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Many regions of the world continue to bear witness to the controversial and culturally sensitive subject of gender violence, whether the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) or domestic aggression, and this issue of the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal examines research on this topic in Sudan and India. Changing attitudes through education is the underlying theme in the Article “Opinions of university students about female genital mutilation” (1), whereby current gender-based attitudes to the practice of FGM are examined in order to assess how Sudan’s professional community of tomorrow can tackle the practice. Likewise, the issues of education and urbanization of society are some of the variables examined in the article “Gender-based violence in New Delhi, India: forecast based on secondary data analysis” (2) in an attempt to predict how gender-based violence materializes in various sections of society.

Continuing the theme of maternal and child health is a focus on how health systems development in the Islamic Republic of Iran has had an effect on caesarian section (CS) rate through the country’s Health Transformation Plan. The phenomenon of increasing CS rates has been witnessed within the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and elsewhere, with rising concern by the medical community as the move away from health-facility-based normal vaginal delivery. The article “Effects of the Health Transformation Plan on caesarian section rates in the Islamic Republic of Iran: an interrupted time series” (3) provides important data and analysis on this important topic.

Meanwhile, the issue of effective nutrition in schools is the focus of the article “Compliance with school nutrition policy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: a quantitative study” (4). Saudi Arabia has found itself prone to the problem of childhood obesity and the subsequent noncommunicable disease

risk, and therefore the country has actively pursued a policy of reviewing school meals in an effort to reverse overweight and obesity among growing children through school-based health promotion and education. The article researches the effectiveness of the policy in the capital Riyadh and where weaknesses still remain.

The Region has, unfortunately, suffered further calamities both manmade and natural. Extreme meteorological events in the Islamic Republic of Iran resulted in catastrophic flooding in areas of the country in early 2019, and the article “Communicable diseases management in disasters: an analysis in the Islamic Republic of Iran” (5) is a timely review of the problem of health systems degradation during periods of environmental upheaval through conflict or natural phenomena.

Mass movement of populations, whether as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or voluntary migration, has been phenomenal in the Region, especially during the past 2 decades. Countries suffering conflict, such as the Syrian Arab Republic, have witnessed massive internal displacement as well as population flows into neighbouring states such as Jordan and Lebanon, where strains on health and educational systems have become apparent. Moreover, many of these migrants attempt to reach Europe via dangerous sea crossings at the hands of exploitative people smugglers. This situation is exacerbated by migrant flows primarily from Sub-Saharan Africa via Libya in an attempt to reach Mediterranean European nations. Until recently, Italy had been a major recipient of illegal migration where the problem of communicable disease outbreaks in reception camps has led to urgent need for screening of arrivals, as detailed in the article “Screening for infectious diseases in newly arrived asymptomatic immigrants in southern Italy” (6).

The approaching Holy Month of Ramadan in the Islamic world highlights the issue of combining religious fasting and medical care as examined in the timely article “Comparing time restricted feeding and Islamic fasting” (7). Moreover, the physiological effects of fasting are researched with regard to diabetes during pregnancy in the article “Fasting and post-prandial plasma glucose screening for gestational diabetes mellitus” (8).

Looking forward, the May issue of the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal will examine the health needs of refugees, anaemia in Jordan, the Egyptian health map, and infection control practices in blood banks in Pakistan, among other issues of public health interest.

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