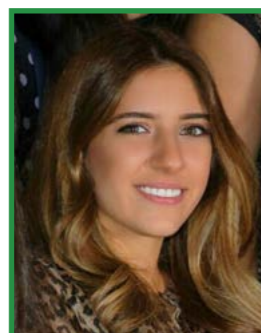


The Center for Studies on Aging: A Think Tank for the Rights of Older Persons in Lebanon



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youthful adults seeking better work opportunities and safer havens elsewhere, as well as counter-waves of 'return migration' of older workers post-retirement mainly from Arab host countries, have additionally contributed to the rectangularization of the population pyramid (Sibai et al, 2015). In fact, people aged 65 years and older currently represent close to 9 percent of Lebanon's population, the highest percentage in the region, and this is projected to increase to 12.0 percent and 21.0 percent by the year 2030 and 2050, respectively.

The current demographic shift in Lebanon is an achievement to be celebrated. Yet, it brings with it a host of challenges: at the forefront lie a shift in disease pattern from communicable to non-communicable degenerative diseases, a greater number of persons with disabilities, increasing out of pocket expenditures, a fragile social protection scheme, and societal changes in family structures and roles (Kronfol et al., 2016). The vulnerability of older persons is further exacerbated by a shortage of geriatric medical specialists, a lack of social workers specialized in gerontology, and inadequacies in nursing homes (Chemali et al., 2008). Furthermore, the stigma of old age mask the contribution and the support older persons are providing to their families and more broadly to societies and national economies, a value which the Western world has started to acknowledge and tap upon to inform strategies and programs that aim at promoting inclusion and active participation of older persons in society .

All of this created an impetus for the initiation of a "think tank" in support of older adult issues, and the first conference on aging in Lebanon was organized in September 2007. This was co-lead by Abla Sibai and Nabil Kronfol and made possible with generous support from the UNFPA-Lebanon. The conference, entitled 'Aging in Lebanon: Research and Policies' brought together over 150

national, regional and international participants as well as professionals involved in research, service provision and policy development and culminated in the establishment of a **Center for Studies Aging (CSA, www.csa.org.lb)**¹. The CSA was registered as a non-governmental organization in October 2008. The center brings together researchers and academicians from major Universities in Lebanon, geriatricians, key officials from the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Social affairs, and the Ministry of Interior, members of the National Committee on Aging in Lebanon, directors of older adults institutes and elderly homes, and representatives of NGOs, social care professionals and of the senior community, themselves. In so doing, the Center supports intersectoral collaboration and promotes exchange between researchers, policy makers, service providers and advocacy groups with the aim of strengthening evidence-to-policy and evidence-to-practice links; and hence, its motto "Translating Research Into Policy and Practice (TRIPP)".

About the Center for Studies on Aging

The mission of the CSA is to promote the integration and active participation of older people in society and to strive for their rights for economic and social security and physical wellbeing. To this end, the Center advocates for the generation of research and studies for evidence based policy and practice. The Center endeavors that policy makers and service providers are aware not only of demographic transitions but also of the health, social and economic consequences of population change. The overall aim of the CSA is to create a hub for research, education, policy formulation and training on aging in Lebanon and the region. The main pillars of the Center's strategic tools with their corresponding aim and objectives are described below.

- **Strategic Tool 1: Research, database, networks, and conferences**

Aim: To raise awareness of aging issues in Lebanon in particular and in the wider Arab world, targeting researchers, policymakers, the major donors and service providers in public, private and the non-profit sectors.

- To collect *documentary evidence* of the demographic, economic, social, cultural and health-related aspects of

old age in the Lebanon and, for comparative purposes, in the Arab world and establish a sound *data* and documentary base on older adults as a virtual library with wide access to researchers and interested parties.

- To create and promote *multidisciplinary regional and national networks* within Lebanon and between Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world by engaging in high level discussions and seminars that promote aging issues through local and regional conferences.

- **Strategic Tool 2: Human resource development**

Aim: To promote good practice in the care of older people in Lebanon and the region.

- To develop manuals and create guidelines with an emphasis on primary care and prevention as well as psycho-social support for use in the training and practice of health and social care workers
- To support and promote the incorporation of geriatrics and gerontology into universities and medical/nursing school curricula and trainings across Lebanon and the region and to provide short courses and training in geriatrics and gerontology for allied health professionals.
- To provide appropriate knowledge and skills needed for self-care and health protection and promotion for older persons

- **Strategic Tool 3: Optimizing opportunities in development plans and policies across all sectors**

Aim: To promote the mainstreaming of older people issues into all economic, social and health development processes and programs

- To counter the negative perception of aging by advocating active aging and primary prevention as an integral part of all development processes, plans, policies, and activities across all sectors: health, behavioral, social, and to promote the incorporation of health care of the older persons into the primary health care systems
- To encourage active partnership and coordination among all levels of government, civil society, the private sector and organizations and international cooperation; utilizing the evidence base as a means of influencing social and health policy

The CSA organizes conferences on a yearly basis (pending availability of funding), hosting national and

1- The A in the logo of the Center depicts a population pyramid with the tip representing the share of older population

international experts to discuss challenges, opportunities and recommendations related to aging, and responding to current issues as these arise. In the context of the recent Syrian crisis in the country and the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon, for example, the CSA held a symposium in 2013 entitled “Older Persons in Emergencies: Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations for Relief Workers”. The symposium promoted a space for proactive discussion on the role of relief agencies catering to the needs of seniors in emergencies and discussed strategies for an action plan to meet these challenges. An ‘Action Brief’ was published and disseminated to relief agencies and their workers in the field (available upon request).

To date, the CSA has issued and published six policy briefs², a country profile for Lebanon (in Arabic and English), and developed an extensive mapping following the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (MIPAA) priority areas: institutional arrangements, research and data, policies and plans of action, older people and development, health and well-being, and enabling and supportive environments. The tool was reviewed by an Expert Group Committee consisting of 16 specialists from Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Egypt as well as senior advisors from UN agencies, and was tailored to the Arab region. In 2014, CSA collaborated with the UNFPA and ESCWA to publish a report entitled “Ageing in the Arab Region: Trends, Implications and Policy Options”. This report presents the most comprehensive overview to date of the demographic, economic, social and health challenges and opportunities of population aging in the Arab world and describes actions made in three priority areas: development, health and well-being, and environment (Sibai et al, 2014).

The Center for Studies on Aging is the first with such initiative in Lebanon and the Arab region. Its online archiving system is continuously being updated with publications, reports and news on aging in Lebanon and the region. These as well as the links and collaborations it has generated in the Arab region and worldwide provide invaluable material and a resource to students, researchers, service providers as well as entrepreneurs in the field of aging. Requests are increasingly being received from international students to connect with the Center for their



internships and research. CSA recognizes the gap in the areas of research, care and policies related to aging in Lebanon and is committed towards improving the quality of life of this growing population through constant evidence generation and communication as well as promotion of intersectoral collaboration.

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2- Older people in Lebanon: Voices of the care givers; Pensions: A right long overdue for the older citizens; Seniors in Emergencies: A call to action; Chronic disease and aging in the Eastern Mediterranean Region; End of Life Care; and Age Friendly Cities: An Opportunity for Friendly Aging; all available at the CSA website.



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