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## **Study finds correlation between conflict and infant mortality in Palestine**

Beirut, Lebanon- 28/01/2011 - The recent conflict in Palestine has augmented the infant mortality rate in the country, said a social statistics expert, at a seminar held at the American University of Beirut on January 20, 2011.

"Data from four recent surveys . . . provide evidence that mortality decline has stalled at fairly high levels," said Marwan Khawaja, the section chief of social statistics at the UN's Social and Economic Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), after exposing statistics from different household surveys conducted in the West Bank and Gaza from 1990 to 2006.

Entitled "Conflict and the Recent Rise in Palestinian Infant Mortality: Evidence from Recent Surveys," the seminar was organized by the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) at the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at AUB.

A former professor of population health at AUB, Khawaja was also the director of CRPH for eight consecutive years from 2001 to 2008. In addition, he has taught at a number of prominent institutions, such as Yale University and Syracuse University. Khawaja currently serves as a member of the Specialist Panel on Social Science Research on Reproductive Health at the World Health Organization (WHO) and a council member at the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP).

Discussing statistics from 1945 to 2005, Khawaja explained that infant mortality in Palestine underwent a rapid decrease until 1990. Following that year, the decline plateaued as the mortality rate became relatively stable. However, "since 2000, [the date of the second Intifada], there has been a slight increase in infant mortality," he said.

"A stagnation or rise in mortality is quite rare in the region and is worrisome," Khawaja said as he referred to statistics from 1990 to 2006. The numbers revealed that the infant mortality rate in Palestine did not decrease as much as it did in other Arab countries.

Khawaja attributed the figures to the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the country and to the closure policy which denies Palestinians access to health-care services.

"Israel has over 600 checkpoints. [As a result,] women are hindered from accessing health facilities, especially obstetric care," he said.

Khawaja further told his audience that the situation is different in each of Gaza and the West Bank as "the Gaza strip is worse off than the West Bank."

Until December 2008, 56 percent of the population in Gaza was "food insecure," according to the UN World Food Program (WFP), and 80 percent lived below the poverty line, he added.

The seminar was attended by students, foreign researchers and FHS faculty. Bosnian-Palestinian Shadi Fadda, an AUB alumnus and a current lecturer and PhD-candidate at the International University of Sarajevo, expressed his positive attitude toward the study, noting that nowadays "few studies are done on Palestine."

Toward the end of the seminar, Khawaja said that he is "waiting for data after 2006" to see how the rise of Hamas in 2006 elections and the armed conflict in Gaza have affected infant mortality in Palestine. Khawaja's research had also shown a correspondence between the number of Palestinians killed and infant death: "The more Palestinians are killed, the more the mortality rate increases."

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**Note to Editors**

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