



ADVANCING THE ADOLESCENT HEALTH AGENDA IN EGYPT: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Consultative meeting
Ismailia, Egypt
February 19-21, 2019

R E P O R T

March 2019

INTRODUCTION:

The Egyptian Society for Adolescent Medicine (ESAM) conducted a consultative meeting with key stakeholders in Egypt engaged and occupied with adolescent health during the period February 19th to 21st, 2019 in a resort venue in Ismailia city at the Suez Canal, under the title “Advancing Adolescent Health Agenda in Egypt; Opportunities and Challenges. This report describes the proceedings and outcome of the meeting.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING:

The meeting aimed at:

- Highlight the need for efficient and quality school health services.
- Initiate a collaborative dialogue between concerned policy makers.
- Develop a working plan in order to integrate health education, adolescent immunization and healthy nutrition in school health services.

APPROACH:

School health and its main components of health education, nutrition and immunization were discussed in three separate sessions as an open discussion following short expert presentations of each of the three topics. Chairpersons of the sessions kept the discussions focusing on: what is happening now? What challenges are we facing? and what is the way forward.

AGENDA:

February 19th:

- Welcoming and introducing participants followed by briefing about the purpose of the meeting and its expected outcome. Discussing agenda and approach.
- Data and research findings about adolescents in Egypt and their health challenges.
- Adolescents’ health promoting program in Egypt; who is caring about them?

February 20th:

- School Health in Egypt; are we reading on the same page like the rest of the region?
- Health education; an urgent need.
- Healthy Nutrition; challenges and opportunities.
- Immunization during adolescence.

February 21st:

- Drafting and discussing the findings and recommendation.
- The way forward? What and Who.

PARTICIPANTS:

The following table indicates participants' names, affiliations and positions:

NO	NAME	AFFILIATION	POSITION
1	Dr. Soad Abdel Maguid	MOHP	Chairperson, primary health
2	Dr. Gamal Al Kashef	MOHP	Chairperson, School Age Health
3	Dr. Osama Hassan	MOHP	Director, Youth-friendly Units
4	Dr. Khaled Kobeisi	Ministry of Education	Deputy Minister, Ismailia
5	Dr. Khalid Seddeg	WHO, EMRO	Adolescent Health Officer
6	Mr. Michael Abdalla	Save the Children	School Health Program Manager
7	Ms. Sara Al Shafey	Plan International	SRH Project Coordinator
8	Dr. Nevine Dous (x)	UNICEF	Senior Health Officer
9	Dr. Nahla Abdel Tawab	Population Council	Regional Director MENA
10	Dr. Mostafa Mohamady	Vacsera Institute	Vaccine General Manager
11	Dr. Samir El Fiky	Min. of Social Solidarity	School Nutrition Sector
12	Dr. Magdy Khaled	ESAM	Chairperson, Scientific Comm.
13	Ms. Elham Fateem	Egyptian Family Health Soc.	Secretary General
14	Dr. Kholoud Tayel	High Institute, Public Health	Chair, Adolescent & School Health
15	Dr. Nagwa Eid Sobhi	Cairo University	Prof. Family Medicine
16	Dr. Amani Abou El-Seoud	Zagazig University	Prof. Community Medicine
17	Ms. Heba Hussein	Akhbar Al-Youm Newspaper	Head of Scientific Section
18	Mr. Nesim Ibrahim	Adult Education Authority	Director, Ismailia Office
19	Mr. Amr Taha	Victory College	Head of Events
20	Ms. Farah Feteiha	ESAM	Adolescent Member
21	Ms. Mariam Arafa	ESAM	Adolescent Member
22	Dr. Mamdouh Wahba	ESAM	President

The 22 participants vary in several aspects; age, profession, affiliation and experience. However they are all engaged somehow with adolescents' health; from being key adolescent health promoters to being adolescents themselves. Each one had a role and shared with valuable and most helpful input.

DISCUSSIONS:

- Adolescents in Egypt constitute 19% of the population. However they are not receiving enough care or attention. The whole phase of life is not even recognized in the "books" or in practice. Sometimes the term "adolescent" in Arabic is not tolerated by some

policy-makers. These young people face many health challenges: they have no reliable source for health awareness, suffer from malnutrition and anemia, facing mental health disorders and the dangers of smoking and violence.

- School Health programs in Egypt are not the best in the world. The term is usually denoted by officials as providing curative services only. The 8 essential elements defined by WHO and other international health organizations are not being recognized. There is no collaboration between the School-age department of the MOHP and the Ministry of Education (MOE) because there is nobody in the MOE who share in this field.
- Studies indicate increasing incidence of disorders of malnutrition among young people in Egypt whether stunting, underweight or in the other hand obesity. Iron-deficiency anemia is prevalent among 24% of students and metabolic diseases are appearing in young ages. Many societal factors are leading to the wide spread of these nutritional disorders; families, schools and the media. Lack of nutrition education among school students is a major factor that can be easily addressed. School meals need to be suitable and responsive to protein-deficiency rather than energy deficiency.
- The immunization is a success story. People are well aware of the benefits of vaccinating infants and children, and strictly adhere to the schedule. The MOH provides high quality vaccines and well executed immunization programs and campaigns. However, there is no similar governmental or public awareness about vaccination in adolescence. The only vaccine provided by the MOH for adolescents in schools is for meningitis. Vaccination against Hepatitis A and HPV is only available in the private sector and at a very small scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

At the end of discussions the consultative group concluded the following recommendations:

1. There is a need to communicate to policy-makers the need to nurture more attention and care to the large sector of adolescents and to support initiation of effective school health program based upon international standards.
2. There is also a need to develop policy briefs containing recent data and information related to the status of adolescent health in the country to become available for the policy makers and other stakeholders.
3. Enforcement of the Ministerial Decision of banning unhealthy drinks and food from school canteens as well as empowering the Environment, Population and Health committees in the different governorates to share in school health promotion.
4. Reconsider the current school meals provided to students and find an alternative that will respond to protein deficiency rather than energy deficiency.

5. There is a dire need for the collaboration of the MOH and Ministry of Education in developing a strategy for a national Health Promoting Schools based upon the standards of the International Health agencies and in association with these agencies.
6. Inclusion of health education syllabus in school curricula as a principal subjects.
7. Update the studies and surveys related to adolescents and their health on a regular basis.
8. Working closely with media channels as being a public source of health information and to help with advocating adolescents' health among policy makers.
9. Create a cadre of healthcare providers who are able to address healthcare programs for adolescents that is acceptable to them and responding to their needs and expectations.
10. Cooperate with national and international organizations to make resources available to support adolescent health programs and encourage non-governmental organizations to share in these programs.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED:

The main usual challenge is getting someone to represent the MOE at the central level. This also happens with regional meetings whether in Egypt or outside. In the Sabin meeting in Dubai there was no such representative and the same happened in 2 workshops organized by WHO in Amman, Jordan and Cairo, Egypt. We tried hard with the Minister himself, his Assistant and his secretary, but had no single positive response. At the end, we resorted to inviting the Deputy Minister in Ismailia Governorate who kindly participated. Yet, he but has no authority beyond his Governorate.

Having a newspaper reporter sharing in the meeting proved to be very helpful. The reporter who participated is one of the medical reporters of the oldest and widely distributed weekly newspaper "Akhbar Al Youm". She participated positively in discussions and published 3 long columns in 3 consequent weeks. She talked about the need for school health then the role of young people and then youth-friendly services.

Inviting young people proved to be a good idea. The two female students who attended were 16 years old and from a governmental secondary school in Cairo. They were of great help with the administrative procedures and also provided clear description of what happens in schools and between their peers. They came up of the idea of helping with advocating school health among students at a national level utilizing social media channels. The accompanying head of events of the school declared that his school will not be providing any unhealthy food or drinks as from the beginning of next academic year.





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