

Regional Networking and Collaboration

The RHWG convenes in Istanbul for its 20th annual meeting

The annual Reproductive Health Working Group meeting took place from July 12-14 in Istanbul. Established in 1988, the RHWG has developed into a regional network of multi-disciplinary, multi-generation scholars who use progressive and broad concepts of reproductive health to create new knowledge and to amass evidence for policy. The 3-day meeting, attended by 39 participants including all the group's committee members, was divided into eight sessions covering themes such as: gender and violence, reproductive health providers, health and policy, the postpartum period, quality of life and youth mental health. Sociologists, anthropologists, economists and obstetrician/gynecologists from Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, the US and Iran were represented and the guest speaker was Soraya Tremayne, Iranian social anthropologist, research associate and director of the Fertility and Reproduction Studies Group at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University

Jocelyn DeJong, who recently took over coordination of the group, opened the first session, summarizing 20 years of history and success for the group whose interdisciplinary and regional character has enriched its experiences. Keynote speaker, Tremayne followed with a presentation entitled "Paradise is at Mothers' Feet" which addressed the issue of reproductive health policies and their consequences for and impact on women in Iran. Session II on "gender and violence" saw thought-provoking presentations: an analysis of representations and post-injury experiences of disabled veterans and masculinity in Turkey (Salih Can Aciksoz, Turkey); results from ethnographic fieldwork in a Cairo neighborhood examining the structured and performative nature of violence and its relation to masculinity (Farha Ghannam, Jordan); an analysis of the way 73 interviewees responded to questions about the death of a female relative as a result of domestic violence in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir, Turkey (Nuket Sirman, Turkey). Session III, on "reproductive health providers" saw a presentation on the social component in medical education in Egypt: the challenges faced by the accreditation process at Al Azhar faculty of medicine (Abdel Moneim

Farag, Egypt); reproductive health and nursing education in Palestine – a presentation of findings from a collaborative initiative to identify gaps and establish priorities for curricular expansion (Angel Foster, USA); and a presentation of 23 in-depth interviews with Palestinian midwives for the purpose of better understanding how to promote and improve midwifery practice (Sahar Hassan and Laura Wick).

The second day opened with Session IV on "health and policy" which included a presentation on female cancer patients in Turkey, interviewed as part of a larger study on how cancer is related to patients' decisions around reproduction in various ways (Aysecan Terzioğlu, Turkey); a presentation on causes of death among single women in the reproductive age in the West Bank (Niveen Abu Rmeileh) and an assessment of HIV and AIDS in Egypt based on qualitative and quantitative data (Daad Fouad and Dina Galal, Egypt); as well as a presentation on a new program of conditional cash transfers to be piloted in Egypt (Hania Sholkamy, Egypt). There were four presentations in Session V on the "postpartum period": Asma Abdulsalam and Mayada Kharouf from Syria shared analysis of maternal morbidities during the puerperium conducted on over 500 women in Damascus. From Lebanon, Hibah Osman discussed postpartum interventions and ways to facilitate the transition into motherhood; Livia Wick presented on stress research and the postpartum; and Faysal El Kak talked about how research is being put to action by a group of committed obstetricians/ gynecologists who are interested in promoting change in practice through the Initiative on Standards of Practice in Childbirth in Lebanon (ISOPIC).

Session VI on day three was on "quality of life: understanding and measurement". Awad Mataria (Palestine) demonstrated



Left to right top row: A. Foster, M. Kamal, F. El Kak, A. Farag, A. Mataria, D. Fouad, F. Ozbay, H. Bashour, H. Zurayk, D. Cetinoglu, H. Sholkamy
Left to right second: R. Giacaman, J. DeJong, N. Abu Rmeileh, L. Wick, L. Wick, K. Khalil, W. Hammoudeh, B. Tekce, A. Abdulsalam, Y. Yasin, S. Aciksoz, S. Tremayne

Left to right third: A. Riyami, F. Ghannam, S. Hassan, A. Terzioğlu, S. Abboud
Left to right front: S. Tawil, T. El Hajj, N. Goballah, H. Dimechkie

how quality of life (QoL) enables a holistic view of the health status of the population; Wee'am Hammoudeh (Palestine) explained how QoL measures were applied in her study aimed at understanding Palestinian women's experiences of the postpartum. Sarah Abboud (Lebanon) discussed the QoL of AIDS patients in Lebanon sharing findings from a cross-sectional descriptive self-administered survey. Session VII was on "youth mental health". Taghreed Al Hajj (Lebanon) presented the development and validation of a new instrument to measure youth mental health; Yoke van der Meulen and Hana Saab (Palestine) described a joint project to design and implement a pilot study called Palestinian Adolescents Coping with trauma (PACT) through an innovative dialogue style of presentation; Hyam Bashour and Mayada Kharouf (Syria) talked about a study they conducted that aimed to assess whether a psychological and support program for mothers caring for such children would improve their psychological health status in Damascus and rural Damascus; and Asya Al-Riyami (Oman) presented findings of a study to investigate the rate and correlates of depressive symptoms among high school adolescents in Oman. The final and eighth session was dedicated to group reflection and to brainstorming concerning future directions of the RHWG. Core support to the RHWG is provided by the Ford Foundation, Cairo Office.

