

Confusion and Panic

Health and Environment

Health concerns have gained proportional attention among the peoples and governments of the world. Or at least it looks that way! Terms like Cholesterol, Triglyceride, Diabetes, Tumor, Benign, Malignant are all too familiar to many. Health food and diets have mushroomed into large money making industries. I wonder if they are life-saving too! Furthermore, it is becoming more difficult to separate between health and environment. Hence, the deterioration of health conditions all over the world is closely associated to impairments in environmental conditions and natural resources.

May be what I am trying to say is that the global tone is frightening. More so, it is actually terrifying, and one is prompted to react with denial. A popular proverb in Arabic says: "If one pays attention to everything being said, one would die of worry." But then again, this proverb could be hazardous to your health if it ends up reinforcing ignorance rather than moderation.

What exactly is the real situation other than global panic over survival of the planet? Information is contradictory. There are opposing reports even in specific health issues. On the one hand, medical research has linked the birth control pill to breast cancer due to high levels of estrogen it subjects women's body to; on another hand, international efforts to control population growth propose easy access to the pill as a form of family planning.

Indeed, it is quite confusing: what we are made to believe speaks world panic over health and survival!

We do know that Lebanon has co-signed the **Alma Ata Declaration** which defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity."(WHO Report: Psychological and Mental Health Aspects of Women's Health, Geneva 1993). Hence, Lebanese health policies must begin to let go of the Medical Model whereby, Health is a state of not being sick/ill, and work towards creating a healthy environment.

We noticed in the course of the preparation for this FILE that specific attention to women's health does not come out as a major focus in existing health policies or patterns. We encountered a specific interest in women's health issues in the National AIDS Control Programme, established by the Lebanese Government and the WHO, who having realized that 50% of AIDS victims are women, is eager to do something about it. NGOs naturally perform their own grass root efforts and scholars their own research on the various issues. All of these efforts must come together with the Ministry of Public Health to formulate a comprehensive health policy in accordance with the Alma Ata Declaration.

— R.A.H

Women's Health in Lebanon