Ageing and Long-Term Care in the Middle East and North Africa: Opportunities and Challenges to Enhancing the Wellbeing of Older Persons and their Families

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Disclosure Statement

Speaker:

Dr. Shereen Hussein

- Has no relevant financial relationships to disclose
- Will not be discussing unlabeled/unapproved use of drugs or products
Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe trends and developments related to population ageing in the MENA region.

- Discuss the concepts of wellbeing and healthy ageing in the MENA region.

- Examine the opportunities and challenges to promote the wellbeing of older persons in the region (including current long term care provisions and participatory opportunities).

- Explain some policy and practice interventions to support the wellbeing of older persons that are likely to be suitable to the cultural context of MENA.
INTRODUCTIONS
MENA REGION & AGEING
Cultural Contexts

‘Treasuring’ older people

Re-constructing ‘real’ vs. rhetoric values

Healthy and meaningful ageing process

Care is a family ‘business’

Care ability and burden

• Younger populations dominate the policy agenda
• Obesity and co-morbidity
• Physical (in)activity
• Isolation and loneliness
• Care options
• Support mechanisms
• Regional and socio-economic differences

— Within and between countries
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income level</th>
<th>Country Groups</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High Income</strong></td>
<td>• Bahrain; Kuwait; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Upper Middle Income</strong></td>
<td>• Iraq; Jordan; Lebanon; Libya;</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Middle Income</strong></td>
<td>• Algeria; Djibouti; Egypt; Iran; Morocco; Tunisia; West Bank and Gaza</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low Income</strong></td>
<td>• Syria; Yemen</td>
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POPULATION AGEING IN THE MENA REGION
What is Population Ageing?

Changes to the whole structure of a population

- Societal/population level
- Linked to economic productivity (retirement)
- Individual’s perception of ageing
  - What one can and can not do!
  - Expectations from and opportunities at old age
- Differentials by societal & individual factors
- Variations in health and wellbeing at older age is not random

Measurements

- Static
  - Age Index
  - Age dependency ratio,
  - Percentage over 65+
- Dynamic: prospective ageing
Population Ageing the context of 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
By 2050, 80% of the world older people will be living in LMICs

Source: WHO, additions by author
The pace and stage of population ageing vary across countries.
THE WELLBEING AND HEALTHY AGEING IN THE MENA REGION
The meaning of ageing

- No typical definition
- Varies within and across individuals, societies and groups
- Desired & unwanted outcomes

- The notion of ‘Growing older’
  - Connotations of experience and frailty
  - Maturity and dependency

- Age-conscious societies

- A Growing attention to
  - Life-long learning
  - An increased importance of enhancing wellbeing and quality of life

- Not all years gained are spent in good health

- Huge observed levels of inequalities at old age
Not all years gained are healthy years

- Both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are increasing
  - Nature longevity limit?
  - HLE not growing as fast as LE
- High number of years lived with LTC needs
- Significant gender, ethnic & socio-economic differentials
- Differentials within and across countries

<table>
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Average LE & HLE at birth in 2019, source: World Health Organization

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Health and epidemiology in the region

High prevalence of chronic disease among older persons

– In GCC countries, the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes and obesity is unusually high relative to the rest of the world

The number of older persons with non-communicable diseases in the region is expected to reach 1.3 million in 2030, nearly 50% higher than in 2015

– The percentage of older persons suffering from at least one chronic disease ranges between 13.1% in Djibouti and 63.8% in Lebanon, with the majority of the countries having rates above 45%

Based on limited studies, it is estimated that the prevalence of dementia among older persons (60+) is currently around 6%

– Likely to be an under-estimate, yet, it is expected the number of people to suffer from dementia in the region to reach 4.7 million in 2040
Gender Inequality Index measures the human development costs of gender inequality, higher the GII the more disparities between females and males.

GII distributed into three groups relative to the overall distribution of Arab countries.

Relatively young populations of the Gulf region, with high levels of female labour participation rates.

Egypt presents a scenario of competing demands on women.

GII range from 2.1% to 73.3% in the region.

Source: Hussein and Ismail (2017)
Inequalities at Old Age

RECOGNITION
• Self-recognition
• Cultural visibility & class
• Assumptions - otherness

(MIS)REPRESENTATION
• Inclusion (exclusion) – the environment
• Participation
• Media representation

Opportunities and challenges to promote the wellbeing of older persons

- Ageing in Place
- Long life learning at later life
- Economic participation
- Recognition & Participation
- Financial wellbeing
- LTC beyond personal/medical care
- COVID-19
Ageism, Social Norms & Isolation

- Pre-existing & new perceptions
- Definitional challenges: what does ‘ageism’ mean in different contexts and settings?
  - Benevolent and hostile elements
- Operates at different levels: cognition, emotional & actions
- Different components: stereotyping; prejudice and discrimination
- Intersectionality: age, disability, gender, race etc.
Some recent national, regional and global policy attention
  – Narratives of intergenerational solidarity, families & ageing in place

Limited LTC services
  – Primarily community based, NGOs and informal arrangements

Reliance on families (traditional hubs of care)
  • Within a context of dynamic changes in family structures, living arrangements ...

Environment & infrastructures

Universal health coverage remains an aspiration

Lack of acknowledgment of caring burdens (provided mainly by women)

Opportunities: population dividends & labour supply

Quality of life & inequalities
The diversity of the Arab countries in relation to their position at the demographic transition

No clear link between demographic transition stage and palliative care development

Another group situated at a later stage of demographic transition

Lebanon is almost singled out with the lowest TFR (1.8) and highest LE (80 years)

Very high TFR (6.6) and low LE (55 years)

Source: Hussein and Ismail (2017)
Opportunity: intergenerational support

With population ageing there are more and more four generations co-existing
Challenges to intergenerational relations

Changes in the core kin social network
   – Marriage; Childless older people; Living alone
Demographic changes
Migration and geographical proximity
   – Both internal and international migration
Globalization and technological changes
   – ‘virtual’ intergenerational relations- with potential positive impacts
Potential competing priorities
   – Fiscal pressures- caring for older people and labour force participation
   – Impact on use of space among lower socio-economic groups – older people residence and independence
Women in the sandwich ‘Janus’ generations

Those with at least one generation ‘above’ them and one generation ‘below’ them to look after

– Being simultaneously a child to an older parent and a parent (or grand parent) to a child or a young person

Women may occupy this position for several decades

Stress and strain over a long period of time

Possible impacts on labour participation, wellbeing and general health

However, it is not proven to be a ‘zero-sum’ game for the Janus generation

Very debatable issue, the need for more data and research
Challenge: COVID-19 and Older people wellbeing

Infections levels high in certain ‘hot spots’

Differences between actual & reported cases

Lack of widespread testing


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

- Older People
Recent Research on the Wellbeing of Older People during COVID\textsuperscript{19} in the MENA Region

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
Impact of COVID19 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

(older person (man); 65)

Reduction in medical checks and visits to health professionals

(Family carer (daughter in law), 80 years)

Isolation especially for older people who are living alone

(Older person, woman, living alone, 81 years old)
Deconditioning and Reduced Muscle Strengths

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(Family carer (son); 90 years old)

(Formal carer, 86 years old)
POLICY AND PRACTICE INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT THE WELLBEING OF OLDER PERSONS
A growing interest in global ageing, particularly healthy ageing
The UN decade of health ageing (2021-2030) – building on the 2030 SDGs
An interest in LMIC and the MENA region in developing ageing policies and supporting the community as a whole
Realization of the need for data, evidence and dialogue
A new initiative to bring stakeholders together (MENARAH)
Global policy context

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

– Goal 3: “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”
– Goal 5: "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls";
  and
– Goal 11: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”

International polices on

– Age-discrimination; active ageing; social protection of older persons and accessibility to public transport, goods and services
Population Ageing as a Policy Issue in the Region

The region has historically shown a strong commitment to social welfare

– Post independence

– Majority linked to employment
  • E.g. pensions and retirement schemes, however, favouring public sector and can be regarded as gender biased

– Universal health and education service
  • but actual delivery is relatively poor in most countries

No ‘formal’ aged policy strategic vision in many countries

– However, some attention to the phenomenon in recent policy discussions

The role of charitable and religious institutions
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
Developing Practical Online Tools

https://www.facebook.com/صحة-أهاليينا-Our-Elders-Health-104264887980919/
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
CONCLUSION
Success Factors for Sustainable Ageing Policies

Human rights and equality at old age
Person-centeredness
Ageing in place and enabling environments
The role of social capital within comprehensive social protection systems
Addressing health and income inequalities at old age
Ensuring a sustainable and appropriately trained LTC workforce

A key recommendation for pension reforms by the World Bank is to ensure diversification in pension systems
  – a mix of pension systems, such as public/private; contributory and non-contributory

However, there remains many challenges:
  – high level of informal employment and migrant workers
Reflection

• A dynamic context
• Diverse and unequal experiences
• High level policy attention (SDS/ Decade of healthy ageing etc.)
• Definitions and concepts (including the notion of ageing itself)
• Global context and knowledge flow (four-ways)
• Fiscal consequences at the individual, families and state levels
• Policy challenges- reforms and systems’ inter-connectedness
• A changing landscape (COVID19 & mobility)
Questions & Discussion

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