

# **Common health problems in Lebanese Women**

**Presented by  
Asmahan EL Ezzi, Ph.D**

***International conference of Women of the Mountains  
Utah Valley University  
March 8-9, 2011***



# **Lebanon**

## **The Birthplace of the poet Gibran Khalil Gibran**





*Habeeb.com*

# Geography of Lebanon

- **Lebanon or Loubnan as said in Arabic, derives from the Phoenician for “White Mountain” and related to Lebanon’s mountains, part of which remain snow covered all - year.**
- **Lebanon is bounded on the north and east by Syria, on the west by the Mediterranean, and on the south by occupied Palestine.**



# Lebanon's Mountains

- **Lebanon consists of two mountain chains, the Lebanon and the ante-Lebanon; a narrow coastal strip, and a fertile plain, the Beka'a valley, which provides most of the local agriculture produce.**



# Lebanese population

- **The population of Lebanon is about 4 million, with an overall gender distribution of 0.95 male/ female.**
- **The Lebanese constitution of 1926 included equal rights for all Lebanese citizens, but it was until 1953 when women were given the right to vote and run in elections as candidates.**

# Religions in Lebanon

- Lebanon has a unique cultural identity of ethnic and religious diversity.
- 95% of Lebanese population is Arab, 4% Armenian and 1% from other ethnic backgrounds.
- As for the religion distribution, 70% of Lebanese are Muslim and 30% are Christians.



*Habeeb.com*

- **Lebanon is a democratic Republic country, with a parliament, a cabinet and a President.**
- **The power is divided into the religions, where the President is Christian, the Prime minister is the head of government and is Sunnite and the head of parliament is Chiite.**

- **The birth rate for Lebanese population is 27.7 per 1000 and the death rate is 6.55 per 1000.**
- **The average life expectancy is 69.4 years for men and 71 years for women.**

- **Health care is highly developed in Lebanon which has a reputation for having some of the best health facilities in the Arab world and which has more doctors than it actually needs and hospitals are constantly trying to modernize.**
- **Lebanon spends a lot on health care without efficient use of resources. This shortcomings were also compounded by the 2006 war, which hampered or destroyed health care facilities in the country.**

# **Smoking rate among Lebanese women**

- The smoking rate among Lebanese women is the highest in Arab world (1). Smoking prevalence increased from 28% in 1960 to 35% in 1992.**
- In younger women, smoking (2) was related to women's autonomy and social capital: those who lacked trust and who were not satisfied from the surroundings and relatives were more likely to be smokers.**

- **In older women, smoking was strongly associated with high decision making and high mobility.**
- **Other significant factors were younger age at marriage, lower educational level, and community of residence, unhappiness, household debt, labor force participation and distress.**



- **There is an increasing in the incidence of cancer cases lately in Lebanon.**
- **In women, the distribution of cancer is as follows: 38.2% breast, 7.8% colorectal, 5.9% non- Hodgkin lymphoma, 5.9% lung and 5.6% ovary (4).**
- **Breast cancer incidence in Lebanon is 69 per 100,000, substantially higher than other developing countries of the region, attributed to the wide adoption of screening programs and to better awareness of breast cancer and its early signs.**

- **About 50% of breast cancer patients in Lebanon are below the age of 50 (5). More importantly, breast cancer below age 40 is almost 22% of the cases in Lebanon while it is estimated to represent 6% of cases in western population.**
- **Women diagnosed with cancer in Lebanon do not receive moral support from any governmental or Non Governmental Organization and have to rely on themselves and on their close family members. They feel guilty, fear, uncertainty and lost (6).**

# Wars and mental health

- **Lebanese women suffered long periods of stress, fear and humiliation due to wars. From civil war in 1975-76, then during the several following Israeli invasions to Lebanon: 1982, 1987, 1993, 1996 and lately 2006. Thousands of people were killed, infrastructure of the country destroyed every time. Electricity, water supply and roads were destroyed too. Husbands and sons were detained in prisons by Israeli army; Women had to cope with all these difficulties.**



*Habeeb.com*



Habzeb.com





Habeeb.com



Habeeb.com



- **Life in Lebanon was challenging morally and economically.**
- **About 11% of Lebanese have disability, and so women had to cope with all these problems.**
- **In addition, thousands of men had to leave the country to find job overseas and women had to play the roles of both men and women in their families, which affected greatly their mental health.**

- **As a result of war too, Benzodiazepine (BZP) use is very high and was present in 9.6% of subjects (9), especially women aged more than 45.**
- **BZP is used for treating anxiety, insomnia, agitation and muscle spasm.**
- **The use of BZP was significantly associated with: age higher than 45 years, female, cigarette smoking, and the existence of a recent life event, war stress and the lack of control on drug access.**

- **Obesity is a health issue in Lebanese women. A study (10) showed that 49.4% of women were overweight and 18.8% of women are obese (BMI  $30 \text{ kg/m}^2$ ).**
- **Obesity is more prevalent in rural than urban areas and is more prevalent in unemployed and non-smoking women.**
- **Diabetes in Lebanese women was 13.4% compared (12) to 6.3% of the population in the United States.**

- **Life style related diseases such as cardiovascular, gastro intestinal ulcers, chronic obstructive lung diseases, musculo-skeletal diseases, depression and cancer are increasing (14).**
- **Another common health problem also is the metabolic syndrome (high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes), whereby smoking habits, reduced physical activity, and overweight constitute important modifiable risk factors.**

- **In a screening study for cholesterol, about 60% of volunteer participants were women, which demonstrate that Lebanese women are more attentive to their health than Lebanese men (15).**
- **55% of the screened volunteers have dyslipidemia and an important number of them are not aware of it, and 50% of patients already on cholesterol treatment medications are not properly controlling their condition.**

- **The fertility rate (17) fell from 7 children/ woman in 1960 to 1.78/ women in 2010. The falling birth rate is a social and urban phenomenon.**
- **The decline in fertility is due on one hand to more education among girls and on the other hand to the increase in marriage age. Other reasons for this fertility decline are the cost of marriage, the increase in the number of women who are not married at their late 30's, many of whom will never marry; one fifth of Lebanese women aged 35- 39 are not married.**

***Thank you!***