

IHP news 482 : Women seeking women to help mend “broken hearts”

(10 August 2018)

Dear Colleagues,

The negative impact of the gender gap on health is widely acknowledged, but now it is confirmed that gender inequality can be deadly, literally! As a woman, the thought that during a heart attack, my chances of survival might be influenced by the gender of my treating doctor is a scary one indeed. The good news, though, is that small changes can result in improvements, and gender mainstreaming is apparently not only good for women, it [benefits everyone](#).

In other news, I was happy to see the spotlight being put on nurses and midwives this week, because even though globally, we account for almost [50% of the health workforce](#), we are often left out of global health discussions. As someone who is acutely aware of the important role of this cadre of professionals within health systems, it was gratifying to see them being recognized as a key resource for the achievement and implementation of Alma Ata.

And finally, the heatwave has abated, at least here in Belgium, hurrah! Yet we are not out of the woods, as scientists warned this week that current efforts to mitigate climate change are not enough - they say that unless we take much better care of our planet, we risk finding ourselves in a “Hothouse Earth” state. This of course is not new information, however, the timing of the publication to coincide with the end of what has been a few weeks of unbearably hot weather should hopefully yield some results. I know I am perhaps being overly optimistic, but I have to be, because honestly the idea of living on a hothouse earth does not sound appealing to me at all. With a bit of luck the two things will convince the powers that be (as well as individuals!) to finally take climate change seriously.

On a happier note, this is the third and final edition of what I like to term my “IHP summer takeover”, it really has been fun stepping into Kristof’s shoes and trying to keep up the standard at the IHP headquarters.

Enjoy your reading!

Clara Affun-Adegbulu

Featured Article

Understanding Autism: The key to acceptance

Dina Fahmi (Dina is a Psychology graduate from an Italian university in Rome, specialized in the "Montessori Educational Method" and Autism Certified by the "International board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards"(IBCCES). She is the founder of Nemos' World - Child Learning Studio.)

“I’m standing in a place people call the playground. My eyes are hurting from the brightness of the sun...I keep my head down and twitch my eyes. The sounds around me are hard to distinguish from one another, I hear people’s voices; I hear children crying; I can hear and feel the vibration of the wind every time the swing next to me goes up and down...I cover my ears with my hands. I start humming. Everything around me is moving so quickly. I start getting anxious. Why is everyone in such a rush I wonder? Slow down!

While all this is happening, my mother starts talking to me and asks: “do you want to go on the swing? “I barely look up, I don’t uncover my ears, I don’t reply. She asks me again; I don’t reply; I start humming louder. This time my mother looks at me and says slowly “I want...?” waiting for me to complete the sentence. Wait mom, wait...I’m processing the voices, the feel of the wind, the cries, the brightness in my eyes and your question. While my mother waits patiently for me to answer, a voice in the background says: “Why is your son covering his ears? Why doesn’t he look at you or respond to you?” He is really misbehaving. My mother looks back and says “my child is not misbehaving; my child has Autism”.”

We have all heard about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at some point in our lives, we’ve come across it on the news, on TV, in articles, or met a friend of a friend with an Autistic child or sibling, but not many truly know what it is like to be Autistic or have a child on the spectrum.

In the story above, this mother once again finds herself having to explain what this all means; what Autism is, and she sometimes may even feel the need to apologize for her child’s behavior.

So, what is Autism? It is a neurodevelopment disorder that appears during the first 3 years of life, which affects brain function and three main areas of a child’s development: the social skills; communication skills and behavior. Autism is defined as a spectrum disorder because it has a wide range of symptoms, and varies in severity, from mild to moderate to severe. For example, some people may have mild behavioral challenges, but be affected in their communication and social skills, while others might have behavioral problems and poor social skills but good speech.

In most cases parents start noticing a change in their child between the ages of 18-48 months. Around that age the child starts stagnating in his/her development: there is a noticeable delay in speech, poor interaction with other children, poor eye contact, no separation anxiety when the parents leave the room and “odd” behaviors known as stereotypical behaviors start catching the parents’ attention. Once a parent notices these early symptoms or has any slight doubt it is important to immediately ask for a proper diagnosis, not only from a pediatrician but also from a specialized therapist. Early intervention has proven to be effective for a good prognosis. Unfortunately, we still do not have a

specific cause for ASD which makes it extremely difficult for people, including the parents themselves, to understand the condition fully or even accept it in some societies and cultures.

This is the case in Egypt where awareness of the condition is still poor, and even when people know about ASD, there is a big gap between knowledge and acceptance of the disorder. Egypt currently does not have official statistics on ASD, and although awareness is starting to improve, it is still mostly limited to families that are highly educated and/or from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Many families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds don't understanding the disorder or sometimes don't even know it exists. In fact, in some cases it is a big taboo to have a child with learning difficulties and challenges.

Parents with children on the spectrum face many barriers in Egypt. Socially we are far behind when it comes to acceptance and integration in schools and society. Schools don't have enough trained staff, curriculums are not adapted to the child's needs, and learning support staff are not always provided. Parents also struggle to find qualified therapists and even when they do, the therapists are overwhelmed with the number of clients and are not able to offer their services to enough children. In addition to this, there are very few centers where a child can receive a full therapy program. More often than not, parents have to move from one place to another in order to access speech therapy, occupational therapy (OT) and behavioral therapy services.

Children with ASD will often need a great amount of behavioral therapy, OT, speech therapy and so on, but all of it must go hand in hand with a fundamental element: integration into society. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness in new generations to allow ASD children and adults to be part of the society, to be educated, to work, and contribute to society with their capacities and talents. This would be a win-win situation for individuals with Autism and their families, as well as the Egyptian society as a whole. After all [sustainable development](#) can only truly happen, when "no one is left behind".

Our world is moving too quickly, we are all running around, juggling a thousand things at once and sometimes forgetting to do what a mother of an ASD child knows how to do best: Stop, listen and wait patiently for her child to process her question.

"I want swing" I finally replied. She took my hand and guided me towards it. **I am not misbehaving...I have Autism.**

Highlights of the week

Planet at Risk of Heading Towards Apocalyptic, Irreversible 'Hothouse Earth' State

https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/8xbdnk/planet-at-risk-of-heading-towards-hothouse-earth

Scientists issued a new warning about climate change this week, as a [major study](#) reported its findings on the risk of earth entering a hothouse state. *"Hothouse Earth"*, an apocalyptic nightmare in which the global average temperature and sea levels would significantly higher than at any time in Earth's recent history, would *"cause serious disruptions to ecosystems, society, and economies"* and make large parts of the Earth uninhabitable. The authors remind us of the need to *"become responsible planetary stewards in the next ten years"*, if we are to avoid finding ourselves at this point of no return.

Reproductive Rights in Latin America: A luta continua

Sad news from Argentina, where lawmakers have [rejected a bill to legalize elective abortion](#) in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. The Catholic Church remains very powerful in Pope Francis's homeland, but abortion rights activists remain hopeful that safe and legal access is just a matter of time: *"We might not have a law today, but it is going to happen. Argentina is not going back to this, it is important for the women, especially for the young women."* Amnesty International estimates that more than 3,000 women have died in Argentina in the past 25 years as a result of an unsafe abortion.

Meanwhile in Brazil, the Supreme Court is in the midst of hearings that could result in the decriminalization of abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Feminist campaigner and anthropology professor Debora Diniz has been [forced into hiding](#) after receiving death threats.

Ebola Vaccinations Begin in North Kivu

The WHO announced on Wednesday that [vaccinations have begun](#) in the volatile North Kivu Province, site of the latest Ebola outbreak in the DRC. They are using an experimental vaccine that showed early successes during the recent outbreak in Equateur Province, but security concerns are complicating vaccination efforts.

Italy Backtracks on Mandatory Vaccination

Italy's upper house has approved an amendment that [removes mandatory vaccination](#) for school children. Once it passes the lower house, it will suspend a child vaccination law that was introduced last year by the Democratic Party during an outbreak of measles. According to the [European Centre](#)

[for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#), Italy accounted for 34% of all reported measles cases in the European Economic Area in 2017. The skepticism about vaccinations reflects broader a distrust of institutions.

Venezuelan problems for Columbia's new president

Crisis in neighboring Venezuela poses a tough challenge for Ivan Duque, Colombia's new President who [took office this week](#). Thousands of refugees continue to cross the border each day, and while Colombia has been granting them residency and work papers, increasing numbers will certainly put pressure on the country's already stretched resources.

NCD Alliance: UN Draft Political Declaration Lacks Required Strength and Ambition

In a [media release](#) put out on Wednesday, the NCD Alliance criticized the draft Political Declaration to be adopted at the third UN High-Level Meeting on Noncommunicable Diseases in New York on September 27th. The omission of a sugar tax was one of the highlighted weaknesses of the declaration.

Global governance of health

What Happened to PEPFAR's \$100M Key Population Investment Fund?

Deboah Birx, head of the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, says government bureaucracy prevented the announced direct funding of NGOs and in-country groups targeting key populations living with HIV, from taking place. The [\\$100M Key Population Investment Fund](#) will now be delivered through US government agencies instead.

UN Risks Falling Behind on Global Drug Policy

Governments are increasingly turning away from the supply-reduction approach that has long dominated but yielded little success in global drug control efforts. [Paralyzed by conflicting demands](#) of its member states, [UN has been slower to react](#), hindered in part by its tradition of consensus decision-making and the powerful security cooperation dimension to the global war on drugs. The organization is at a pivotal crossroads, but next year's sessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, may be an opportunity to make a decision and take a firm stand, either way.

Human resources for health

Nursing and Midwifery: Key to Implementing Alma-Ata 40 Years On

Crisp; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23288604.2018.1483683>

An article discussing why nurses and midwives are a core group within the health workforce, that is particularly suited to promoting global health improvement efforts.

UHC

Are Our 'UHC Systems' Learning Systems?

Akhnif et al.: <https://health-policy-systems.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12961-018-0340-y>

"If there is one universal recommendation to countries wanting to make progress towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC), it is to develop the learning capacities that will enable them to 'find their own way' – this is especially true for countries struggling with fragmented health financing systems. This paper explores results from a multi-country study whose main aim was to assess the extent to which UHC systems and processes at country level operate as 'learning systems'."

Infectious diseases & NTDs

Polio in Papua New Guinea

A [third polio victim](#) has been confirmed in PNG, with the WHO reporting an additional 55 suspected cases. Surveillance has been stepped up, but the vaccination coverage being far below the required level in many provinces, they are fears that the virus could emerge in populations which were inadequately immunized.

Measles Outbreak in the Americas

A measles outbreak that originated in Venezuela is now [spreading throughout the Americas](#), threatening unvaccinated local and indigenous populations.

NCDs

The Cost of Public Health Decisions

Making the right public health promoting decision can often come at a substantial cost, as Transport for London found out this week. It has been estimated that a [proposed ban on junk food advertising](#) on public transport could wipe off a whopping £13M a year from TFL's advertising revenue.

Other more less obvious costs can come in form of backlash to such proposals, especially when powerful commercial interests and industry lobbying are involved. Stephen Bendle suggests a few [strategies](#) for dealing with it.

SDGs

Civil Society Organizations Question the Veracity of Self-Reported SDG Status Updates

Unhappy with flexible and often cherrypicked [government Voluntary National Reports](#), various civil society actors have begun developing shadow reports on SDG progress, paying specific attention to the often overlooked cross-cutting principle of "leaving no one behind."

Gender

Representation Matters, Even in Matters of the Heart

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/women-die-more-from-heart-attacks-than-men-mdash-unless-the-er-doc-is-female/>

A [US study](#) suggests that female patients have a substantially higher risk of mortality in the emergency room if they have a male doctor rather than a female one. Conversely, the mere fact of having more female colleagues, increases the likelihood of survival for female patients of male emergency doctors. Since women make up just 25% of emergency doctors in the US, this gender gap has life or death implications for women.

Migration

Addressing the Venezuelan Migrant Crisis

With the situation in Venezuela getting worse and no resolution in sight, the international community must prepare itself for the possibility that migrants from the country will be displaced for a protracted period. This means that the response must go beyond meeting immediate humanitarian needs. Cindy Huang and Kate Gough from the Center for Global Development [propose and outline](#) several priorities which include regularizing Venezuelans' legal status, forging a regional response, improving local service delivery, and stepping up US engagement in the region.

Report: The Linkages between Migration, Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development

A joint [FAO, IFAD, IMO, WFP report](#) highlights the role of agriculture and rural development in addressing the drivers of migration, with food (in)security playing a central role.

Planetary health

Climate Change: The Biggest Health Problem in the World

<https://www.globalhealthnow.org/2018-08/climate-change-biggest-health-problem-world-0>

"[Physicians] are the natural content experts in terms of framing in the most productive way the most important issue of our time—in the last remaining time window for productive action." Courtney Howard, International Policy Coordinator for the 2018 Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change, on how and why she made the move from emergency doctor to climate change activist.

Report: Suva Expert Dialogue on Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change Impacts

The UNFCCC Secretariat has published a [report](#) of the two-day expert dialogue which took place May 2-3 in Bonn, Germany. The meeting sought to enable open exchanges between technical and policy experts, and the co-creation of comprehensive risk-management solutions to extreme weather events and slow onset climatic processes.

Armyworm threatens food security in Asia

The [arrival of the fall armyworm](#) in the southern Indian state of Karnataka has put the whole country on alert. The caterpillar, an invasive species that is native to the Americas, has spread rapidly since its arrival in Nigeria in 2016, devastating crops and threatening food security across Africa.

Research

Plus ca change...

Lant Pritchett on what he calls the [new fad of randomized controlled trials](#) in development, and the lessons from previous development process research that it seems to have ignored.

Cash transfers and labor supply: Evidence from a large-scale program in Iran

Salehi-Isfahani and Mostafavi-Dehzoie;
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0304387818306084?dgcid=rss_sd_all

In this paper which examined the impact of a national cash transfer program on labor supply in Iran, the authors found no evidence of a negative effect on hours worked or labor force participation. Instead, their findings suggest that such program may have a positive effect among women and self-employed men.

Miscellaneous

Japan Embraces the 100-Year Life

The Japanese translation of the 2016 book *The 100-Year Life* has proven to be a bestseller. The book, whose central theme is that “individuals, institutions, government, finances and infrastructure need urgent preparation for a time when millions can reasonably expect to live for a century”, seems to have resonated strongly with the Japanese people, probably because the country is home to the world’s oldest population. Now the search is on for [fitting policy reforms](#).

#AidToo

It has emerged that Oxfam [did not ban staff from paying for sex until last year](#), reportedly because of concerns over its staff's personal rights and sexual needs. Other major NGOs banned the practice earlier, following a 2003 UN guidance.

Meanwhile in the UK, experts warn that [sexual abuse by aid contractors](#) may be going under the radar. They are calling for private firms delivering aid programs to have the same level of DfID scrutiny and reporting requirements as charitable organizations.

Diversity in Humanitarian Leadership

The Humanitarian Advisory Group, with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is spending the next two years trying to answer questions like: "is a lack of diversity at the leadership level stymying the humanitarian sector's ability to address sexual harassment and exploitation?" The first paper in the [research series](#) was published last week.

Data Consent in Humanitarian Contexts

Data protection and (affirmative) consent have become a basic requirement for data collection in much of the global North, but [what role can and does such data consent play](#) when dealing with vulnerable populations in humanitarian contexts? Concerns arise not only around the collection, but also the storage and protection of deeply personal but increasingly lucrative health data.

EU Considering Cash Transfer Choices

ECHO, the EU's humanitarian arm, is running a [market assessment](#) to determine whether a controversial new approach to coordinating humanitarian cash transfers would work in practice.

China to Surpass Australia as Biggest Pacific Aid Donor

Beijing's pledge of [US\\$4bn in aid to the Asia Pacific region](#), last year, has seen the country overtake Australia, traditionally the largest donor in the region, which pledged just a quarter of that. There is unease around the news in Canberra which is suspicious of China's motives.

The securitization of Foreign Aid

20 years after the US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Michael Igoe [reflects](#) on the rise of “countering violent extremism” as a US global development priority.