply on choice or preference and might occur several times during pregnancy in the pursuit of cheap and, hopefully but not assuredly, quality care. The memories of previous experiences play an important part in the birth ritual as well as during pregnancy whereby discomfort, fear, and happiness seem to be the dominant feelings. Nevertheless, these feelings and their intensity are not the same for all women and include fear of changes in body image for affluent women experiencing their first pregnancy.

The presentations of the Regional Childbirth Research Group during the RHWG included the work of the Lebanon providers study on sexuality, the objectives of which are to examine women’s consumption patterns for sexual complaints and to explore the readiness of physicians to provide care for these problems. The most common problems reported in face-to-face interviews with physicians are: pain during intercourse, loss of pleasure during sex, and anorgasmia. In terms of their readiness to care for women with sexual problems, the study shows that female providers are more comfortable than male providers, and recent graduates are more comfortable than older practitioners.

The next planned meeting of the regional project on Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth will take place during October 2003, in order to finalize proposals for intervention studies in each country and to brainstorm about the next phase of the project.

Fieldwork Finalized

The data collection for Phase II of the study was completed in May 2003. The main challenge during the fieldwork of this phase was for different fieldworkers to gain entry into the households on multiple occasions for the purpose of interviewing members eligible for the study. In addition, there was some difficulty related to the time gap between the two phases because of movement within and outside some of these communities, possibly in the quest for ‘better’ neighborhoods and areas. Securing the consent of the adolescents and that of their parents was also not easy, especially during the school year. However, the field staff’s previous encounters with the families and their expertise in carrying out fieldwork in the study communities helped to overcome some of these obstacles.

Twelve-seventy representatives of non-governmental organizations and political leaders from Hay El-Selloum, Nabaa, and Borj El-Barajneh refugee camp participated in the meeting. In addition to representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA), and the Central Administration of Statistics.

In the opening session, Dr. Huda Zurayk, dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, welcomed the participants and underscored the importance of collaboration and partnership building between researchers at FHS and the communities involved in the study. Dr. Marwan Khawaja, the director of the Center, discussed the socio-economic profile of the study’s subjects and Dr. Rima Habib presented information on housing in the target communities. The dissemination meeting also included findings from the qualitative part of the project, conducted by Dr. Judy Makhoul.

The Center plans to organize community-based workshops to continue the process of exchanging and sharing ideas with the community leaders, and aims to engage stakeholders in the study to ensure the use of its findings in aid programs and policy planning. In this context, transforming academic knowledge into intervention activities and prioritizing intervention measures remains the most challenging task for both the communities and the Center.
refuge in deserted buildings in and around the city. With no apparent building regulations, unplanned construction went unchecked, creating shanty towns in the outskirts of the capital. Poverty and deprivation, overcrowding, congestion, noise, air pollution, as well as problems in access to housing, infrastructure and basic services are some of the issues facing these communities.

Findings of the Urban Health Study show that income poverty is pervasive, with estimates ranging from 15 to 44 percent depending on the measure used. Clear differences among communities are also evident, the refugee population being the most vulnerable. There is clustering of poverty, and close to 60% of inhabitants consider themselves “poor” or otherwise cannot raise L1150,000 ($100) if need arises. Income poverty appears common even among the educated middle-class living there.

**Measures of poverty by community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Low income %</th>
<th>Absolute poverty line</th>
<th>Relative Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hay El-Selloum</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>$2 a day</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naxa</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>$2 a day</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borj El</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>$2 a day</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barajeh</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>$2 a day</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Unofficial national poverty line calculated based on unpublished findings of the Consultation and Research Institute (CRI)**
2. **Per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity as used by the World Bank**
3. **Relative measure of poverty for the three communities combined: 50% of median household adjusted income.**

Despite persistent economic hardships, or perhaps because of them, many (especially men) are delaying marriage; about 40% of men in one community aged 35 years have not been married. The younger generation has limited job prospects, or otherwise restricted access to wage labor. The yearly median household income, which is wage income for the majority, is L16 million. There are indications of income differences within and between these communities with about 45% in one area reporting an annual income of less than L111 million and about 40% in another reporting almost more than triple that amount.

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**CRPH Affiliates**

The Center currently has fourteen Research Affiliates from the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at AUB and other regional institutions. The following list of Affiliates reflects our disciplinary diversity:

**Abdul Meho-Sihai:** PhD, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Chairperson of Epidemiology and Population Health Department, FHS. His research interests are cardiovascular diseases; the elderly population; psychosocial and behavioral risk factors; disability and impairments; routine sources of data collection.

**Faysal El-Kaki:** MD, American University of Beirut; Lecturer of Health Education and Behavior, FHS. His research interests are reproductive health, sexuality and sexual health. He is currently conducting research on perceptions of women in the suburbs of Beirut in the area of reproductive health issues; and perception of providers on sexuality and childbearing practices. He is also a participant in the research initiative on Surveillance and Intervention of Behavioral Risks, which aims to assess health risk behaviors of college students, implement and evaluate interventions.

**Huda Zurayk:** PhD, Johns Hopkins University; Dean of FHS and Professor of Biostatistics. Dean Zurayk co-authored the landmark Giza Study on women, reproduction and health in rural Egypt. She is a founding member of the Regional Reproductive Health Working Group housed at the Population Council in Cairo. Her research interests are reproductive health/women’s health within a holistic perspective of health. Dean Zurayk is one of the principal investigators of the reproductive health research component of the Urban Health Study.

**Hyam Bashour:** MD, Aleppo University; PhD; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Family and Community Health at the Faculty of Medicine, Damascus University. Her research interests are child health, reproductive health, and infectious diseases. She is also the coordinator of the Syrian study of the Center’s Choices and Challenges in the Changing Childbirth project.

**Iman Nuseyhid:** MD, American University of Beirut; DrPH, Johns Hopkins University; Assistant Dean and Associate Professor of Environmental Health, FHS. Her research interests are occupational health; burden of disease; lead toxicity; neurotoxicity; and women and work. He is a principal investigator in the women and work research component of the Center’s Urban Health Study.

**Judy Makkoul:** DrPH, University of Wollongong; Assistant Professor of Health Behavior and Education, FHS. Dr. Makkoul is also the Director of the Health Education and Resource Unit at FHS. Her research interests are development, child labor, and the social context of health. Dr. Makkoul is a principal investigator of the Urban Health Study.

**Karima Khalil:** M.B.B.Ch, Ain Shams University, Egypt; MSc, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Dr. Khalil is a program associate at the Population Council Cairo office, where she coordinates the Reproductive Health Program. She has worked on the design and integration of primary level services addressing common reproductive conditions in Egypt, as well as reproductive morbidity measurement in developing countries. She is currently a coordinator of the Birthing Practices Study, which has documented actual facility practices for normal birth in Egypt for the first time, in an attempt to explore barriers to the provision of quality obstetric care.

**Laura Wick:** midwifery degree, Hopital Cantonal de Geneve; Diplomes in International Health, Universite de Paris VI, Paris, France and in Development Studies from the Institut d’ Etudes du Developpement, Universite de Geneve. Ms. Wick is a researcher and midwife at the Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, Palestine. Her research interests are maternal health care in Palestine and its relation to the development of health policy in a situation of conflict; and comparative childbirth practices and policies.

**Marwan Khawaja:** PhD, Cornell University; Associate Professor of Population Health, FHS and Director of CRPH. His research interests are population health; demography of refugee population; migration; Arab fertility; living conditions; poverty and social exclusion.

**Monique Chaaya:** DrPH, Johns Hopkins University; Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, FHS. Her research interests are the mental health of women in the reproductive age group; the mental health of marginalized groups such as elderly, prisoners of war, delinquents; psychiatric distress in primary care settings; psycho-geriatric assessment; and smoking in pregnancy.

**Rima Alfli-Soweid:** PhD, St. Louis University; Acting Chairperson and Assistant Professor of Health Behavior and Education, FHS. Her research interests are social contextual factors associated with health and health behavior; the multi-level determinants of initiation and sustainment of health risk behaviors; and evaluation of interventions to influence health behavior. She is currently involved in several research projects focused on community-based interventions, adolescents, and tobacco.

**Rima Habib:** PhD, University of New South Wales; Assistant Professor of Environmental Health, FHS. Her research interests are occupational health; radiation and cancer; monitoring of environmental radiation exposure; an ecosystem approach to human health; and women, work and health. She is involved in an international study looking at the effects of occupational ionising radiation exposure among nuclear industry workers. Dr. Habib is a principal investigator of the women, work and health research component of the Center’s Urban Health Study.

**Samer Jabbour:** MD, Aleppo University; MPH, Harvard School of Public Health; Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Clinical Instructor of Medicine, AUB. His research interests are epidemiology and the prevention of cardiovascular disease and its risk factors; tobacco control with focus on smoking.
cessation; and health policy and politics. Dr. Jabbour is conducting research exploring the outcomes of medical management of coronary heart disease, the association between coronary heart disease and water-pipe smoking, patterns of preventive clinical care practice, and approaches to smoking cessation in the Lebanese context.

Tamar Kabakian-Khasholian: PhD, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Assistant Professor of Health Behavior and Education, FHS. Her research interests are reproductive and maternal health. Kabakian-Khasholian has also participated in research on women’s understandings and experiences of reproductive health problems, reported reproductive morbidity, and health care seeking behavior. She is currently coordinating CRPH regional research program on Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth.

Scholars Speak at CRPH

January 2003

Mona Fawwaz, PhD candidate, MIT

“Strategizing for Housing: Land Developers in Hay el Sellom”

Ms. Fawwaz’s presentation was based on her dissertation research in Hay el Sellom, the largest informal settlement in Beirut, a very poor and highly congested neighborhood located at the fringes of the southern suburbs of the Lebanese capital city. The findings indicate that developers involved in land sales and housing construction resorted to public institutions (e.g., land registries, state-recognized topographers) and regulations (state law, urban codes, etc.) recurrently in their operations. Thus, the developers used methods similar to those employed by their counterparts in the formal sector to secure their sales, acquire symbolic legitimacy, and organize the process of land subdivision and construction. These findings contradict the perception that cities grow through rule making by one group and rule breaking by another to show that both the state and residents of informal settlements contribute together in the production of the urban regulations of space.

February 2003

Hala Naufal, Professor of Demography, Lebanese University and Faysal El Kak, Lecturer, Health Behavior and Education, FHS

“Advanced Maternal Age: Population and Health Consequences”

Dr. El-kak summarized the reproductive health outcomes of advanced maternal age. Trends in marriage patterns show an increase in the mean age at marriage. Recent and ongoing advancements in pregnancy care, birth control methods and ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology), coupled with an increased number of women in the labor force and greater equality in the workplace have all had an influence on the timing of childbearing for women in the developed world, and to a lesser extent in developing countries. Accumulated literature has shown an increased association of advanced maternal age with several maternal and neonatal outcomes. Maternal mortality increases with maternal age. This is in part related to the increased rate of Caesarean section with its known complications. These outcomes are mainly related to ovarian aging, meiotic errors, and uterine dysfunction. The speakers called for developing new antenatal care packages in terms of preconception counseling and better pregnancy care for this group of women.

March 2003

Tamar Kabakian-Khasholian, Assistant Professor, Health Behavior and Education, FHS

“Improving Maternal Health: The Postpartum Experience”

In her talk, Dr. Kabakian suggested that despite the wide use of health education programs targeting women around childbirth, the effect of different educational approaches are rarely studied, especially in developing countries. Dr. Kabakian used a randomized controlled design to evaluate the impact of providing postpartum women with written educational material on their satisfaction with care, use of postpartum health services and contraception. The control group received an educational booklet and another group received an educational booklet following the findings of a qualitative study on women’s information needs in the postpartum period. The intervention improved women’s satisfaction with the postpartum period and women’s use of postpartum services. Recommendations were made for the use of studies to evaluate patient education and regulate and standardize maternity services in Lebanon.

April 2003

Malek Batal, Assistant Professor, Nutrition and Food Sciences Department, Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, AUB

“Determinants of Infant Feeding Practices across Lebanon”

Dr. Batal’s study examines the patterns of breastfeeding practice in Lebanon as well as the various social and cultural factors that shape these patterns among several users of health centers in Lebanon. In addressing the FHS community he suggested that the initiation of breastfeeding soon after birth and the maintenance of breastfeeding for at least 4 months have been shown to present advantages for both the mother and the infant. Studies showed that babies fed exclusively on breast milk for a minimum period of 4 months witness fewer episodes of childhood diseases such as gastrointestinal and respiratory infections. Breastfeeding mothers are better protected against breast and ovarian cancers, osteoporosis, and gestational diabetes mellitus than their bottle-feeding counterparts. Despite widespread scientific evidence of the benefits, breastfeeding practices differ widely between and within cultures and societies. Religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, working status, breastfeeding family history, and hospital support are a few among the many determinants of breastfeeding practices.

May 2003

Marwan Khawaja, CRPH Director and Associate Professor of Population Health, FHS

“Familial Support and Labor Force Attachment: The Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon”

Dr. Khawaja presented findings from his study on intra-family support among Palestinians living in Lebanon. The study is based on detailed household survey data from the refugee camps and Palestinian communities in Lebanon using latent class analysis techniques. His findings uncover five latent classes of familial exchange. Two different theoretical models—the equality and receipt-exchange—were used to examine the link between patterns of assistance and labor market conditions. Contrary to the solidarity account, findings indicate no evidence of high familial assistance among the unemployed, or those excluded from the labor market, and this is true regardless of type of exchange. However, the camp population is more likely to engage in exchange relations than their non-camp counterparts. Educated, employed and those with stronger ties to relatives are more likely to be money exchangers. Some policy implications of the findings were also discussed.

June 2003

Hayat Osseiran, National Manager of the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC), International Labor Organization (ILO)

“The Silent Violence of Child Labor and the Different Means for Combating by IPEC Lebanon”

Ms. Osseiran’s talk focused on IPEC Lebanon, which was established during the year 2000 as a result of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Labor and the ILO regional office in Beirut. The program, which targets exploited girls and boys under the age of 16, aims to rehabilitate and withdraw children from the worst forms of child labor in Lebanon as well as prevent others from becoming victims. As a part of the implementation process, IPEC Lebanon coordinates with various stakeholders including civil society groups, organizations and governmental bodies. Its preparatory activities entailed assessing the prevalence of the worst forms of child labor and identifying them as well as determining the types of “hazardous work” that exist.

CRPH Launches the Visiting Research Fellowship Program

CRPH hosted three visiting Research Fellows this summer.

Dr. Hyam Bashour, also a center affiliate, spent one month at the Center analyzing data from the Syrian part of the Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth project.

Dr. Mustafa Affifi, director general of Planning in the Department of Research and Studies in the Ministry of Health in Oman, held an MD from Alexandria University and MPH from the Higher Institute of Public Health. During his stay at CRPH, Dr. Affifi worked on analyzing tabular data from the Oman Family Health Survey 1995 (OFGS 1995) and National Health Survey 2000 (NHS 2000). His analysis focused on identifying the causes of fertility decline in Oman, and examining the association between women’s empowerment and fertility.

Dr. Samia Heilib, assistant professor at the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University, holds an MD from the University of London and a PhD in education from Warwick University. During her stay, Dr. Heilib worked on studies based on data from a nutritional survey in Gaza and the West Bank, which examined the impact of various demographic, health and environmental factors on child growth and anemia in a situation of conflict.

Join Us as a Visiting Fellow

The Center has been sponsoring a Visiting Fellows Program since January 2003. Selected fellows from around the world 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.

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, as administrative assistant, via email at crph@aub.edu.lb. The fellowship application should be submitted at least three months prior to the proposed starting date of the fellowship.
Grant News

The Andrew Mellon Foundation Extends the CRPH Grant for a Third Cycle

The Andrew Mellon Foundation has awarded CRPH a third grant in a series of awards to support population research at FHS. During this cycle of funding, effective January 2003, the Center was awarded $260,000 to continue Phase II of the “Population Displacement, Impoverishment and Urban Health in the Outskirts of Beirut” study. The Faculty of Health Sciences received the first cycle of funding in 1995.

With the support from the Wellcome Trust, the Ford Foundation, and the second cycle of funding from the Mellon Foundation, Phase I of the Urban Health Study was completed in July 2002. The data collected are quite unique in that extensive socio-economic information was gathered. Phase I of the study has laid a foundation for future research on selected dimensions of health by establishing a baseline of vital information for populations about which very little was known. Phase II of the study covered the specific dimensions of adolescent health, the health of the elderly, and reproductive health.

The second cycle of funding from the Mellon Foundation also supported the visits of several international scholars to collaborate with CRPH Faculty Affiliates on sponsored research.

In May 2002, Dr. Suad Joseph, professor of Anthropology and Women’s Studies at the University of California at Davis visited FHS. Dr. Joseph reviewed with FHS researchers the set of concepts and indicators focusing on relevant variables in the different components of the study. Among the visiting fellows was Dr. Rita Giacaman, director of Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University who participated in ongoing discussions about collaborative research.

Dr. Marwan Khawaja, the director of CRPH, is the principal investigator in this three-year project.

The Department of Epidemiology and Population Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences is currently seeking a candidate with a PhD degree in Demography, Sociology or related field and a strong research and teaching record. Preference is for scholars working in the area of population health/reproductive health.

The position is available at the ranks of assistant, associate or professor depending on qualifications. Visiting positions at all levels may be considered.

Successful candidates will have the opportunity to collaborate on ongoing multi-disciplinary research projects sponsored by CRPH.

Interested candidates should submit a complete resume, statement of teaching and research interests and the names of three references to Huda Zurayk
Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences
American University of Beirut
3 Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10017-2303
USA

E-mail: hzurayk@aub.edu.lb
URL: http://www.aub.edu.lb
Fax in Beirut: +961-1-744 470

The Deadline for receiving applications is December 31, 2003, for a starting date of September 15, 2004. The American University of Beirut is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer.