

FAMILY PLANNING IN LEBANON



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The Lebanese Family Planning Association (LFPA) was founded in 1969. It is one of nine associations established in countries of the Middle East and North Africa between 1965 and 1971, and affiliated with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). The nine countries are: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Sudan, Morocco, Afghanistan, Iraq and Cyprus. The Family Planning Associations of Bahrain, the Arab Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Democratic Republic joined in 1976.

The activities of the LFPA have consisted of the following:

1. Counselling the ministries concerned with family-planning and the social organization of Lebanon regarding the amendment of old laws and the creation of new ones leading to the evolution and welfare of the Lebanese family.
2. Providing the Lebanese family with necessary services in the following fields:
 - a. Preparation of field studies about family status, causes of sterility and high birth rates, treatment of problems derived from these conditions.
 - b. Creating guidance centers or clinics for parents and couples, in cooperation with the local administrations.
 - c. Creating family-planning centers outside the regular clinics.
 - d. Training social workers in family planning.
3. Participation in international family-planning activities through a) affiliation with IPPF, b) close cooperation with the various organizations concerned with the problem.

Field Study in 1970-71(2)

A comprehensive study made in 1970 and published in 2 volumes, covered the following fields:

1. The demographic, social, cultural and economic status of the Lebanese family, and how it influences the parents' attitude toward family-planning.
2. The amount of information within the family about contraceptives, their uses and the response they receive.
3. The status of pregnancy, abortion and child birth in Lebanon.

(2) A sampling demographic study in 2 vols. (Arabic), entitled: *Al-Ustra fi-Lubnan*, (The Family in Lebanon), prepared and published in Beirut, June 1970.

(3) Average fertility: proportion of live births to the total number of females between 15 and 49.

Average birth: proportion of births to the average number of inhabitants in a certain year.

The average percentage of fertility in Lebanon in 1970 reached 131 per thousand while the present average percentage of births was about 27,3 per thousand, i.e. about the same proportion given in the U.N. Demographic Year of 1970.⁽³⁾

The birth rate in Lebanon is a bit lower than in some other Arab countries where it fluctuates between 40 and 50 per thousand, while in industrialized countries it varies from 15 to 18 per thousand.⁽⁴⁾

The study concludes that a lowering of the average of births and fertility in any country depends on the degree of modernization and economic development achieved by that country. This condition presupposes a high degree of industrialization and technological progress; ensuring a higher standard of living for citizens, a higher individual income, better health conditions, a more effective participation of women in development, raising the standard of education and intensifying the means of information and mass media.⁽⁵⁾

Family Planning Services in and Outside the Clinics

The LFPA has established sixteen regular family-planning centers or clinics distributed in the five administrative districts of Lebanon: 6 in Beirut, 4 in Mt. Lebanon, 1 in the Bekaa, 3 in the South, 2 in the North.

It has also worked to establish other centers for family planning service outside the regular clinics.

In June 1978, the Association obtained from the Municipal Council of Beirut an agreement by which the family-planning services of the LFPA would form a part of the services offered to the citizens by the General Health Department of the Council, without any additional expenses incurred by the beneficiaries.

The Association also agreed to offer free family-planning training to employees in Beirut municipal clinics and health centers, to provide them with contraceptives and help in administering them.

LFPA Information Media

Between 1970 and 1979 the Association organized several conferences on varied topics related to family-planning.

Information sessions brought together leaders of different organizations who were informed about LFPA's aims and activities.

Contacts with the general public included television sessions, radio broadcasts, newspaper publicity, posters and publication of reports and monthly newsletters.

Round table conferences were constituted by groups of Lebanese youth discussing a number of social problems. One of them was a conference held at Beit Meri in November 1972, which discussed family planning and its relation to personal status. The following recommendations were submitted by the members:

1. Fixing a minimum age for marriage.

According to the ECWA Demographic & Related Socio-Economic Data Sheets, no. 2, Beirut, Jan. 1978, the crude birth rate per thousand in Lebanon was 34.4 in 1970, 33.0 in 1975.

(4) *Al-Ustra fi Lubnan*, vol. 1, pp. 139-141.

(5) Information in this and subsequent articles is obtained from LFPA recent publications and monthly newsletter *al-Ustra* issued in July and August 1979.

2. Requiring a health certificate from candidates for marriage.
3. Defining the degree of blood ties which does not hinder intermarriage between relatives.
4. Encouraging tendencies and opinions that discourage polygamy on the ground that it infringes the principle of justice.
5. Working for a legal recognition of the right to adopt children and the right of every child to have a family name.
6. Working to the effect of entrusting divorce cases to legal authorities which would permit it only in dire necessity.
7. Supporting all efforts that contribute to arouse woman's awareness and ensure her participation in family planning activities and other forms of social development.

Conference on Demographic Policies

An important conference on demographic policies in Lebanon took place May 12-14, 1977 in Beirut. It was attended by a large audience including representatives from both the public and the private sector. Several papers were read and discussions conducted on demography and development, population distribution in Lebanon, industrial concentration and its influence on demographic agglomeration. The suggestions and recommendations of this conference were reported in *Al-Raida*, Sept. 1977, no. 2, p. 11.

The Societies' Day

Another important conference was "The Societies Day" which grouped men and women representatives of private organizations on December 2, 1978, to discuss family planning issues which resulted in the following recommendations:

1. Coordination of activities of the societies represented at the Conference.
2. Supporting the claim of LFPA regarding the encouragement of family-planning activities in Lebanon and the abolition of laws that obstruct the use of contraceptive methods.
3. The creation of a new board of social welfare directors, capable of drawing a modern social plan for the future and of putting the plan into practice.

Training Sessions

Following the idea that "people's health lies in people's hands," training sessions were held by LFPA for the workers' syndicate leaders in 1971 and for women field workers at Zahrani (South Lebanon) in four successive years, 1974-1979. (See *Al-Raida* no. 2, Sept. 1977, p. 11).

At Mishrif (Mt. Lebanon), a training session for youth leaders was held May 25-27, 1979. Lectures were presented by five social leaders on family-planning in the national context, family laws and family-planning, social leadership and management, and woman's role in promoting social evolution.

The following important recommendations were finally submitted by the participants:

1. The topic of population studies and family-planning is the problem of our time especially in developing countries and should be the principal concern of today's youth because of its direct impact on their status, their future and their ambitions.

2. The Session members emphasize the necessity of adopting a systematic population policy by the State. A regular demographic survey should be made every year to serve as a basis for development and construction projects in Lebanon. The Lebanese Family Planning Association could take the initiative of collecting any available statistics and current periodicals which may be adequately and properly utilized for the purpose of effecting the survey.
3. The State should be required to issue laws asserting the right of parents to know about family-planning technique and receive the services they need in this respect.
4. Sex education as a part of sociological studies and family relations should be included in school and college curricula.

Training Sessions for Women Fieldworkers

This session took charge of giving a three-week training program to 30 women volunteer fieldworkers who offered their family-planning services in the Zahrani and Nabatiyyeh districts of South Lebanon.

The session lasted for three weeks of July 1979. It included lectures and workshop training in management, health care, family-planning information, first-aid, cooperative activities, rural development unit, budgeting and role of economy in family-planning.

About the relation between economy and family planning, Mr. M. Bizri, one of the speakers, gave a lecture which is condensed in the following paragraphs.

After showing the relationship between economics and sociology, the lecturer defined the role played by the population growth in effecting general welfare. If the rate of the former exceeds the rate of national income, the result will be a continuous decrease of individual income and, consequently, a lowering of the standard of living. To meet the requirements of population pressure, imports will have to increase while exports will proportionately decrease. National income will consequently suffer if the population increase is not balanced by a corresponding increase in production.

What connection is there between the economic status of the family and the number of children planned by the parents?

Parents with a low income and rudimentary education are highly dependent on their children as a means of compensation for material and cultural wants. Children become to them a source of moral satisfaction, income production and old age security. They think that the benefits they expect from increasing the number of their children exceed by far the corresponding expenses and privations which this increase would impose on them.

Parents with a relatively high income and high standard of living show less interest in a large number of children because this would interfere with their personal comfort and lead to a lowering of their standard of living. Instead of depending on their children they depend on accumulated savings and sizable securities for their old age.

From the above statement we may conclude that in order to prevent a menacing over-population, it is necessary to wipe out poverty and make people less dependent on their children as a source of income and old age security.

Workshop on Breast-feeding

A joint meeting brought together the Lebanese Family Planning Association and the Association of Pediatricians in Lebanon, in collaboration with UNICEF and the National IYC Committee in Lebanon, for the purpose of organizing a workshop on breastfeeding and the methods of encouraging it.

The workshop was held at the American University of Beirut Alumni Club, May 19, 1979. It was presided over by the Minister of Health and attended by a large number of pediatricians, gynaecologists and representatives of various national and international organizations.

Lectures and discussions emphasized the importance of breastfeeding for the health of mother and child. They pointed out the necessity of recommending it to pregnant women, particularly in the first months following childbirth. They said that the superstition that disparages this natural function should be fought and nullified. Mass media, public and private health centers should be mobilized for a breast-feeding campaign.

Finally a "Breast-feeding Committee" was created, whose function would be to follow up the execution of the above recommendations.

We publish below a few statistics received from LFPA about the services of the Association outside the clinics.

These statistics are limited to the LFPA's activities in South Lebanon, mainly in the districts of Nabatiyyeh and Zahrani.

1) In Nabatiyyeh district, 1978-1979.

37 villages were included in the study. Average number of women at the fertility age in these villages: 2300 in 1978.

Average number of women benefiting from those clinics: varies between 28 and 36 percent, ranging between 600 in January and over 800 in the last three months of the year, thus showing a steady increase.

In 1979, during the first six months, 36 villages were included in the study.

No. of women at the fertility age: 2316

No. of married women at the fertility age: 1687

No. of beneficiaries: between 680 and 780, making 31 to 41 percent of the total.

2) In Al-Zahrani district

40 villages were included in the study.

Average number of women at the fertility age in 1978: 3733

No. of women benefiting from the above clinics: between 1100 and 1200, making 30 to 34 percent.

Average number of married women at the fertility age in the first four months of 1979: 3654, in May-June: 3566

No. of beneficiaries: between 1131 and 1255, making 32 to 34 percent of the total.

SOCIAL WORKERS AND FAMILY PLANNING⁽¹⁾

Family planning in developing countries is likely to become a major occupation for social workers. Since it is considered one of the major means to raise per capital income, to meet a national goal and to indigenize itself by coping more effectively with requirements of the country in which it operates, family planning allows social work to become a developmental, non-marginal profession. Moreover it fulfills a humanitarian drive which is an essential element in social work and which will become more apparent when we think that the developing countries "have about 70 per cent of the world's children, and their population is growing twice as fast as that of industrialized countries. Their total labor force is increasing at a much faster rate than the opportunities for wage employment... Without significant population reduction, unemployment will be the greatest problem due to the population drift from the countryside where the highest birth rate prevails."⁽²⁾

Family Planning and Family Welfare

As visualized by social work, family planning embraces almost the majority of the items which conduce to family welfare. It is not reduced to the limitation of the number of children and the spacing of pregnancies. It actually leads to family welfare "because it aims at bettering the economic standards of families, reducing parental and maternal burdens, minimizing family conflict and ameliorating children's educational, health and

recreational levels... Thus it is logical to assume that family planning is synonymous with family welfare."

Interest of Social Work in family planning

At an international seminar held in Hawaii in 1970 and consisting mainly of social work educators, the members clearly recognized "the grave threat to the well-being of mankind of world-wide population trends."

Another example of this interest is the effort exerted by the international association of Schools of Social Work which launched a program among member schools to stimulate the development of family planning curricula. Pilot schools were involved upon their own choice as, for example, the Faculty of Social Work, University of Helwan, Egypt. At a workshop held June 25-July 1, 1977, it was recommended that new courses in family planning should be developed and a demonstration center for family planning projects should be created.

The author proposes social work intervention in the field of family planning according to a number of standards which include: policy-making, planning, supervision, administration, research, and indirect practice whereby the practitioner works with the agencies involved in family planning activities to promote the coordination and cooperation between these agencies. Direct practice involves family life education process: working to change the attitude of the indigeneous leaders towards family planning, developing social education programs and following up the cases which cease to use contraceptives.

In conclusion the author says that family planning represents a challenge for social work in developing countries, such as Egypt, which suffer from over-population. Social work as an applied science has to develop a relevant scientific base and a set of techniques by which social values can be incorporated and attitudes can be changed to enhance the adoption of family planning among the vast masses of impoverished societies.

(1) Condensed from an article by Dr. Abdel Halim Reda Abdel Aal in **Population Studies** (An Arabic English publication), Cairo, Egypt no. 49, April-June, 1979, pp. 1-13.

(2) Quoted by the author from Herman D. Stein's "Social Welfare and Development: Education Training for the Seventies", **Social Work Education in the Seventies**, (N.Y. FASSW 1970) p. 3