



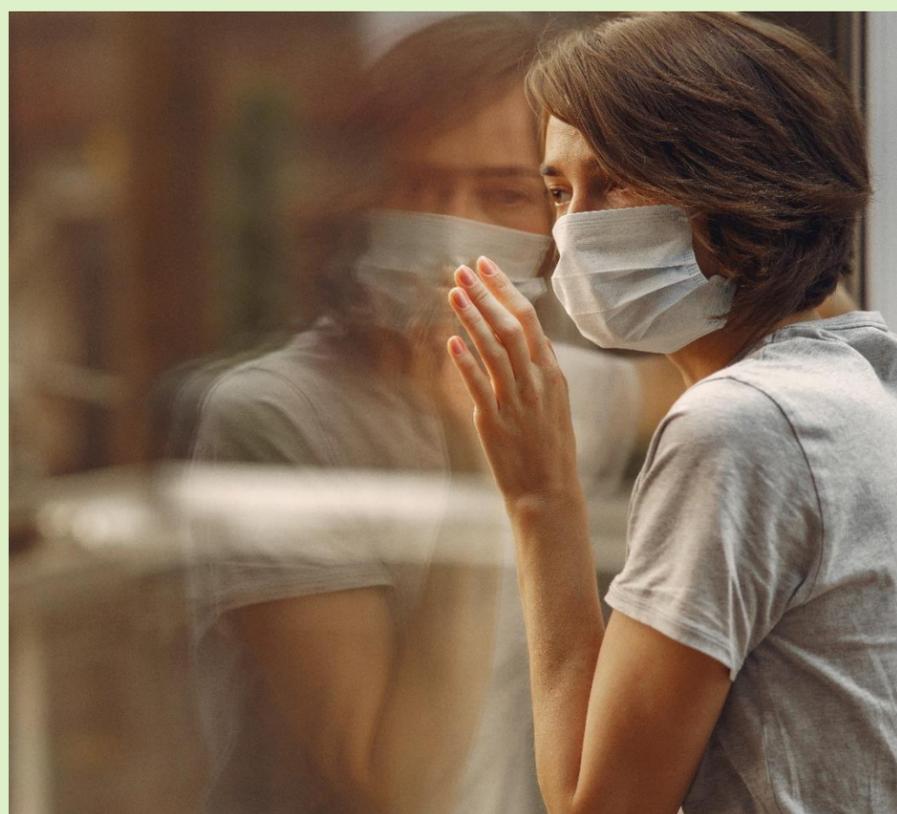
Lebanese Medical Students' International Committee (LeMSIC)

THE VIRAL NEWS

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Lebanon Re-imposes Lockdown



After Lebanon recorded daily double- and triple-digit COVID-19 infections, public health minister Hamad Hassan warned of an upsurge since the lifting of lockdown and reopening of the airport. According to the latest WHO Lebanon daily report, 4734 cumulative cases and 61 deaths have been noted up till now.

Following this spike in infections, drastic restrictions were restituted, shutting places of worship, cinemas, bars, nightclubs, sports events, and popular markets starting Friday 31.

Shops, private companies, banks, and educational institutions would be allowed to open their doors only on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, with a near-total lockdown in place Thursday through Monday until August 10.

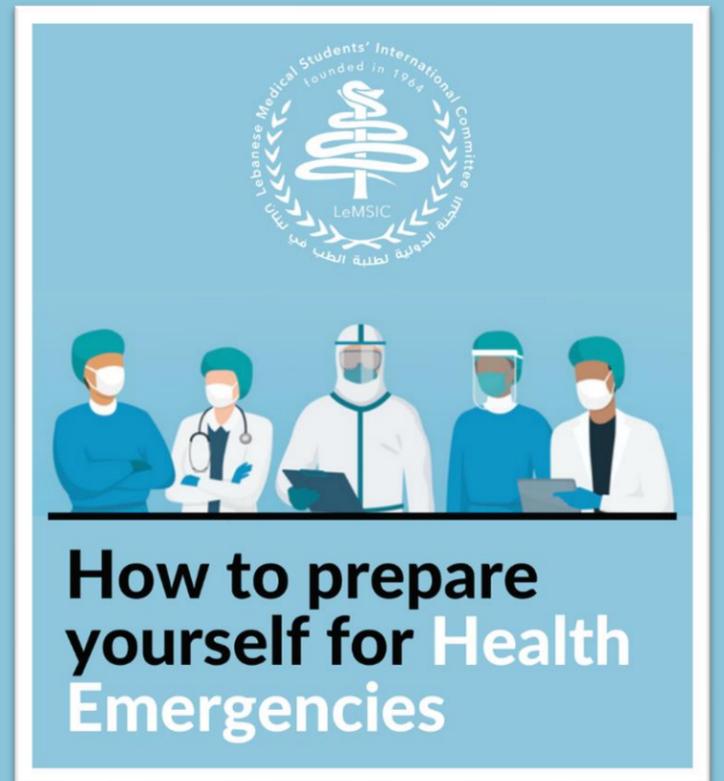
Call Centers

During the past 2 weeks, a total of 20 medical, nursing, biology and medical lab students volunteered at the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) call centers. After being trained on the matter, volunteers have been receiving calls from people reporting illness, reporting on others and requesting information about COVID-19. LeMSIC's work with Amel at the call centers ensures that refugees as well receive the adequate support they deserve. This week, volunteers will be present every day at MoPH Ras El Nabeh from 8 AM till 7 PM. The MoPH Hotline 01/594459 remains functional 24/7. If you wish to help in any of these call centers, kindly fill [this form](#). Our volunteers' safety is our primary concern, and measures ensuring it are implemented on a daily basis.



How to Prepare Yourself for Health Emergencies – Week 1

As mentioned previously, LeMSIC is hosting a series of online COVID-19 related trainings **How to Prepare Yourself for Health Emergencies**. The week of July 27 marked the beginning of the event. Five sessions took place Monday through Thursday, four of which were facilitated by externals. On Monday, Dr. Nesrine Rizk discussed the future of sexual and reproductive health and rights services. The next day, we welcomed Karine Zoghby, project officer at the UNDP and part of the Disaster Risk Management Unit, who gave a session on stakeholder coordination in crisis. Clinical psychologist Karim Khalil talked about eating disorders during health emergencies on the third day. Finally, to top it all, Dr. Michel Nawfal elaborated on vulnerable populations' support. Participants from different countries embraced the opportunity and joined this enriching experience. Many thanks to the hard-working team whose dedication took capacity building to new heights. Stay tuned for more details about Week 2 on LeMSIC social media platforms!



The Importance of Evidence-Based Medicine in the Light of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a viral illness caused by SARS-CoV-2, a type of coronavirus. This disease is highly contagious, mostly through coughing and sneezing droplets, contaminated surfaces, and aerosols. While airborne transmission remains debatable, the virus may survive in air droplets for a short time. By 12 July 2020, around 13 million COVID-19 infections were diagnosed worldwide, with more than 560,000 deaths. In Lebanon, 2334 confirmed cases were detected, among which 1420 recoveries and 36 deaths. The management and containment of this rapidly spreading novel virus required a quick reaction from the medical community, not necessarily based on trials and well-established data. As a rule, Evidence-Based Medicine (EBM) is a must in the accurate management of patients. It is defined as the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in the decision-making process regarding individual patient care. Considering the current public health emergency, to which extent is EBM respected in the management and treatment of SARS-CoV-2 infected patients?

Between the unprecedented evolution of this virus to a worldwide pandemic, and the extensive number of patients hospitalized in intensive care units, several factors led to non-EBM decisions. The reaction of physicians dealing with this unfamiliar threat had to be fast and efficient to save lives. Hence, waiting for level 1 evidence treatment or randomized trials results was not an option. Didier Raoult, French infectious diseases specialist, was a very emblematic figure in this crisis, earning huge prominence in France for his controversial beliefs. The Marseille-based doctor promoted the use of chloroquine to combat COVID-19, relying solely on his expert opinion and the data generated in an open-label non-randomized/descriptive trial.

On the other hand, different physicians and researchers implemented clinical trials related to SARS-CoV-2 to generate EBM data in a prompt, effective and well-organized way with respect to ethical issues. Moreover, local and regional medical societies released their statements and recommendations concerning the management of SARS-CoV-2 infected patients. In the Hematology-Oncology department of Hôtel Dieu de France - Saint Joseph University Hospital, a research group named ONCOVID SWAT was launched at the beginning of the outbreak. This initiative led to more than 15 studies and publications related to COVID-19 in cancer patients.

All in all, the international and Lebanese medical communities reacted in a very appropriate way to these unexpected circumstances. While EBM remains the cornerstone for a better management of our patients, in some cases, as during the current health emergency, fast and reasonable reactions are inevitable to limit the spread of the virus and decrease the number of deaths.

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COVID-19 and Governance's Impact on the Unemployment Rate in Lebanon and Similar Countries



Although Lebanon faces a relatively small number of COVID-19 cases, the effect of the latter on the economy, especially on the labor market, is not negligible.

The labor market situation in Lebanon seems to be worsening after the emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This can be linked to the containment measures, the closure of many companies, the decrease in productivity caused by employee absenteeism, as well as the drop in demand for goods and services.

According to a survey conducted by [InfoPro](#) in 2020 alongside 300 companies, nearly 220,000 private sector employees were laid off between October and January 2020. The same survey also reported that 50% of the companies in the sample reduced the wages of their employees. In addition, many press articles like [Annahar](#) state that the unemployment rate in Lebanon reached 40% in February 2020. We estimate that this percentage increased further after February 2020 due to the social distancing measures imposed by the government. Indeed, on March 15, 2020, the Lebanese government announced the implementation of strict containment measures, which led to the closure of businesses as well as the dismissal of many employees. The service sector, which employs almost 76% of the working population in Lebanon, was the most affected by COVID-19.

We established a cross-country regression for 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the unemployment rate in Lebanon and in countries with similar levels of development and governance. In fact, we chose 19 countries whose Human Development Index (HDI) varies between 0.6 and 0.8 (Lebanon's HDI is 0.76) and whose Governance Effectiveness indicator varies between -2.5 and 0 (Lebanon's Government Effectiveness index was -0.64 in 2018).

The dependent variable is the unemployment rate (U_i) in 2020 (Source: IMF's "World Economic Outlook", 2020). However, for Lebanon this data is missing. For this reason, we consider the unemployment rate of 40% mentioned by several press articles.

The 1st explanatory variable in the model is the real growth rate of the economy (g_i) in 2020 (Source: IMF, 2020). The 2nd explanatory variable in the model represents the fatality rate of COVID-19 cases on June 28, 2020 (Source: ourworldindata.org, 2020). The fatality rate (FR_{*i*}) of COVID-19 cases measures the proportion of deaths from COVID-19 compared to the number of cases over a period of time. The 3rd regressor of the model is the Government Effectiveness indicator (Source: [World Governance Indicators WGI](https://www.worldgovernance.org/), 2019). This indicator, which ranges from -2.5 (weak governance) to 2.5 (strong governance), measures citizens' perceptions of public and civil services quality, and the degree of its independence from political pressures. It also reflects the quality of policy making and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies.

The 4th explanatory variable is an indicator or "Dummy" variable measuring income assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic (IS_{*i*}) or "Income support during the COVID-19 pandemic" (Source: Oxford, 2020). This variable can take 3 values: 0 if the government doesn't implement income support measures, 1 if the government replaces less than 50% of lost wages and 2 if the government replaces 50% or more of the wages lost by those who have been made redundant or who cannot work.



Estimated equation

We estimate the following equation:

$$U_i = 4.97 - 1.77g_i - 0.89FR_i - 14.99GOV_i - 3.37IS_i + e_i$$

(-4.2)^{***} (-2.04)^{*} (-2.25)^{**} (-1.56)

(.) T-statistic

* Significant at the 0.1 level (P-value < 0.1)

** Significant at the 0.05 level (P-value < 0.05)

*** Significant at the 0.01 level (P-value < 0.01)

Real growth of GDP

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the monetary value of all finished goods and services made within a country during a specific period. On average, in the 19 countries, when the growth rate of real GDP increases by one percentage point, the unemployment rate decreases by 1.77 percentage points, all other things being equal. Consequently, real GDP growth promotes employment.

Given the current and anticipated recession in Lebanon, we believe that the unemployment rate will not subside in the short term. Indeed, according to the IMF (2020), the real growth rate of the Lebanese economy dropped to -12% in 2020, a decrease of 12.2 percentage points compared to 2019 (0.2%).

Fatality rate

On average, in the 19 countries, when the fatality rate increases by one percentage point, the unemployment rate decreases by 0.89 percentage points.

The interpretation of this result is intuitive, and it would be absurd to draw normative conclusions from it. Indeed, we could interpret it by the fact that the deaths in the 19 countries affect, among other things, a considerable proportion of the working population which is vulnerable to unemployment during the pandemic. The death of the latter could cause the unemployment rate to fall.

This is an absurd result from a normative point of view, but we cannot overlook the effect of this variable on the unemployment rate since it is significant.

Government effectiveness

On average, in the 19 countries, when the government effectiveness increases by one unit, the unemployment rate decreases by 14.99 percentage points. Accordingly, efficient governance (perception) considerably reduces the unemployment rate.

The latest data for this indicator for Lebanon (-0.64 in 2018) indicates that Lebanon has a weak governance structure. With the emergence of political instabilities, we estimate that this number decreased further which disadvantages Lebanon considerably in terms of employment.

Income support during the COVID-19 crisis

On average, in the 19 countries, when the income support increases by one unit, the unemployment rate decreases by 3.37 percentage points.

This negative relationship seems logical when we think of it in the following way: if the government of a country has the capacity to replace the losses of wages undergone by those which were dismissed or not able to work, it has the capacity to subsidize the companies so that they are not forced to close their doors. Thus, countries whose governments have a score different from 0 on this index experience a lower unemployment rate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lebanon is disadvantaged since it scores 0 in income support according to Oxford (2020). Nevertheless, this variable is not significant in our model, so it is not necessary to give much importance to its effect on unemployment.

Hence, Lebanon is disadvantaged in terms of factors favoring employment in the countries which are similar to it in terms of development and governance. This, amalgamated with the fragile socio-economic situation of Lebanon, leads us to conclude that the country will be slow to emerge from the crisis and improve employment.

Additional references

- ILO (2020). ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fourth edition.
- [ILO](#)
- [The961](#)

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COVID-19: A Disease of Human Lungs... and Human Rights

Times of crises, whether political, economic, or health-related, have always been associated with an upswing in human rights violations. The situation during the current pandemic is no different. The rapid diffusion of the virus, alongside the need of governments and societies to cope with it, resulted in the establishment of certain measures to curb the spread. Some of the most applied measures worldwide, besides increasing scientific research and public awareness, were the initiation of full-country lockdowns and imposition of self-quarantine. Although these steps meant preventing citizens from practicing their rights to move freely, go to their jobs, seek proper education, and protest, they were a decent compromise vis a vis the gain of guaranteeing all humans their right to life, proper health, and well-being [1]. Indeed, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights allows party states to “take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation” [2]. Several institutions that advocate for human rights agree that such measures are acceptable only if they are based on scientific or legal evidence, temporary, implemented equally, and do not degrade any human’s dignity [3]. Extending this to nation-wide lockdowns and quarantine, these measures satisfy the first and second rules as they are based on medical recommendations and tend to be set for a limited duration. However, states need to ensure that the dignity of all citizens is preserved during this period, something that was severely lacking in Lebanon due to the financial instability and constant fear faced by many citizens during the lockdown. Furthermore, although several governments around the world tried to preserve equality between citizens when it comes to applying measures, this realization remains far-fetched. In fact, violations to the rights of marginalized groups were further exacerbated during this period:



Women and children

For many people, staying at home is a safe experience. However, for an alarming number of women and children, the lockdown has brought more misery to their lives as it meant being trapped with their abusers [4]. As a matter of fact, Kafa, a Lebanese NGO dealing with domestic abuse, stated that reported cases of domestic violence against women rose significantly during the months of quarantine [5].

Refugees

Besides the crowding and lack of proper sanitation in refugee camps which puts them at an elevated risk of contracting the virus, the already established fear of these populations to seek medical attention was aggravated during the pandemic. The Human Rights Watch reported that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are afraid of being deported if diagnosed with COVID-19 [6]. This is mainly due to the existing stigma in the community that refugees can cause the viral spread in the country [6]. Thus, the right of these populations to seek adequate healthcare is being severely compromised.



Citizens with mental health problems

The movement restriction orders prevent patients to seek proper psychological or psychiatric attention if needed [4]. Furthermore, concerns were raised regarding the vast prioritization of infection control over psychological well-being of patients in hospital settings, especially when it comes to coercion and restraint [7].

During these troubling and stressful times, mental health should be a priority. Hence, it is important to spread awareness on Lebanon's first mental health crisis and suicide prevention helpline 1564, established by [Embrace](#).

The rights of these groups have always been endangered, and the novel limitations created a suitable environment for further violations. Based on that, it is of utmost importance that authorities around the world pay increased attention to these groups and channel greater efforts to protect their rights, especially in critical situations like the one we are going through.

Feedback

We are always seeking ways to improve and your suggestions are vital to this process! Please take a few minutes to fill out this anonymous feedback [form](#) so that we can ameliorate the quality of our publications. Thank you in advance for your collaboration!

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