COVID-19, Social Distancing and Lockdown: Implications on Older People in the Middle East & North Africa

Professor Shereen Hussein
Professor of Health & Social Care Policy
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
United Kingdom
Overview of the presentation

COVID19
- Infection levels in the MENA region
  - Accuracy of reporting

Infection Control Measures
- Social Distancing
- Lockdown
- Curfews

- The context of population ageing
  - A quick overview of the situation in the region

- Impact of COVID19 on older people
  - Introducing the MENARAH network
  - Findings from recent research
    - Specific to the wellbeing of older people during COVID19
    - Tools to support older people and their families

@DrShereeHussein  www.MENARAH.org
Infections levels high in certain ‘hot spots’

Differences between actual & reported cases

Lack of widespread testing


@DrShereehussein www.MENARAH.org
# Measures to Reduce Infection Spread - examples from selected countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Morocco</th>
<th>Libya</th>
<th>Palestine</th>
<th>Syria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Closure</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace closure</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel public event</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatherings</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int’n travel</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face covering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Oxford University COVID19 tracker- up to 31 December 2020
Implications of COVID-19 in the MENA region

- Economic impact:
  - On the individuals & household income
  - Countries
- Employment
- Education
- Mobility
- Remittances

- Older People
Population Ageing in the MENA Region

‘Rapid’ process of ageing (fast and steep)

High level of unpreparedness
- Health and care services
- Infrastructure
- Social & economic opportunities

Social-determinants of health and wellbeing at old age

Nested within other demographic dynamics (pop. growth & dividends)

Socio-political structures

Perceived age-related roles & duties

Source: Ismail & Hussein (Forthcoming)
By 2050, 80% of the world older people will be living in LMICs.
Ageing and Cultural Contexts

‘Treasuring’ older people
Re-constructing ‘real’ vs. rhetoric values
Healthy and meaningful ageing process
Care as a family ‘business’
Care ability and burden

• Socio-determinants of health and co-morbidity
• Physical (in)activity
• Isolation and loneliness
• Care options and support mechanisms
  – Within and between countries
• Impact of COVID19

@DrShereeHussein www.MENARAH.org
Gender roles, expectations and aspirations

Both as older people and informal carers

Unequal, and qualitatively different, gender share of caring burden

Family and marriage norms

Intergenerational two-ways flows of exchange

Ageing as ‘women’s’ issues – at both ends of the spectrum

Wellbeing & quality of life

Opportunities – learning, training & the workforce

Informal support networks, communities and ‘care-share’
The Middle East and North Africa Research on Ageing Healthy (MENARAH) Network

- Focuses on healthy ageing in its broadest meaning
- Aims to
  - Conduct research and knowledge mobilisation activities
  - Raise awareness and connect different actors
  - Inform policy and practice
- A network of researchers, NGOs, policymakers and many more
- Launched Sep. 2020; funded by the GCRF, UK
Summary of activities
- Group discussions
- Virtual Workshops
- Telephone Interviews (11)

From May-December 2021

Supportive tools
- Doctori Pilot (survey n=216)
- Facebook page
- Tailored exercise videos
- Blogs & articles

- Key findings from interviews
  - Reduced levels of social and physical activities
    - Risks of deconditioning
    - Social isolation
  - Reduced access to health and care services
    - Disease management and control
  - Significant negative impact on physical and psychological wellbeing
  - The potential role of technology & social media
Developing Practical Online Tools

Our Elder's Health

https://www.facebook.com/Our-Elders-Health-104264887980919/

@DrShereeHussein www.MENARAH.org
Impact of COVID-19 on older people - interviews with older people and their carers

Significant reduction in physical/social activities:
Including social visits, going to work or running errands

تقليل الزيارات للاقارب أو عدد مرات التنزه أو التسوق
(older person (man); 65)

Reduction in medical checks and visits to health professionals

تقليل الزيارات الدورية اللامطبأء أو المستشفيات والخوف من التعرض للاصابة بالفايروس في مثل هذه الاماكن
(Family carer (daughter in law), 80 years)

Isolation especially for older people who are living alone

قبل الكرونا كنت باروح رحلات كثير ، ينشوف اماكن جديده ونتمشي ونمارس انشطة كثير . الكرونا خلت الواحد
مش عارف يخرج لوحد ، يحتاج حج يمسكه عشان يمشي لان فيه خوف من كتر القاعده فالبيت وكمان الناس
الي ممكن تقابلهم منافقش ممكن يعودكي . المشي نفسه بقي صعب . فالتأثير سبب جدا علي صحة
الواحد . انا بقالي أكثر من ٦ اشهر مخرجش من البيت . كنت بأروح النادي مرتين بالاسبوع دلوقتي انا خايفه
(Older person, woman, living alone, 81 years old)

@DrShereehussein www.MENARAH.org
Impact on older people’s wellbeing

The home became the only place

الجِحْدُ، وَإِنْ يَجِدَهُمُ الْخَانَّ، فَلْيَصْلِحْهُ، وَلَا تَفْسَحْنَ نَفْسَهُمُ الْخَانَّ؛ لِيَحْتَضِنِهِمْ وَيَحْتَضِنُّهُمْ. الْجِحْدُ، وَإِنْ يَجِدَهُمُ الْخَانَّ، فَلْيَصْلِحْهُ، وَلَا تَفْسَحْنَ نَفْسَهُمُ الْخَانَّ؛ لِيَحْتَضِنِهِمْ وَيَحْتَضِنُّهُمْ.

(Formal home care worker; 86 years old)

اذًا امكِن تقديم خدمات طبية مثيرة بالمنزل لِلَّوَّاء الْمَسِينِ

(Family carer (daughter), 77 years)

دِلْوَتِي لَا زِمّ نَتِعَايِش مع الْكُرونة. فَلَا زِمّ يَكُون فِيهِ تَشْجِيع لِلِّحِرقِ جَوْهِ الْبِيْتِ. العِلْجِ الطَّبِيعِي لِكَبَارِ السَّنِّ

(Family carer (son), 90 years)

الحالة النفسية اتاثرت جدًا.. كَتِير.. بَقَت زِعلانه ومِتْضايِقِهُ

(most participants)

@DrShereehussein www.MENARAH.org
Deconditioning and Reduced Muscle Strengths

Mama was herself not able to get out for a year and a half. Her body was unable to cope with her situation and it was a problem. They also faced problems with water and electricity. The situation was exacerbated by the presence of the coronavirus and the closure of the hospital. The situation is critical. People are suffering. (Family carer (son); 90 years old)

Her steps were lost. She could not get up and go outside for a walk. He came to help her and stay with her. He walked with her, helped her with her daily routine. He did not work for a few weeks. (Formal carer, 86 years old)
Feedback on the Exercise videos

Benefits

• Very useful to have these videos as something can be done at home
• All participants had internet and devices to access the videos (tablet, smart phone)
• Suitable to be adapted for the older person and the family carer (most in their 50s)
• They valued the simple instructions and innovative ways to use household items as exercise equipment
• The general advice on measures to reduce infection was felt to be easy to follow

Challenges

• Some participants wanted their family to help them access the videos
• Some needed encouragement to select most suitable moves for their health conditions
The role of physical activities and the use of technology to enhance older people's wellbeing in the Middle East during COVID-19. Pandemic: A pilot study. Informal carers in Egypt are one of the main groups of large access and use of mobile phones in Egypt, the use of apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook are widespread. For example, mobile shipments to Egypt were 14.8 million in 2019, alone, with 72% being smartphones. This project aims to capitalise on the use of smartphones and apps to provide a single and unique platform for information, advice and service dedicated to ensuring the health and wellbeing of older people through the following activities that will be brought together under one online platform. Egypt, similar to many other LMICs, suffer from infrastructure and support for older people. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented situation where older people: those with long term care needs are forced to self-isolate in homes. Utilising social media, telemedicine and the online platform becomes necessary within such a situation to maintain the physical and mental wellbeing of older people. The project consists of four main activities:

1. Piloting a virtual doctor ‘Doctori’ platform, an initiative to connect older people and their carers to doctors online
2. Developing and producing physical training instruction video specific to older people at home during quarantine and beyond. These are at both older people and carers to support them.
4. Developing a Facebook Group ‘our elderly health at home’, hosting the above activities and providing signposting to relevant organisations and a platform for communications with carers.

Research team: Professor Shereen Hussein (PI) in collaboration with Dr Mohamed Salama at the American University in Cairo, Sport Make Arrow Systems, Cairo, Egypt. Funding: The University of Kent, Global Challenges Research Fund, Emergency research fund.

COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa Region

October 5, 2020

Teledermic solutions for older people in the MENA region

Our Contributors

Prof. Shereen Hussein
View Posts ➔

Dr. Mohamed Salama
View Posts ➔

Prof. Sherif El-Khamisy
View Posts ➔

Our Supporters

NARAH.org
Conclusion

- COVID-19 and infection control measures have wide implications on the economy, social life and livelihood of many groups in the MENA region.
- The impact on older people is largely ignored.
- Lack of awareness of ageing issues and lack of formal support mechanisms.
- Reliance on families.
- The impact on older people physical and psychological wellbeing is significant.
- The potential role of targeted and well-tailored use of digital technology and social media.
- Older people will still need support to use such tools.
- The need for advocacy, building capacity and raising awareness of issues related to older people and their families.

@DrShereeHussein  www.MENARAH.org
References

• The Middle East and North Africa Research on Ageing Healthy (MENARAH): www.menorah.org
• YouTube Channel: Menarah Network
• Facebook page: ﻣﺣﺻ-ﺎﻧﯾﻟﺎھأ-Our-Elders-Health
• Twitter: @MENARAH3; @DrShereeHussein


@DrShereeHussein www.MENARAH.org
Thank you for Listening

Shereen.Hussein@LSHTM.ac.uk
@DrShereeHussein
@MENARAH3