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Injuries and their impact on Health in Iraq

A source of Morbidity and mortality that should not be forgotton

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Mortality of a disease is the oldest and simplest measure of population health.[1] It is a good tool to measure the effectiveness of any health system as well as to measure the well-being of any community.[2] Clinicians are always interested to know the mortality rate of many communicable and non-communicable diseases like tuberculosis, ischemic heart disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus and others; consequently, health authorities are vigilant to this challenge and recruit human and economic resources to achieve a remarkable decline in mortality rates of these diseases. The importance of this fact is unarguable; however let me spot a light on another cause of mortality and morbidity. A cause which is as common and important as many other medical illnesses that is injuries. Initially let us contemplate the international figures about this problem.

According to WHO global health estimates,[2] injuries killed almost 5 million people worldwide in 2012. It represents about 9 % of all-cause mortality. Two-thirds of them are men and majority of the involved men are in their active life (15-60 years). It is nearly the fourth leading cause of death globally after cardiovascular (31.4 %), infectious including respiratory and parasitic diseases (17 %), and malignant neoplasms (14.7 %). Experts from WHO expect these figures to rise by 2030 and to compete with other causes of death on higher ranks.[3] If this is the situation with mortality from injuries what about their effect on morbidity? It looks a hard question to be answered, but one can imagine how much the impact would be on the health, economy and society as a whole.

What can we conclude from these figures?

Injuries are a common health problem globally, affecting people in their active life, and add very considerable burden on the health resources and health budgets of all countries. Resources which are already limited and depleted. The problem has a huge Social and psychological impact on the community. But in most of the time it is preventable.

What triggers me to talk about injuries and their health, economic, and social impacts is the report about Injury Surveillance System in Iraq (2010-2012) which is published recently by Iraqi Ministry of health.[4] The importance of this report is that it represents the first ever report in Iraq to talk about fatal and non fatal injuries. In addition, it tells that a fruitful results can be obtained if we work together nationally with Iraqi Health directorates and internationally through cooperation with international organizations. This work is the efforts of experts from Ministry of health in Baghdad and Ministry of Health in Kurdistan/ Iraq, in addition to officials from Iraqi Health directorates. Experts from WHO, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have made valuable contributions.

The injury surveillance system started from 2010-2012, data were collected from 9

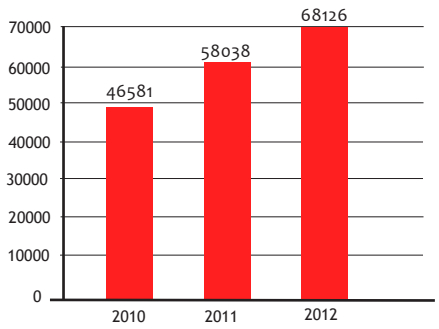

Figure 1: Non Fatal injuries in 8 Iraqi governorates 2010-2012

Iraqi Health directorates in 8 Iraqi governorates. Figure 1 and 2 show the number of non fatal and fatal injuries in those governorates. Non fatal and fatal injuries are more prevalent in 2012. For understandable reasons fatal and non fatal injuries occur in men more than women; however, in both genders the victims are in adult age group (15-40 years). So the loss would be doubled. Firstly, because of human loss and secondly because the loss would deprive the community from its active power, the young adults.

I invite everyone who is concerned with health in Iraq to read this report to have an idea about many interesting and important figures it includes; however, here let me share with you this fact. In our mind including myself, as people living in Iraq, we may expect that injuries, fatal and non fatal, are mainly due to insurgence acts (this fact may be driven forcibly into our mind by mass media) but the figures on the ground tell us something unexpected. In 2012 the non-fatal and fatal injuries caused by insurgent acts are 2.2 and 23 % respectively, while there are 18.2 and 28 % respectively due to traffic. So traffic is more dangerous than insurgent acts on health and life of Iraqis! Consequently if we want to save life of Iraqi people we need to redirect our human and fiscal resources to traffic as well.

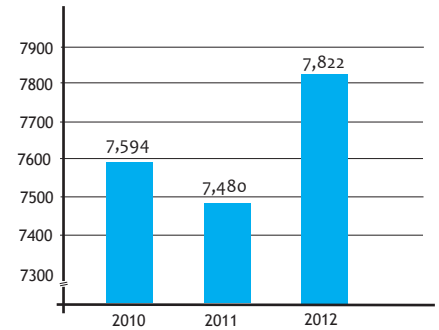

Figure 2: Fatal injuries in 8 Iraqi governorates 2010-2012

Redirection of resources are needed most of the time to deal with challanges, which are many in health. In order to do it in the right way we need a compass to show us the real ground. Nothing better than a well prepared surveillance to guide us.

Surveillance is a very important tool in the hands of epidemiologists and health policymakers to determine the magnitude of the public health problem and trends, to identify risk groups in the community studied, allowing prioritization and planning of the necessary preventive programs, and enable research and assessment.[4]

Developed countries who are proud of their health systems are always define their right health challenges and redirect their efforts and money accordingly. This is usually based on the results of the epidemiological and surveillance studies. In our hands we have such a study and we need to start our action accordingly.

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