

For Immediate Release



AUB research team launches study on alcohol harm reduction policies in Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon- 04/03/2013 - Rising alcohol consumption among Lebanese teenagers as young as 13 has prompted an American University of Beirut team of researchers to study and reform national alcohol policies to help curb reckless alcohol consumption and reduce associated harms.

Having been awarded a \$260,000 three-year grant by the International Development Research Center (IDRC), Lilian Ghandour, assistant professor of epidemiology and population health from the Faculty of Health Sciences, has embarked, along with an interdisciplinary team, on a project aimed at identifying a specific national alcohol control and harm reduction policy package most likely to influence young consumer alcohol consumption and purchasing behaviors.

“The evidence based on our research, and other recent studies, clearly indicates that youth alcohol consumption is a public health issue in Lebanon right now,” explained Ghandour.

Between 2005 and 2011, the number of drinkers among teenagers between 13- and 15 rose almost 40 percent: Currently, two out of seven teenagers in this age group are alcohol drinkers. The increase in drinking is markedly higher among girls and 7th and 8th graders versus 9th graders, according to recent data from the Global School Health Survey, a collaborative effort between local ministries, the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control, in the United States.

What’s more disconcerting for public health specialists is that one and a half times more high school students in this age group reported ever getting drunk in 2011 as compared to 2005.

“Unfortunately prevention efforts are scattered, and a national strategy is absent since the issue of alcohol control is not high on the Lebanese policymaking agenda,” noted Ghandour. “Today, Lebanon is characterized by alcohol control policies that are weak, outdated -- the latest update was in 1985-- and loosely enforced.”

For this reason, the AUB research team aims to generate qualitative and quantitative scientific evidence needed to help develop, reform and implement effective national alcohol control policies specifically targeting alcohol taxes and prices, age of legal alcohol purchase and consumption, drinking and driving, as well as alcohol marketing and advertising--which are often designed to appeal to youth. The end product will be a package of evidence-based policies that is expected to spark a national dialogue, push national efforts forward and ultimately influence young consumer alcohol consumption and purchasing behaviors in Lebanon.

According to Youth Association for Social Awareness (YASA), whose aim is to raise awareness about road safety, more than 700 people die in car crashes every year in Lebanon. On average nearly 33 percent of these accidents are due to drunk driving, which means at least 230 lives could potentially be saved annually, if policies to control harm from alcohol were put in place.

Ghandour, principal investigator and project leader, will be working with her interdisciplinary team, which includes Assistant Professor Nasser Yassin, the co-principal investigator from the Department of Health Management and Policy, Assistant Professor Rima Nakkash and Professor Rima Afifi from the Department of Health Promotion and Community Health, and Ali Chalak, assistant professor of applied economics from the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences.

Entitled "Alcohol control and harm reduction policies in Lebanon: The industry, the market and the young consumer," the three-year study will be split into three phases.

The first year will be dedicated to understanding existing local policies on alcohol harm reduction and comparing them with effective regional and international ones. In the second year, the research team will conduct two quantitative surveys among youth aged 15-25 to find out first how variables such as taxation, marketing and the media affect both alcohol consumption and alcohol purchasing behaviors, and second, to identify the combination of policies that is most likely to influence alcohol consumption and purchasing behavior. During the last year, the team will synthesize and analyze the data, recommending an evidence-based alcohol harm reduction policy generated through a participatory-based approach.

"The success of this project rests on the collaborative efforts of all major stakeholders, including youth," said Ghandour, adding that the end result will be a collectively developed national alcohol harm reduction and control policy. "Developing a strong advocacy group that will follow up the implementation of the proposed policy is also important to ensure its success," added Ghandour.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to

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