MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH IN THE ARAB REGION: Challenges and Opportunities

Brigitte Khoury, Ph.D.
Director, Arab Regional Center for Research, Training and Policy Making in Mental Health
Dept. of Psychiatry, American University of Beirut
UNESCO’s 2010 Science Report on Scientific Research

The research expenditure in the Arab world has fallen short of world averages over the last four decades.
Reasons cited

- Emphasis on different national priorities and policies, have led to the research community’s fragmentation
- Common concerns: quest for democracy, the elaboration of Arab identity and nationalism in the context of changing regional dynamics.
- In many countries in the region, political conditions prevent a genuine and free discussion of these issues
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Scientific and technical journal articles 2007 published in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The world</td>
<td>758,137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>3,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>17,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>7,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>27,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>56,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>30,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>3,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>3,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>17,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>7,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>27,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>56,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1,934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>30,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>3,792</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expenditure on Health

- According to the WHO World Health Report (2010) the health expenditure estimated as percentage of gross domestic product is highest in Lebanon (11.3%) followed by Jordan (8.8%), Tunisia (5.3%) and Bahrain (5%).

- None of the remaining Arab countries fulfilled the WHO recommendation of a minimum expenditure of 5% of GDP on health.
Arab research centers are diverse
Qualified individuals: education and considerable, experience
These individuals may become prominent names in science and innovation if provided with material and moral support
Limited collaborations: Joint research projects among Arab scientific research institutions working in similar fields remain extremely rare even within the same country.
Reasons for weakness in research

- Obstacles to funding
- Lack of incentive-driven work opportunities for researchers
- Scarcity of support offered by public and private industry
- Lack of a research culture
Mental Health Field: more problems

- Stigma of topic itself
- No research culture among patients nor families
- Fear of confidentiality breach
- Lack of funding and resources
- Little if any research translates into practical work
Language Issues

- Most scales, instruments are in English
- Lack of adapted scales
- Arab region diverse in languages: Arabic, French and English.
- Research and publications also done in 3 languages which limit its dissemination
Psychiatric journals in the Arab World

- In Egypt there are 3 journals published in English:
  - Egyptian Journal of Psychiatry, since 1978
  - Current Psychiatry, since 1995
  - Journal of Neurology Psychiatry and Neurosurgery,
- In Algeria the official journal of APA, in French.
- In Jordan there is the Arab Journal of Psychiatry, since 1989 (in English and Arabic)
- Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, the official journal of WHO/EMRO
- But many local and regional journals in Arabic, not indexed, not peer reviewed.
Research Output

- An electronic data base search for mental health articles from the Arab region showed
- countries according to productivity were:
  - Very high (Egypt, Saudi Arabia & Lebanon),
  - High (Kuwait & Tunisia), average (Morocco, Jordan, Algeria & Iraq),
  - Low (UAE, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya & Palestine)
  - very low (Oman, Qatar, Syria & Sudan).
Unfortunately, many more articles were published, but were unavailable online since journals were unavailable online, written in Arabic, or not published in international (cited) journals,
Among first centers to conduct mental health research in Lebanon and the region

Have an electronic database of all research published in English in the region.
ABSTRACTS OF PUBLISHED PAPERS RELATED TO MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH IN THE ARAB WORLD FROM 1966 UNTIL JULY 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>child</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depression</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>addiction</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suicide</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affective</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classification</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychosis</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organic</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somatoform</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychopharmacology</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE ARAB JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY
THE ARAB FEDERATION OF PSYCHIATRIST

1989 – 2011
363 PAPER
Arab Regional Center for Research and Training in Mental Health

- More multicultural and gender representativeness
- Realized the need to have scientific data about the Arab region and classification
- Lobbied for a regional center
- WHO and AUB–MC joined hands
Arab Regional Center for Research, Training, & Policy Making in Mental Health

- Center was established at the American University of Beirut in October 2010.
- Main mission: To develop research, training, and policy making capacities necessary to enhance mental health research and care in the Arab region.
- Tasks: establish a data base of research from the region, a network of professionals to encourage collaborative work, exchange expertise and knowledge, and support professionals in conducting research in mental health through capacity building.
- Field study center for WHO: For the ICD revision to collect data from the Arab region.
Goals of the Center

- Until 2016 work on ICD revision process
- Later on provide training in the ICD–11 changes
- Training IRB reviews, research protocols, conducting field studies, protection of human subjects, ethics…
- Establish a database of regional studies
- Establish a network of regional professionals
First activity: a regional conference held in Beirut in June 2011 gathering over 20 professionals from 10 countries in the region.

To develop recommendations to WHO and its International Advisory Group for the revision of ICD–10 Mental & Behavioral Disorders based on the experience in the Arab region.

- To organize the participation of mental health experts from the Arab region in the revision of ICD–10 Classification of Mental & Behavioral Disorders.
- To enhance further collaboration among mental health experts in the Arab region for future research and field studies related to classification.
November issue: 2 editorials written about the ICD–10 revision process.

May special supplement issue: papers on ICD–11 changes as they apply to the Arab region.
Other activities

- Special meeting in Dubai specific to sexuality disorders in November 2013.
- 2nd Regional meeting in Amman, Jordan on April 2014 to launch the clinical field studies.
- Contributed to translation into Arabic to WHO invitation to professionals to join a global network.
- Lobbied with colleagues from all Arab countries to participate: many trips, meetings, conferences etc…
Collaborators

- Regional collaborators: Syria, Jordan, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, Tunisia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunis, Palestine, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon.
- WHO–Geneva
- WHO–EMRO office in Cairo
- WHO local office in Lebanon
- Dept. of Psychiatry, AUB–MC
Conclusion

- The scientific research in the Arab world is not enough.
- The mental health research is poor in production and international indexing.
Research needs

- The development of proposals that can help the research specially the multicenter studies.

- The use of the different meetings and conferences scheduled in the Arab world to have a platform for discussion and communications.
Needs to stimulate research

- Research training across the region for fruitful collaborations
- Need for funding and opportunities
- Need for training to secure funding
- Need to publish in international journals for dissemination of Arab research
- Need to have Arab journals indexed
- Need to give value to research and protect it in academic settings.
This center is our opportunity to put Arab mental health on the international map. Let's all join hands to make it work.