

Lifestyle disorders top health issues in Arab world

January 20 2014

Heart disease and stroke have replaced infectious disease as the top causes of early death in the Arab world, tracking the West in a trend towards lifestyle disorders, *The Lancet* reported Monday.

An international consortium of scientists compared the state of health in the 22 countries of the Arab League in 1990 and in 2010, using data from a vast study—the 2010 Global Burden of Diseases report.

In 1990, respiratory infection headed the list of concerns, accounting for 11 percent of deaths, while stillbirths and poor nutrition also featured high on the mortality list.

These problems still persist in the low-income countries of the Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia and Yemen, the investigators found.

But overall, [infectious diseases](#)—with the exception of HIV—have receded, the paper said.

By 2010, the No. 1 cause of death in Arab countries was [heart disease](#), which was implicated in 14.3 percent of cases. In 1990, it had ranked second.

Next on the mortality list was stroke, followed by [respiratory infection](#), diarrhoea, diabetes, road injuries and cirrhosis, respectively.

The report also pointed to depression, anxiety, domestic violence, lower

back pain and neck pain as common and growing sources of ill health—all signs of a region "undergoing a major epidemiological transition."

"Indeed, the epidemiological profile closely resembles that of western Europe, the USA and Canada," it said.

"Today, disorders related to drug and alcohol use are causing more premature death and disability in the Arab world than they were two decades ago."

"Road injuries have taken a growing toll on health," it added.

"The region has also seen a rapid increase in injuries associated with interpersonal violence and self-harm, but a decline in injuries from fire, drowning and poisonings."

Despite the change, "the Arab world has made great progress" in increasing life expectancy and reducing infant mortality and maternal deaths, it said.

The report noted that its source material predated most of the events of the Arab uprising.

In some countries, the turbulence could have a big impact on health, said its authors.

"Many of the successes that we report here might now be lost because of war and a shortage of health services such as sanitation, surveillance and immunisation programmes, leading to disease outbreaks."

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Citation: Lifestyle disorders top health issues in Arab world (2014, January 20) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-01-lifestyle-disorders-health-issues-arab.html>

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