

Summary report on the

**Regional workshop on adolescent  
sexual and reproductive health  
research: translating research  
findings into action**

Tunis, Tunisia  
14–17 June 2010



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**World Health  
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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## **1. Introduction**

A regional workshop on adolescent sexual and reproductive health research: translating research findings into action was held in Tunis, Tunisia, from 14 to 17 June 2010. The workshop was organized by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO/EMRO) and attended by 38 participants from 14 Member States, as well as from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations for Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), League of Arab States, International Planned Parenthood Federation and American University of Beirut, along with WHO staff from the headquarters and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The workshop was opened by Dr Ibrahim Abdel-Rahim, WHO Representative, Tunisia, who delivered a message from Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. In his message, Dr Gezairy, highlighted the gradual decline of family influence, rapid urbanization and the many-fold increase in exposure to mass media as emerging factors that contributed to major changes in the social behaviour of adolescents. Despite this situation, national data on adolescent sexual and reproductive health in Member States were still insufficient, and when available they were inadequately utilized in advocacy, health education and programme development. Furthermore, situational analyses undertaken in Eastern Mediterranean countries had shown the inadequacy of conventional health systems in meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents. There was also insufficient awareness among health care providers of the psychological, social and bio-physiological aspects of sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. Research based on scientific approaches would generate reliable information, which in turn would help identify and prioritize areas of action in response to sexual and reproductive health of adolescents.

Dr Gezairy emphasized the urgent need to create a database on important issues such as types of adolescent reproductive risky behaviours and availability of essential components of sexual and reproductive health care for adolescents. Appropriate ways were needed to disseminate information to key players, partners and adolescents themselves for promoting their reproductive health, and to enable families and communities to optimize their role in enhancing positive behaviours among adolescents and in acting as agents of change.

Dr Mounira Garbouj, Director, School and University Health Services, addressed the workshop on behalf of the Ministry of Public Health. In her address, Dr Garbouj noted that the Ministry had started to introduce reproductive health related issues into school curricula in 1975. However, national studies and research activities indicated that there was still a gap between the knowledge and practices of adolescents. Several studies had been conducted in the country with close technical support of WHO. These activities had resulted in the initiation of successful interventions such as establishing information and counselling units in secondary schools, universities and public health centres. The implementation of these activities was being closely monitored and periodically evaluated to ensure the quality of the services provided. The rapid change in lifestyles of adolescents posed an ongoing challenge for protecting and promoting adolescent health in the country.

Dr Haifa Madi, Director, Health Protection and Promotion, WHO/EMRO, briefed the participants on the workshop objectives, methodology and expected outcomes. The objectives were to:

- Provide information on existing policies and programmes on adolescent sexual and reproductive health;
- Review adolescent sexual and reproductive health research and studies conducted in countries of the Region;

- Identify research gaps that should be addressed to enable evidence based policy and programme planning and development; and
- Develop national workplans addressing adolescent sexual and reproductive health research priorities and translating research findings into action.

The workshop methodology included updates on adolescent sexual and reproductive health research activities of WHO and the participating partner agencies, presentations on relevant national activities from selected countries, and two group work sessions to identify priority research issues for promoting adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and to conduct strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the use of adolescent sexual and reproductive health research findings in programme planning and implementation.

On the final day, draft country workplans for addressing adolescent sexual and reproductive health research priorities and translating research findings into action in the participating countries were developed. Major conclusions and recommendations were discussed in a plenary discussion in order to determine future steps. The draft country workplans focused on the following adolescent sexual and reproductive health research priority areas.

- **Afghanistan:** establishing a database for youth-friendly services
- **Bahrain:** 1) determining knowledge and attitudes towards contraceptives among students aged 18 to 21 years; 2) prioritizing sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents; and 3) determining prevalence and consequences of unwanted pregnancies among youth
- **Egypt:** 1) addressing human sexuality education from religious and cultural perspectives in schools; and 2) assessing the needs of adolescent sexual and reproductive health services

- **Islamic Republic of Iran:** assessing knowledge and behaviours among young boys in Teheran
- **Jordan:** assessing sexual and reproductive health knowledge, attitudes and practices of young people aged 16 to 18 years
- **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya:** assessing sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents
- **Oman:** assessing the impact of the implemented national strategy on adolescent health
- **Morocco:** 1) youth satisfaction with sexual and reproductive health services in the public and private sectors; 2) desk assessment of adolescent sexual and reproductive health research; 3) qualitative survey on adolescent sexual and reproductive health needs
- **Palestine:** assessing sexual and reproductive health knowledge, attitudes and practices of young people aged 16 to 18 years
- **Saudi Arabia:** 1) assessing the health needs of adolescents; and 2) assessing the needs of youth-friendly services
- **Syrian Arab Republic:** assessing sexual and reproductive health knowledge, attitudes and practices of young people
- **Tunisia:** 1) youth satisfaction with sexual and reproductive health services in the public and private sectors; 2) desk assessment of adolescent sexual and reproductive health research; 3) qualitative survey on adolescent sexual and reproductive health needs
- **United Arab Emirates:** 1) assessing the health needs of adolescents; and 2) assessing the needs of youth-friendly services
- **Yemen:** determining prevalence and consequences of teenage pregnancies

At the closing of the inaugural session, Dr Mounira Garbouj, (Tunisia), Dr Rim Ben Issa (Tunisia), and Ms May Kassar, (Lebanon) were elected chairperson, co-chairperson and rapporteur, respectively.



## 2. Conclusions

Adolescent sexual and reproductive health research presents a challenge in the context of public health in countries of the Region. In some countries, the health of adolescents is still not a priority public health issue; the concept of sexual and reproductive health is not well appreciated; and research is regarded as a luxury.

The workshop underlined the diversity of the situation of adolescent sexual and reproductive health research in Member States and the need to address the identified requirements in accordance with each country context. Successful experiences in adolescent sexual and reproductive health research activities presented by the participating Member States, United Nations and international agencies provide basis for learning opportunities and wider exchange of knowledge among Eastern Mediterranean countries.

Deliberations highlighted crucial success elements for implementation and outcome of adolescent sexual and reproductive health research, such as:

- Support of religious and political leaders
- Community awareness about the special needs of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, including sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS
- Identification of feasible, action-oriented and country specific research priorities
- Ensuring wide dissemination and utilization of research findings in enhancing programme development and implementation.

As well, the socio-cultural environment where adolescents live in has a critical impact on the outcomes of their health, including sexual and reproductive health, and is regarded as integral element of relevant

research work especially in culture-dominated communities in the Region.

The participants emphasized the need to strengthen networking among country teams and partners using available opportunities. They recognized the value of available sources of information such as the reproductive health research directory of WHO, the database of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM) at the League of Arab States, and the reproductive health library of WHO headquarters, and emphasized the need for networking across the Region to build on such successful initiatives.

The participants noted with appreciation the crucial role of PAPFAM, along with collaborating partners including UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and IPPF, in generating country specific information on adolescent health and requested revision of its module to address reproductive health issues along with other priority areas in an integrated manner.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### **To Member States**

1. Finalize the workplans drafted in the workshop in consultation with the concerned national officers, taking into consideration the recommendations of the workshop, and submit the final country workplans to the Regional Office no later than 1 August 2010.
2. Nominate focal points who will be expected to coordinate national efforts aiming to:
  - Establish and operationalize an Eastern Mediterranean Network for Enhancing Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Research

- Facilitate exchange of relevant information at the national and regional levels.
3. Adopt comprehensive approaches to establish and strengthen the adolescent research component of reproductive health and/or adolescent health programmes according to evidence-based elements of success, including:
    - Establishing and updating baseline data
    - Setting up adolescent health research priorities in an integrated manner
    - Promoting research resource mobilization activities
    - Ensuring the use of research findings for scaling up programme performance.
  4. Consider the PAPFAM Youth Module as an integral, not optional, questionnaire of the PAPFAM survey.
  5. Make effective use of available sources of information for promoting and enhancing adolescent sexual and reproductive health research such as the reproductive health research directory of the WHO Regional Office, the PAPFAM database and the reproductive health library of WHO headquarters.
  6. Include adolescents from the planning stage through to the implementation stages of research on sexual and reproductive health of adolescents, and ensure research projects maintain a gender perspective during all phases. For example, data should be disaggregated by sex, study designs should incorporate both sexes, and research teams should have representatives from both sexes.
  7. Conduct situation analyses of the adequacy of existing health care services, starting with the review of existing data and information, wherever feasible, in order to meet the special health needs of adolescents.
  8. Ensure national reproductive and adolescent health programmes collaborate actively with mass media in order to promote a more responsible approach in developing and broadcasting programmes

addressing adolescent needs and using evidence-based research findings.

9. Promote socio-cultural and operational research to evaluate and support the roles of families and communities in fostering responsible sexual behaviours among adolescents.
10. The major needs and problems of adolescents should be identified based on local data and scientific information in a way that is sensitive to the religious and cultural norms of the Region as well as research ethical considerations.
11. Undertake exhaustive review and analysis of existing data before collecting new data for the purpose of assessing needs. Consider using monitoring and evaluation tools to ensure efficient use of research findings through all potential channels.

#### **To WHO**

12. Review the submitted draft country workplans and provide technical input to the participating countries no later than 26 August 2010.
13. In collaboration with the PAPFAM secretariat (including AGFUND, UNICEF, UNFPA, and IPPF), review and update the PAPFAM Youth Module to ensure addressing adolescent research priority issues in this tool and request PAPFAM administration to consider this module as integral, not optional, questionnaire of the PAPFAM survey.

#### **To all concerned agencies**

14. Maintain and harmonize support for adolescent sexual and reproductive health research, including building national capacity, as a priority public health issue in the Region that contributes critically to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.