In This Issue

Welcome to the third issue of CRPH News. This newsletter of the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) disseminates information about CRPH and its ongoing activities to researchers and policy makers in Lebanon, the region, and internationally. In this issue, we report on the many collaborations, research outputs, and activities that have been the result of ongoing research initiatives from CRPH and its affiliates over the past year.

We received a substantial grant from the Wellcome Trust to support our research program Health Status, Wellbeing and Population Change in the Middle East: A Research Network Approach. This funding will contribute to new research studies, strengthen the CRPH infrastructure, and increase capacity for population and public health research in the Arab Middle East.

CRPH research affiliates presented an informational session, Population Health: From Research to Practice, highlighting the main findings of two research projects. The presentation was given at AUB’s Faculty of Health Sciences international scientific conference Public Health: Reaching Beyond Boundaries held in honor of the FHS 50th anniversary. CRPH affiliates also organized poster presentation sessions summarizing the methodology and selected findings from one research study.

CRPH’s Urban Health Research Group (UHRG) focuses on four themes: youth, women’s health, women and work, and older persons. The group is planning randomized controlled studies to evaluate interventions to improve mental health among different subpopulations. The studies are planned for three communities on the outskirts of Beirut.

Our two collaborative research programs, the Urban Health Study (UHS) and Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth (CCCC), have continued to progress. The UHS is working towards improving the health of poor communities in Beirut. A UHS Dissemination Team was formed to share findings of the UHS study with each participating community. CRPH also initiated a series of research briefs concerning the findings of the UHS for dissemination to policy makers and community members.

CCCC regional research group has taken on studies focusing on childbirth policies, the use and availability of maternity services, and delivery and postpartum practices. The group has been seeing the evidence generated from previous observational research feed into intervention projects in four countries in the region: Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Egypt.

Finally, we highlight contributions from our monthly research seminar series, news from our affiliates, and profiles of our visiting research fellows.

We invite you to learn more about CRPH and its research activities by visiting our website at: http://staff.aub.edu.lb/~webcrph.

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

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CRPH Participates in the 50th Anniversary of FHS

The year 2004 marked the 50th anniversary (1954-2004) of FHS, the first independent school of public health in the Arab region. Celebrating the occasion, activities were held throughout the year and culminated in an international scientific conference entitled Public Health: Reaching Beyond Boundaries held December 10-11, 2004. The conference addressed current challenges to public health education, research, and practice in the Arab world.

As part of the conference, the CRPH organized a session entitled Population Health: From Research to Practice. Two research projects, carried out by the center and funded by the Wellcome Trust, were presented during the session: “Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth” and the “Urban Health Study.” The session disseminated the main findings of these research projects, highlighting the benefits and challenges of regional and multidisciplinary collaboration and drawing on the experiences of disseminating research findings to the communities under study. The discussion explored options for further policy-oriented research.

Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth is a regional program hosted at the Faculty of Health Sciences with partners in Egypt, Palestine and Syria. The program maps childbirth practices in the region, the use and availability of childbirth services, as well as delivery and postpartum practices. Four presentations discussed the findings of the research projects and emphasized the benefits and challenges of having a regional network. Presentations included:

1. Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth Research Network – Tamar Bakabiyan, Department of Health Behavior and Education (HBED), FHS, AUB.
2. Models of Transition from Research into Action – Syam Bashour, Department of Community Medicine, University of Damascus, Syria.
4. Perspectives on Childbirth: A Regional Overview – Farasal El-Yak, HBED, FHS, AUB.
5. Perspectives on Childbirth: The Case of Palestine – Laura Wick, Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, Palestine.
6. Reflections on Changing Childbirth Practices and Policies – Oona Campbell, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK.

The Urban Health Study is a community-based participatory research project working to improve the health of poor urban communities in Beirut by addressing the social determinants of health. Presentations included:

1. Overview of the Urban Health Study – Marwan Khawaja, Director of CRPH, FHS, AUB.
2. Engaging the Communities – Jihad Makhoul, HBED, FHS, AUB.
3. Dissemination of Findings – Nida’ el-Helou, CRPH, FHS, AUB.
4. A Community Perspective – Ahmad Kheil, Islamic Health Association, Beirut, Lebanon.
5. Planning Intervention Studies – Rima Affifi, HBED, FHS, AUB.
6. The Future of Urban Health Research – David Vlahov, Center for Urban Epidemiologic Studies at The New York Academy of Medicine and Columbia University, USA.

CRPH also organized poster presentation sessions at the conference, summarizing the methodology and selected findings from the different themes of the Urban Health Study, namely:

Methods
- Communities in the Study (Community-based participatory research)
- Urban Health Study: Design and methodology

Poverty and Urban Environment
- Household Structure and the Production of Urban Poverty: Findings from outer Beirut, Lebanon
- Environmental Housing Quality in Three Underserved Urban Communities in the Outskirts of Beirut, Lebanon

Adolescent Health
- Distrust, Social Fragmentation and Adolescents’ Health in the Outer City: Beirut and beyond
- The Environment of Youth Related to Tobacco in Lebanon: Analysis by gender and tobacco type
- Youth Caught Between Community and Country: The case of Beirut suburbs
- Urban Health Study – Adolescent Health Component: Socio-demographics, health, and social profile of the adolescent population

Women’s Health
- Women’s Health
- Beyond Reproductive Health: Listening to women about their health in disadvantaged Beirut neighborhoods
- Women Self-Reporting Health and Reproductive Health Problems: Patterns and choice of care
- Psychological Distress among Women in the Outskirts of Beirut: Are somatic symptoms in underprivileged communities an expression of women’s distress?
- Symptomatology of Menopause among Middle-Aged Women in Pre and Early Post Menopause Phase Residing in Low Income Communities

Urban Health Research Group

The Urban Health Research Group (UHRG) at CRPH was formed with FHS-wide participation to promote a multidisciplinary approach to the conception, planning and analysis of research at AUB. Working groups emerged around four research themes: youth, women’s health, women and work, and older persons. Currently, the UHRG is in the process of planning randomized controlled studies in three urban neighborhoods – Bourj Barajneh, Hay el Sellom and Nabaa – relying on findings from the Urban Health Study and the support of organizations from the neighborhoods. The studies aim to evaluate interventions to improve mental health among different subpopulations of the three neighborhoods.
In 2005, members of the four working groups spent considerable time in the three communities identifying community-based organizations and other stakeholders to be involved in the research. The groups employed varying approaches to community participation, but in each case, the partnerships strengthened the research design. The youth group, for instance, helped create the Community Youth Committee, composed of NGOs working with youth in the Bourj Barajneh camp, funders of projects and young people themselves. This committee has emerged as the key partner in a broadly participatory process to plan, conduct and eventually evaluate the intervention.

To map community-based resources, the women’s health group extended their consultations to directors of neighborhood associations, NGOs, health center staff, employees of local government offices, schools, health clubs and midwives and gynecologists in local private practice. The sustained contact with the communities has given the CRPH a more nuanced understanding of the issues and community concerns, supplementing and sometimes challenging the survey data.

**UHS Dissemination**

The Urban Health Study (UHS) Dissemination Team was formed in October 2003 to share findings of the study with community leaders, grass-root activists, policy makers and people from the community. With the next phase of the project focusing on intervention studies, engagement of the community stakeholders in the study phase of the project focusing on intervention studies, makers and people from the community. With the next phase of the project focusing on intervention studies, makers and people from the community. With the next phase of the project focusing on intervention studies, makers and people from the community. With the next phase of the project focusing on intervention studies, makers and people from the community.

The UHS Dissemination Team aimed at presenting the research material in a less academic format — although they have yet to reach out directly to the community members themselves. Engaging the right people in communities, balancing the conflicting priorities of community groups (and their need for interventions) with the resource constraints of FHS, and making the data user-friendly — while preserving its accuracy and addressing the concerns of the researchers — are all of vital importance to the UHS Dissemination Team.

**Conferences and Meetings**

Members of the UHRG participated in the following conferences in 2005 (two local, one regional and seven international) where they presented 13 oral presentations and eight poster sessions:


   - Chaaya, M. The status of elderly population in Bourj Barajneh Palestinian camp: Results from the Urban Health Study. Oral presentation.


**Oral presentations:**

- Afifi-Soweid, R., Planning for intervention research in the Urban Health Study.
- Afifi-Soweid, R., Peering through the looking glass: The concept of positive youth development.
- Kaddour, A. Process of community involvement in intervention research.


**Oral presentations:**

- Khawaja, M., and Mowafi, M. Cultural capital and self-assessed health in low income women: A case study from Greater Beirut, Lebanon.

**Poster presentations:**

- Ibrahim, G. (2004). Women’s autonomy and utilization of reproductive health services in three impoverished areas in Lebanon. MSc. Population Health, FHS/AUB.
- Chaaya, M. Working conditions and mental health: Evidence from refugee and non-refugee underprivileged urban communities.
- Chaaya, M. Working conditions and mental health among elderly from three underprivileged urban communities in Beirut.

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Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth

CCCC research network carries out a coordinated research program of regional studies involving: AUB, Lebanon; Damascus University, Syria; Birzeit University, Palestine; and Egypt team in the Reproductive Health Working Group, at the Population Council. The CRPH hosts the project and provides technical assistance in research design, sampling, data collection and analysis.

Researchers in the CCC research network undertook studies focusing on childbirth policies, the use and availability of maternity services, delivery and postpartum practices. Policy studies looking at general policy in Palestine, caesarean-sections in Lebanon, and general hygiene in Egypt identified areas where maternity care could be improved, and clarified the immediate and policy factors necessary to bring about change. This research suggested that changing childbirth policies and practices at the national level will not be easy. Difficulties stem from a variety of causes, including unstable political context, lack of political commitment to evidence-based policymaking, weak government oversight and regulations, lack of national guidelines, lack of provider accountability, profit motives, fragmented health infrastructures and the low priority given to women’s health.

Our analyses of existing data sets in the four countries, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys and the Pan Arab Project for Child Health, indicated the presence of fairly good antenatal coverage, a considerable and growing use of skilled attendants at delivery, and low use of postpartum care relative to other services. They also showed that care is largely private, and that the c-section rate is increasing rapidly. Home births are decreasing, except in Palestine, where the proportion of home births attended by skilled attendants has been rising.

Studies describing the immediate environment of childbirth focusing on the routines and practices of health care facilities, were pioneered in Lebanon, adapted and operationalized in Syria and subsequently in Palestine. Collaborators in Egypt conducted an innovative observational study documenting, for the first time, how doctors and nurses actually manage normal labor in a typical facility, as compared to standardized guidelines. The Palestine study investigated the care provided for normal childbirth in West Bank maternity hospitals. Overall, the studies reveal that few obstetric practices were evidence-based: some were even potentially dangerous for the mother and her baby, while other beneficial practices were not adopted. Moreover, many hospitals in our region did not routinely evaluate their normal labor practices; instead, practices were tailored to benefit providers rather than women or their babies.

We also made a narrower exploration of antenatal and postpartum care. In-depth studies in Syria and Lebanon confirmed that there was no clear package of antenatal care in use, and that many antenatal practices deviated from the best evidence.

In-depth interviews with women found that they are not involved in the decision-making process for normal care or c-section. In Syria, there was a lack of trust, reports of bad treatment and fear of being left alone. In Lebanon, women were discontent, yet trusted the physician’s choices of procedures. Based on the Egyptian study, providers perceive normal labor as unworthy of much attention; they want to study ‘difficult’ or complicated cases. They also had difficulty communicating with women and would value receiving training on communication skills.

The findings of these studies have fed into intervention projects currently on-going in the four countries. Further large scale interventions are being designed for implementation in the next five years of the program.

Conferences, Workshops and Meetings

CCCC research network organized seven local and regional workshops during 2004, and 2005:

1. Designing and Conducting Randomized Controlled Trials. May 2005, Lebanon. This RCT short course provided participants with insight on designing and conducting randomized controlled trials. The course was led by Professors Diana Elbourne (from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK) and Rona McCandlish (from the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, UK).

2. Care during Normal Birth in Maternity Facilities. November 2004, Palestine. This workshop disseminated the results of the study on maternity policies and practices in the West Bank and held interactive discussions with midwives on how to improve practices in their facilities in the West Bank.


This session disseminated the findings of the regional team’s work. It was done in collaboration with the Lebanese Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

5. National Workshop on Maternal Mortality in Lebanon: A Call to Action. March 2004, Lebanon. The aim of the workshop was to raise awareness on maternal mortality in Lebanon and work towards launching a National Committee on Maternal Mortality (NCMM). The NCMM was formed in May 2004.


The aim of the workshop was to improve care during normal birth in the Maqassed teaching hospital in Jerusalem by comparing the usual care to evidence-based practices.

7. Research Methods and the Implementation of Intervention Studies. February 2004, Palestine. This aim of this workshop was to help participants prepare for the intervention study on routine vs. selective amniotomy at Maqassed Hospital, Jerusalem, with obstetricians, physicians and midwives at that hospital.

Members of the research network attended one regional meeting and two international conferences where they made six oral presentations about their research work:

   • Abdulsalam, A. Effect of a community-based intervention on postnatal outcomes: A study in Damascus, Syria.

2. Wick, L., and el Hassan, S. The weight of RCT’s in changing medical practices: The example of breech presentation at Maqassed Hospital, Jerusalem.

3. The Egyptian Childbirth Team. Preliminary findings from the Gala Intervention to improve selected provider practices for delivering women.


20. XXV IUSSP International Population Conference. July 2005, France

30. XXVII Annual ASPHER Conference, College of Health Sciences, American University of Armenia. September 2005, Armenia
   • Kabakian, T. Birthing in the Arab Region: How to translate research into policy. Oral presentation.
Affiliates of the CRPH published six articles in scholarly journals using the data of the Urban Health Study and seven articles using data produced by the Challenges and Choices in Changing Childbirth research network during 2005. Abstracts of these articles are available on the website of the Urban Health Study (http://www.aub.edu.lb/~webcrph/).

Urban Health Study


Research Briefs

CRPH initiated a series of research briefs summarizing selected findings from the Urban Health Study with the aim of disseminating this data to a wider audience of policy makers and community members. The first research brief is entitled “A Profile of the Labor Force in Two Urban Lebanese Communities” and describes gender and age distributions of the labor force, as well as their educational and occupational characteristics, in the neighborhoods of Nabaa and Hay el Sollom. The brief concludes that people in these neighborhoods are typically young and unskilled with an early entry into the labor force, which continues to be male-dominated. However, working women tend to occupy higher status jobs than men.

The second research brief, entitled “Patterns of Household Income and Personal Wages in Two Urban Lebanese Communities”, highlights the significant features of income poverty in Nabaa and Hay el Sollom. It also includes the residents’ own assessments of their economic situation. Residents in these neighborhoods regard themselves as poor, and most residents depend on more than one source of income to make ends meet. The briefs are published in English and Arabic and are available on the CRPH website.


PhD and MSc Thesis

One PhD thesis in Gerontology and six MSc theses (four in Epidemiology, one in Environmental Sciences) were also produced using data from the Urban Health Study.


Other Materials


The following conclusions were offered: (1) welfare has an instrumental role in Lebanon (2) the family remains the key locus of welfare (3) religious welfare highlights the importance of Takaaful (4) religious charity is a key factor for both service-providers and service-users, which challenges the conventional need for social insurance (5) political interference affects the social welfare sector (6) it is questionable to what extent the policies and programs of welfare actors in Lebanon are treating the causes of poverty.

October, 2004 - The Social and Economic Situation in Lebanon: Prospects and Reality by Abib Neheime, Policy Advisor for Poverty Reduction, SURF-AS (Sub-regional Resource Facility for Arab States)
The report, “The Socio-economic Condition in Lebanon: Reality and Prospects,” was launched on 11 August, 2004. It is the output of an extended and coordinated effort between the Ministry of Social Affairs and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the project “Capacity Building for Poverty Reduction.” This report attempts to compile the major existing data, covering in particular the period between 1996 and 2002, with emphasis on the status of the social sectors in the country regarding education, health, employment, housing, labor, social protection and religion. It deals with these issues and indicators from a developmental perspective and in an analytical manner, providing suggestions for policy recommendations.

November, 2004 - Care-Seeking Behavior of Women Living in Underprivileged Urban Communities in Outer Beirut by Faysal el-Kak, Lecturer, Health Behavior and Education Department, FHS
This study looked at patterns of care-seeking behavior and provider choice in women’s self-reporting health and reproductive health conditions in three urban communities around Beirut. The study examined contextual parameters of each community, the symptomatology of health and reproductive health problems. A cross-sectional survey of a sub-population sample distributed in the three communities was interviewed face-to-face. Women in the refugee camp community had the highest utilization of reproductive health services, while women with zero parity in particular the period between 1996 and 2002, with emphasis on the status of the social sectors in the country regarding education, health, employment, housing, labor, social protection and religion. It deals with these issues and indicators from a developmental perspective and in an analytical manner, providing suggestions for policy recommendations.

Visiting Fellows Program at CRPH
The Center for Research on Population and Health has sponsored Visiting Fellows since January 2003. Selected Fellows from the Arab region visit CRPH from one to three months to collaborate with faculty affiliates of the Faculty of Health Sciences on ongoing research projects or to undertake their own research utilizing CRPH facilities and data resources. During the summer of 2004, CRPH hosted the following research fellows:

Rima Alfi-Soweid (Associate Professor, Chair of the Dept. of Health Behavior and Education, raalfi@aub.edu.lb) is a co-coordinator of the regional project Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth. She is currently involved in the design of a randomized controlled trial funded by the Wellcome Trust examining the effect of mobilizing pregnant women to demand better services during their delivery, in selected Lebanese hospitals.

Karima Khalil (Program Coordinator, Population Council, khalil@aub.edu.lb) has been working on a grant funded by the US Agency for International Development (IRDA/IRC) for her research project “Public position toward tobacco control policy.” She published papers on smoking behavior and tobacco control, and on body weight amongst adolescents, in Beirut, in May 2004; a report to the Welfare Association regarding the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; and a process evaluation of the Obeidak health clinic. She also presented an inventory of KAP studies related to sexual and reproductive health of young persons in the Arab states. She also conducted a needs assessment related to research and intervention for sexual and reproductive health of young persons in the Arab states to the UNFPA.

Hyam Bashour (Professor, Damascus University, hbashour@scs-net.org) is currently working on a study entitled: “Effects of a community-based intervention on postnatal outcomes.” Dr. Bashour, as a coordinator of the Syrian team, has participated in all of the Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth project workshops and participated in the Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth session in the Middle East Medical Assembly, May 2004, discussing women’s experiences with maternity care. Dr. Bashour recently had a paper accepted in Birth analysing Syrian women’s preferences for birth attendant and birth places.

Rima Habib (Assistant Professor, Dept. of Environmental Health, rima.habib@aub.edu.lb) received grants from the University Research Board at the American University of Beirut and from the Safadi Foundation to conduct research on environmental radon levels in Lebanon (2004-current). Dr. Habib also received a grant from the University Research Board for her research on women’s exposure to detergents in domestic work. She is currently working on a project on women’s work and health funded by a grant from the Wellcome Trust. In the course of her involvement in the Ecobehai project in Bebinnie, “Understanding Water, Understanding Health” funded by the IDRC (Jan 2005-current), Dr. Habib conducted fieldwork training for 24 interviewers and supervisors in the town of Bebinnie in July 2005. She has published papers on cancer incidence and mortality among nuclear industry workers, and on community participation and water quality in a coastal area in Lebanon. During 2004, Dr. Habib participated in the following conferences: the 38th Middle East Medical Assembly in May, in Beirut; the Coastal Zone Asia Pacific Conference in September, in Brisbane; the 17th International Symposium on Epidemiology in Occupational Health in October, in Melbourne; and the 7th World Congress of Bioethics in November, in Sapporo.

Tamar Kabakian (Assistant Professor, Dept. of Health Behavior and Education, tk00@aub.edu.lb) is a co-coordinator of the regional project Choices and Challenges in Changing Childbirth. She is currently involved in the...
Ahmad Mandil (July 16-August 16, 2004): A Professor at the Epidemiology Department of the High Institute of Public Health at Alexandria University, Egypt, Dr. Mandil received his DrPH in Epidemiology in 1991. He is currently working in collaboration with Dr. Hala Tamim (CRPH affiliate) on “Preconceptional care and folic acid research,” in coordination with the UCLA·School of Public Health. This research was funded by UCLA and extended until May 2005. During the fellowship, he worked closely with Dr. Hala Tamim analyzing results as well as drafting research papers.

Abdel-Ilah Yaakoubd (August 2-September 2, 2004): A research professor at the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (INSEA) in Rabat, Morocco, Dr. Yaakoubd received his PhD in Demography in 1989. During his fellowship, he collaborated with FHS faculty members concerning his research project which evaluates the evolution of the state of women’s health, particularly their reproductive health, in relation to their gender.

Join Us as a Visiting Fellow
The CRPH initiated the Visiting Fellows Program in 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. 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 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.

The Master of Science in Population Health at FHS
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. Students enrolled in the Master of Science in Population Health program will participate in collaborative research activities with FHS 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.

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 the AUB main web page 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 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.

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