

Enhancing the Understanding of Ageing Perspectives in the Middle East

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Structure of the presentation

- 1- Why is it essential to research ageing in the MENA region?
- 2- Mobilising Collaborations & Engagement: Introducing the MENARAH Network
- 3- Understanding how ageing perceptions are formulated in the MENA region

Reflections on the Intersectionality of Gender and Ageing in the Middle East

Shereen Hussein

Abstract: The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been traditionally characterised by young population demographics but is currently experiencing fast transitions into ageing societies. The region has strong narratives of respect and high regard towards the elderly that are embedded in cultural norms. However, such narratives appear to have limited practical applications as they contradict the experiences of older people. The experiences of older women and men are likely to be impacted by existing gender differentials across the life course including marriage patterns, societal expectations and access to opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated infection control restrictions have impacted the lives of older people globally, including in the Middle East. In this article, I reflect on the intersectionality of gender and ageing perception in the MENA region, drawing on qualitative data collected as part of the Middle East and North Africa Research on Ageing Healthy (MENARAH) Network between 2020 and 2022.

Keywords: COVID-19; intergenerational care; older people; social isolation; ageing perception

Note on the author: Shereen Hussein is a Health and Social Care Policy Professor at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. She is an established multi-disciplinary research leader in ageing and long-term care. Her background is in medical demography, statistics and computer science. Shereen is a Co-Director of a Department of Health and Social Care-funded Policy Research Unit focusing on health and social care systems and commissioning. She is an expert advisor to various OECD and Low–Middle Income countries to develop social care and ageing policies and reforms. In 2020, she founded the Middle East and North Africa Research on Ageing Healthy (MENARAH) Network, a unique regional and international collaborative network promoting healthy ageing in the region (www.MENARAH.org). Publications include 'Migration Gender and Social Inclusion' (2020) in S. Westwood (ed.), *Ageing, Diversity and Inequality: Social Justice Perspectives* (London, Routledge) and 'Ageing and Elderly Care in the Arab Region: Policy Challenges and Opportunities' (2017) (with M. Ismail), *Ageing International*, 42 (3): 274–89.
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1- Why is it essential to research ageing in the MENA region?



The unique features of ageing in the MENA region

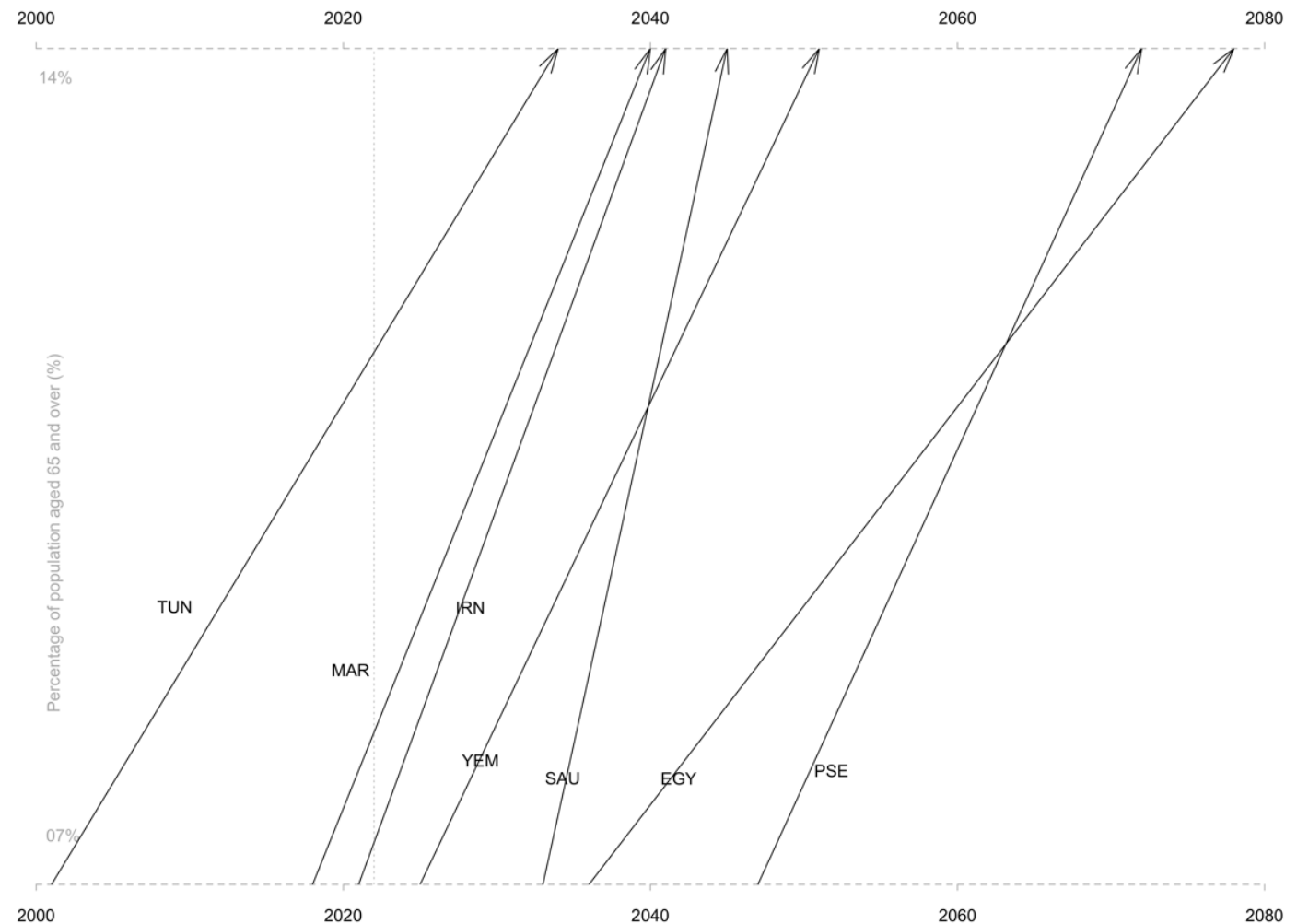
- Pace of ageing
 - Within a dynamic political, socio-economic & epidemiological changing landscape
- Levels of unpreparedness
 - Policy and Practice
- Burden of disease
- Perceptions of and expectations from ageing
- Competing priorities and limited resources
- Population dividends
 - A window of opportunity, but
 - Differences between population and system demographics: high levels of unemployment and low levels of contribution

The pace of ageing transition

Only Tunisia, Iran, Lebanon and Morocco have started the transition.

Most other countries will follow in the next decade or so.

The pace of change in GCC is astonishing (as little as 12 years).



Source: Hussein, S. & Ismail, M. (2023). *Ageing Demographics in the Middle East and North Africa: Policy Opportunities and Challenges*. A report to the World Bank, Head Quarters: Washington D.C. Published by MENARAH Network.

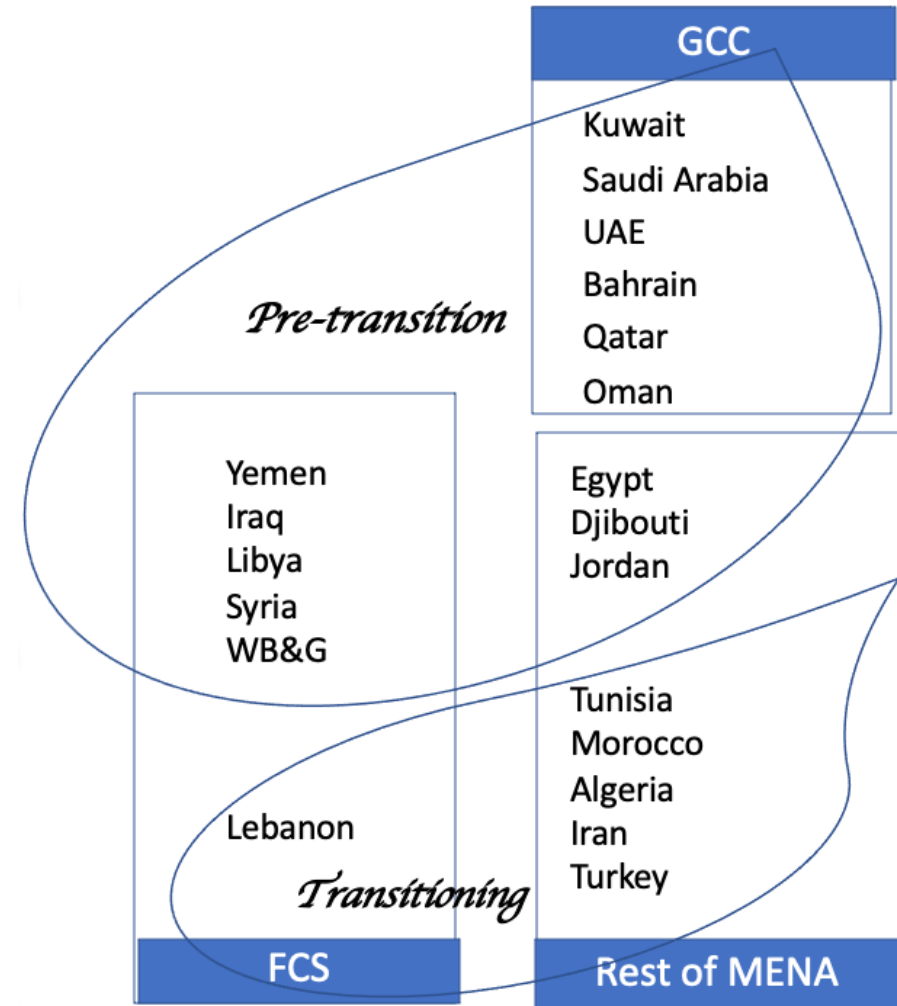
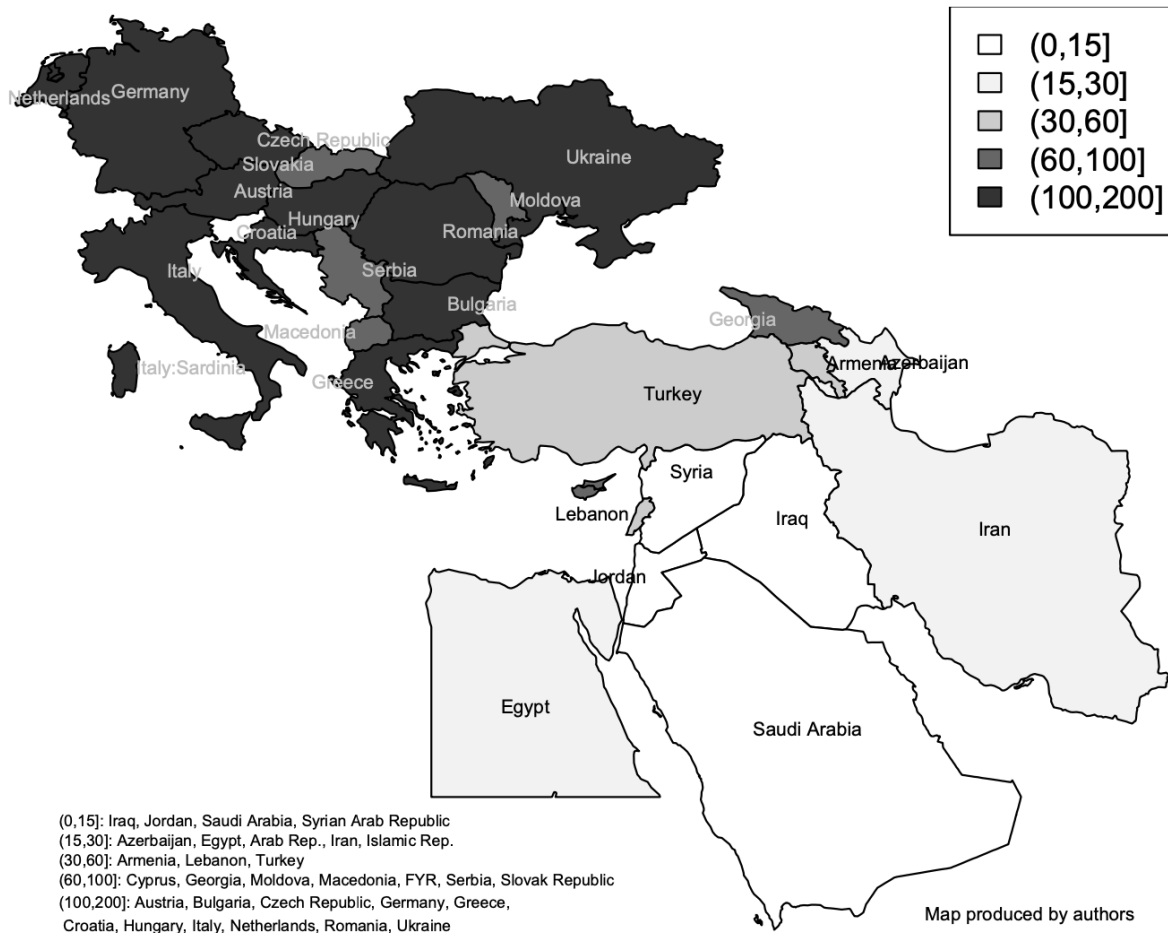
Not all years gained are healthy years

- Both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are increasing
 - Nature longevity limit?
 - HLE not growing as fast as LE
- High number of years lived with LTC needs
- Significant gender, ethnic & socio-economic differentials
- Differentials within and across countries

Country	Life Expectancy at birth		Healthy life expectancy at birth		Difference between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy in years	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Malta	79.9	83.8	70.9	71.9	9.0	11.9
Kuwait	79.3	84.0	69.5	71.1	9.8	12.9
Tunisia	74.9	79.2	66.1	67.7	8.8	11.5
Jordan	77.0	78.8	68.1	67.2	8.9	11.6
Iran	75.7	79.1	66.0	66.5	9.7	12.6
Lebanon	74.0	79.2	65.1	67.1	8.9	12.1
Libya	74.2	77.3	64.9	65.5	9.3	11.8
Algeria	76.2	78.1	66.7	66.1	9.5	12.0
UAE	75.1	78.4	65.8	66.2	9.3	12.2
Oman	73.0	75.3	64.5	64.5	8.5	10.8
Qatar	78.0	76.6	68.1	65.1	9.9	11.5
Bahrain	75.0	77.0	66.0	65.5	9.0	11.5
Egypt	69.6	74.1	62.3	63.7	7.3	10.4
Morocco	71.7	74.3	63.7	63.7	8.0	10.6
Iraq	69.9	75.0	61.6	63.7	8.3	11.3
Saudi Arabia	73.1	76.2	63.8	64.4	9.3	11.8
Syria	71.2	74.3	62.5	63.3	8.7	11.0
Djibouti	64.1	67.8	57.2	58.9	6.9	8.9
Yemen	64.4	68.9	57.0	58.0	7.4	10.9

Source: Hussein, S. & Ismail, M. (2023). *Ageing Demographics in the Middle East and North Africa: Policy Opportunities and Challenges*. A report to the World Bank, Head Quarters: Washington D.C. Published by MENARAH Network.

Common yet nuanced experiences



Ismail, M., & Hussein, S. (2021). An Evidence Review of Ageing, Long-Term Care Provision and Funding Mechanisms in Turkey: Using Existing Evidence to Estimate Long-Term Care Cost. *Sustainability*, 13(11).

Source: Hussein, S. & Ismail, M. (2023). *Ageing Demographics in the Middle East and North Africa: Policy Opportunities and Challenges*. A report to the World Bank, Head Quarters: Washington D.C. Published by MENARAH Network.

2- Mobilising Collaborations & Engagement: Introducing the MENARAH Network



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The Middle East and North Africa Research on Ageing Healthy (MENARAH) Network



MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA RESEARCH ON AGEING HEALTHY

MENARAH (*meaning lighthouse in Arabic*) brings together those interested in healthy ageing research and policy across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. We aim to raise awareness of ageing within the MENA region's specific economic and socio-cultural structures. The MENARAH network seeks to conduct research and knowledge mobilisation activities to inform the formulation of policies and practices specific to healthy ageing and the well-being of older people and their informal carers in the region.

Read MENARAH Director's [Welcome Note](#)



BLOGS & COMMENTARIES

[Unlocking the Demographic Puzzle: MENARAH Report Unveils the Ageing Transformation in the Middle East](#)

[Calling All Age-Friendly Leaders: Join the AFE ECHO Program and Shape the Future of Age-Friendly Cities!](#)

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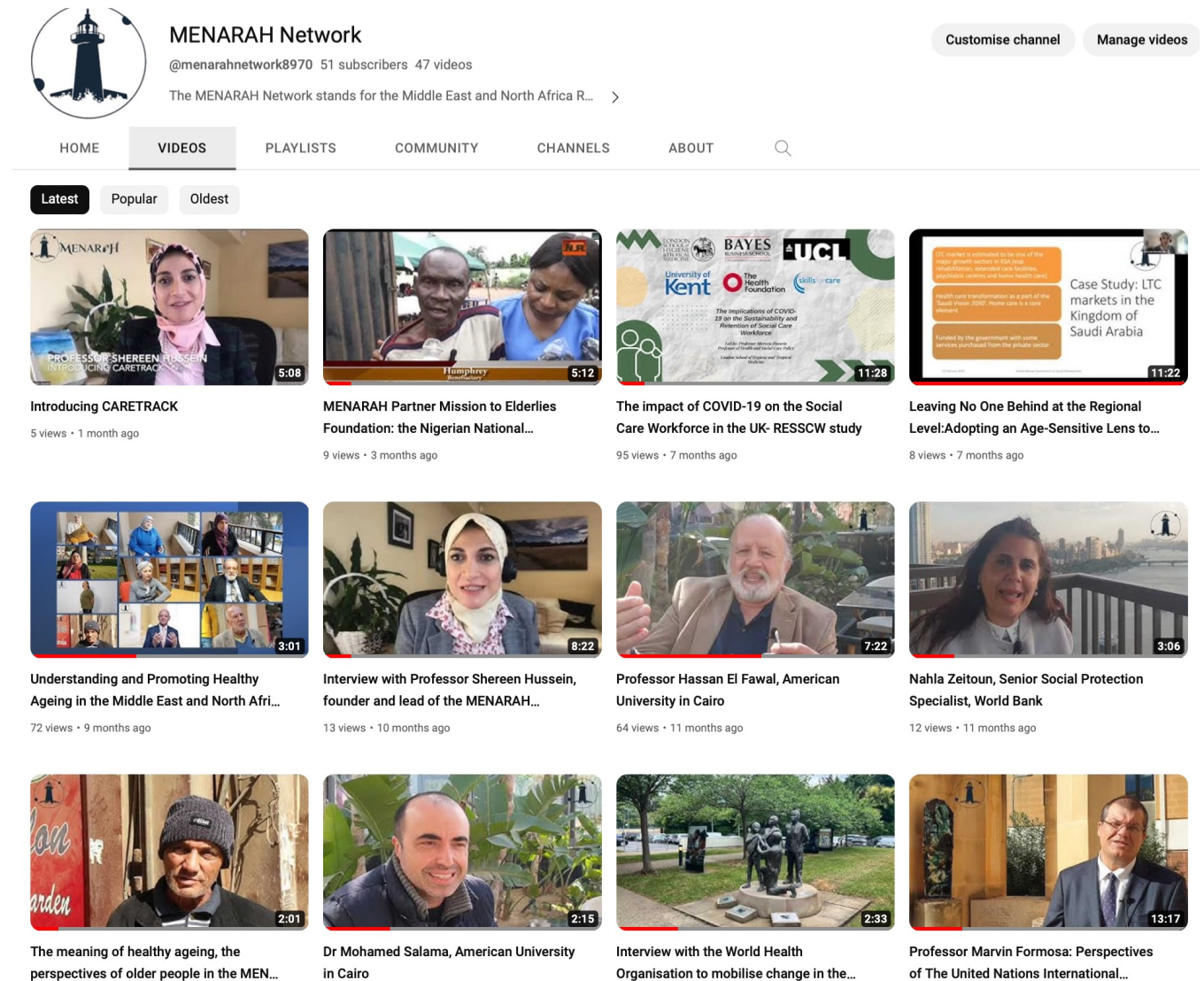
[Unlocking the Demographic Puzzle: MENARAH Report Unveils the Ageing Transformation in the Middle East](#)

[Calling All Age-Friendly Leaders: Join the AFE ECHO Program and Shape the Future of Age-Friendly Cities!](#)

- Launched Sep. 2020
 - Initial UKRI GCRF grants
 - Followed by various funding
 - Builds on activities since 2015
- Focuses on healthy ageing in its broadest meaning
- A network of researchers, NGOs, policymakers and many more
- Aims to
 - Raise awareness and connect different actors
 - Conduct research and knowledge mobilisation activities
 - Inform policy and practice formulation & development

International, regional and national collaborators

- London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- Global Health Equity Foundation
- London School of Economics (STRiDE)
- Healthy Life Span Institute
- United Nations International Institute on Ageing
- Oxford Institute of Population Ageing
- Social Research Centre, American University in Cairo
- Italy's National Institute of Health and Science on Ageing
- HelpAge International
- Institute of Global Health and Human Ecology, Egypt
- Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Turkey
- Global Brain Health Institute



The screenshot shows the YouTube channel for the MENARAH Network. The channel name is "MENARAH Network" with the handle "@menarahnetwork8970", 51 subscribers, and 47 videos. The bio states: "The MENARAH Network stands for the Middle East and North Africa...". The page is set to the "VIDEOS" tab, showing a grid of 12 video thumbnails. Each thumbnail includes a video title, view count, and upload date.

Video Title	Views	Upload Date
Introducing CARETRACK	5 views	1 month ago
MENARAH Partner Mission to Elderlies Foundation: the Nigerian National...	9 views	3 months ago
The impact of COVID-19 on the Social Care Workforce in the UK- RESSCW study	95 views	7 months ago
Leaving No One Behind at the Regional Level: Adopting an Age-Sensitive Lens to...	8 views	7 months ago
Understanding and Promoting Healthy Ageing in the Middle East and North Afri...	72 views	9 months ago
Interview with Professor Shereen Hussein, founder and lead of the MENARAH...	13 views	10 months ago
Professor Hassan El Fawal, American University in Cairo	64 views	11 months ago
Nahla Zeitoun, Senior Social Protection Specialist, World Bank	12 views	11 months ago
The meaning of healthy ageing, the perspectives of older people in the MEN...		
Dr Mohamed Salama, American University in Cairo		
Interview with the World Health Organisation to mobilise change in the...		
Professor Marvin Formosa: Perspectives of The United Nations International...		

MENARAH's Network Aims and Objectives

1

Promoting the ageing agenda and dialogue

- Dialogue & Mapping
- Awareness raising
- Cultural & context specific

2

Linking stakeholders

- NGOs, international agencies, governments, individuals
- Building capacity

3

Providing technical assistance

- Directly to governments or through international agencies and NGOs
- Consultancies

4

Knowledge translations and exchange

- Publications' hub
- Regular commentaries
- Lay summaries of research

Examples: Research



HOME > INITIATIVES > THE MEANING OF HEALTHY AGEING IN THE MENA REGION

THE MEANING OF HEALTHY AGEING IN THE MENA REGION

The meaning of ageing and healthy longevity is socially and culturally sensitive. To enable design aimed at promoting healthy ageing, it is crucial to understand what it means to be healthy in old behaviours that are likely to be adopted by individuals, families and the wider communities in the region, engages with older people, their families and informal carers, national and international relevance, explore the meaning of healthy ageing in the Middle East and North Africa region. The activities and meaningful engagement with different groups and individuals. Some of these activities were from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2021-2022).



Understanding Ageing Perceptions in the MENA Region: The Role of the...

August 14, 2023



Towards Healthy Ageing in the Middle East and North Africa

January 23, 2023



Mobilising Ageing Research in the Middle East and North Africa Region

December 26, 2022



Treating Older People with Dignity and Respect: Communications with People Living...

December 19, 2022

RESOURCES

This section contains our resources across blogs, publications, presentations and useful links.

Blogs

Read our latest blogs and news:



Publications

MENARAH members' publications:



Presentations

Presentations and events:

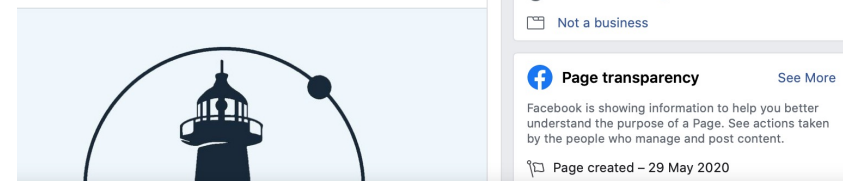
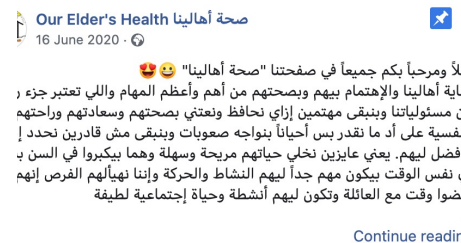


Useful Links

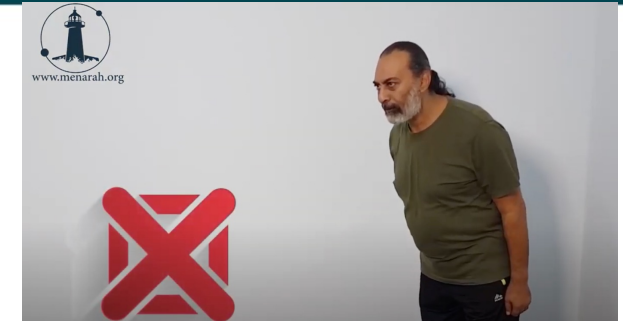
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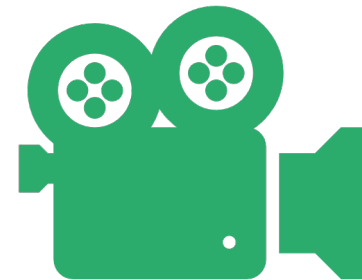
Share Suggest Edits Send Message



Creating practical and accessible tools during COVID



Movement is a Blessing
Culturally tailored physical training videos: 10 episodes



Supporting Regional F the UN, WHO and the



E/ESCWA/CL2.GPID/2022/1/POLICY BRIEF.1

BUILDING FORWARD BETTER

Ageing trends and socioeconomic status of older persons in the Arab region



In this brief

- Demographic trends
- Socioeconomic status
- Health
- Education
- Poverty
- Evidence base



This brief is based on PDR 9, available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/population-development-report-9>



October 2023

Ageing Demographics and Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa

Policy opportunities and challenges

Shereen Hussein
Mohamed Ismail







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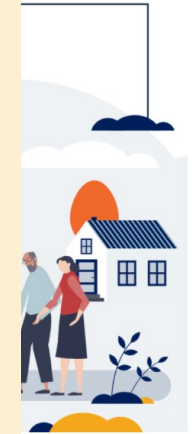


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grow older? Do
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MENARAH current and future activities

Enhancing healthy ageing behaviours & outcomes

- Definitions and concepts (including the notion of ageing itself)
- Creating participation opportunities

Addressing current & future needs

- Policy reforms (retirement, pensions, long-life learning, social protection)
- Fiscal consequences at the individual, families and state levels

Diverse and unequal experiences

- Targeted interventions

Capitalize on international activities

- High level of policy attention (SDS/ Decade of healthy ageing etc.)
- Global context and knowledge flow (four-ways)

A dynamic & shifting landscape (COVID19, conflicts & mobility)

3- Understanding how ageing perceptions are formulated in the MENA region



A study focus: Aim & Methods

- Conceptualising the process of ageing in the MENA region
- Data was collected as part of the MENARAH Network engagement activities in the MENA region:
 - Over 50 one-to-one and group conversations with older people, informal carers, policymakers, researchers and charitable organisations
- At three-time points:
 - September 2019 – February 2020, January – April 2021 and February – May 2022.
- The discussions did not follow any specific interview schedule.
 - Utilised conversational and storytelling techniques.
- Employed a reflectivity analytical process while acknowledging my positionality as someone familiar with the cultural context.

Three main concepts that might explain the process of ageing

Cultural

Collective societies have higher respect and values for older people

Positive ageing views

Modernisation

Attitudes to ageing are aligned to the level of modernisation & industrialisation levels

Diverse ageing views

Speed of Ageing

The rapid and abrupt ageing process may lead to resentment toward older people [competition over resources]

Resentment & negative ageing views in MENA

These theories are not independent.

None of them can fully explain how ageing perceptions are formulated.

Each has been criticised for ignoring certain aspects or making generalisable assumptions.

- Views on ageing formulate early in life
- Increased life expectancy did not match the life expectations as one age

We are lucky that we are living that long, I personally did not expect to reach this age. (Woman 83 years, living with adult son)

- Gender differences when preserving individuals as 'older persons'

Women in the MENA region are perceived to age faster than men and women are consistently perceived to be old at much younger ages than men. These gender differences seem to be attributed by older people in the region to appearance and explained by biological factors, such as childbearing and the double burden of work inside and outside the home.

- A narrative of respect and a high sense of duty towards older people in the region. Positioned within a framework of vulnerability and limited expectations of older individuals.

And then we have this tendency; we might call it respect, to treat them [older people] as handicapped ... as crippled. (Ageing researcher, 2022)

- For some, respect and love operated in a way that increased dependency.

When my mother retired from work, my sisters and I wanted to make life easier for her. We prevented her from doing anything in the house, or outside. We did this too much over several years, she quickly lost her ability to walk, to the point that she has become a wheelchair user. (Daughter, family carer to an 80-year-old mother, 2020)

- A cycle of dependency and reliance within the family care dynamics; difficult for older people to recognise and talk openly about potential mistreatment or abuse.

Well, my son looks after me. He lives far away so I see him every few days. I try to manage my own needs.... My son does not have a stable job and he has lots of responsibilities with his family. His children need a good education. I am pleased that I can support him. I do not need much money, he manages this. ... when I need something fixed in the home, or to see the doctors, I wait for the next month and ask my son when he collects the pensions. (Woman, 80 years, lives alone)

- A sense of isolation and inability to engage in a broad set of social activities was expressed by several older people

There is not much opportunity for me [to participate]; I sometimes go to the local mosque to recite Quran with a group of older women. However, there are minimal facilities for us older people. Even when you try to go out, it is impossible. The pavement is very high; how can I climb up or cross the street? They [the government] should account for older people when they design roads and pavements. (Woman, 79 years old, lives with an adult son, 2020)

- COVID-19 intensified the feelings of isolation among older people, especially among women.

Before COVID-19, I used to go on many trips. I enjoyed seeing new places and having the opportunity to walk and feel active. However, COVID-19 made me unable to go out alone. I need someone to take me out. After many months at home, I worry about going out alone. I fear I will fall. Also, I am afraid I will meet someone with the disease. I feel isolated and reliant on my son, who is very busy and lives far away. (Woman, 81 years old, lives alone, 2021)

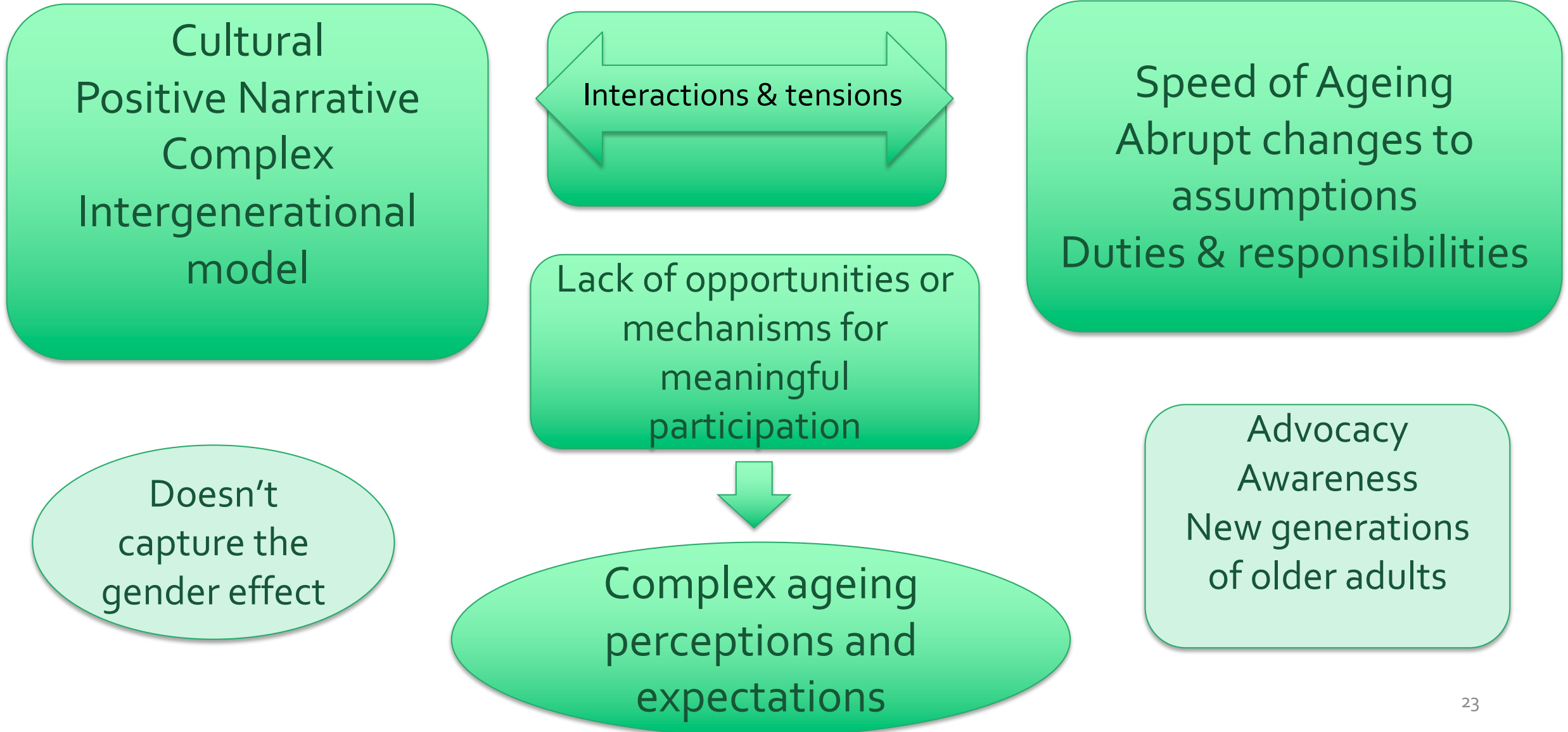
- Lack of physical activities and decline in functional & cognitive abilities

Mum was very active. Every day she used to go to the leisure centre. Two years earlier, she used to do this on her own. Then we recruited a domestic helper to take her. She used to climb down four floors as our building does not have a lift. Since COVID-19, she has not been active, which has affected her ability to walk, and now she needs help going to the toilet. (Male family carer, mother 90 years old, 2021)

Discussion points

- The speed of ageing hypothesis came across on several occasions
- The collective society hypothesis did not necessarily result in a positive ageing experience
 - An embedded code of obligations and responsibilities
 - Tension between treasuring older people and assumed dependency and frailty
 - Good narrative (intentions), yet, a lack of application mechanism
- Some tension is created by the speed of ageing and cultural narratives
- The modernisation hypothesis did not feature much in the data, although participants had different socio-economic backgrounds.
- Gender differences
 - Protecting older women from physical exertion;
 - Ensuring older men remain cognitively active

Conclusion: Concepts explaining the ageing experience in the MENA region



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Thank you for Listening

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