



Intentional injuries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 1990–2015: findings from the Global Burden of Disease 2015 study

GBD 2015 Eastern Mediterranean Region Intentional Injuries Collaborators ·
Ali H. Mokdad¹

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Abstract

Objectives We used GBD 2015 findings to measure the burden of intentional injuries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) between 1990 and 2015.

Methods The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study defines intentional injuries as a combination of self-harm (including suicide), interpersonal violence, collective violence (war), and legal intervention. We estimated number of deaths, years of life lost (YLLs), years lived with disability (YLDs), and disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) for each type of intentional injuries.

Results In 2015, 28,695 individuals (95% UI: 25,474–37,832) died from self-harm, 35,626 (95% UI: 20,947–41,857) from interpersonal violence, and 143,858 (95% UI: 63,554–223,092) from collective violence and legal interventions. In 2015, collective violence and legal intervention was the fifth-leading cause of DALYs in the EMR and the leading cause in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya; they account for 49.7% of total DALYs in Syria.

Corresponding author: Ali H. Mokdad.

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GBD 2015 Eastern Mediterranean Region Intentional Injuries Collaborators are listed at the end of the article.

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✉ Ali H. Mokdad
mokdaa@uw.edu

¹ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2301 5th Avenue, Suite 600, Seattle, WA 98121, USA

Conclusions Our findings call for increased efforts to stabilize the region and assist in rebuilding the health systems, as well as increasing transparency and employing preventive strategies to reduce self-harm and interpersonal injuries.

Keywords Intentional injuries · Eastern mediterranean region · Burden of disease

Introduction

Intentional injuries accounted for more than 1.4 million deaths and about 4% of total years of life lost (YLLs) in 2015 globally (GBD 2015 Mortality and Causes of Death Collaborators 2016). The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study defines intentional injuries as a combination of self-harm (including suicide), interpersonal violence (such as homicide and physical and sexual assault), collective violence (or war), and legal intervention (such as police enforcement). Intentional injuries are important because, in theory, intentional injuries can be avoided by intention of human beings; this is not the case for most of the other injuries and diseases. In spite of this fact, about 30% of all global deaths from injuries in 2015 were intentional, and suicide and homicide were among the top 10 leading causes of deaths in 15–49-year-old individuals (GBD 2015 Mortality and Causes of Death Collaborators 2016; Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) 2017). Conflict obviously increases deaths and injuries on the battlefield, and also affects health due to the displacement of populations, the breakdown of health and social services, and the heightened risk of disease transmission (Murray et al. 2002).

The Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) has had several conflicts and unrests in the past years; such events have huge impact on all types of intentional injuries. A study in Tunisia showed an increase by 1.7 times in self-harm and 1.3 times in homicide after the Tunisian Revolution in 2011 (Ben Khelil et al. 2016). The effect of conflicts and social unrest on collective violence and legal intervention is obvious. Intentional injuries such as suicide are usually underreported due to cultural and religious norms. Previous studies reported on the burden of disease in the region but did not focus on intentional injuries (Mokdad et al. 2014, 2016). To better estimate the burden of intentional injuries, we used the GBD 2015 study to report the mortality, morbidity, and burden of intentional injuries in EMR countries from 1990 to 2015.

Methods

The 2015 Global Burden of Disease (GBD 2015) covered 249 causes of death and 310 non-fatal diseases and injuries. GBD 2015 reported the burden for 195 countries or territories, 21 regions, and seven super-regions for the 1990–2015 time period. The general methodology of GBD 2015 has been detailed elsewhere (GBD 2015 DALYs and HALE Collaborators 2016; GBD 2015 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators 2016; Haagsma et al. 2016; GBD 2015 Mortality and Causes of Death Collaborators 2016).

The EMR contains 22 countries: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

We classified intentional injuries as self-harm, interpersonal violence (which includes physical violence by firearm, sharp objects, or other means) and “collective violence and legal intervention.” Collective violence includes wars, terrorism, and other violent political conflicts within or between states, state-perpetrated violence (such as genocide, repression, disappearances, torture, and other abuses of human rights), and organized violent crimes such as gang warfare (WHO 2014). We estimated fatal and non-fatal intentional injuries to calculate disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).

Mortality input data and cause of death models

We estimated injury mortality from different sources (vital registration, verbal autopsy, mortality surveillance, censuses, surveys, and police record data). More information on input sources of data are available elsewhere (GBD 2015 Mortality and Causes of Death Collaborators 2016).

We used the standard CODEm modeling approach to estimate deaths due to intentional causes of injuries, excluding collective violence and legal intervention. This cause was modeled solely outside of the CODEm process as fatal discontinuities estimation (or mortality shock regression).

The output mortality estimates were used to calculate years of life lost (YLLs) for each cause of death.

Cause-of-injury incidence; input data and modeling

The majority of incidence data exist at the external cause-of-injury level, i.e., E-codes. Incidence for cause-of-injury categories was modeled using DisMod-MR 2.1 for self-harm and interpersonal violence.

DisMod-MR 2.1 is a descriptive epidemiological meta-regression tool that uses the integrative systems modeling approach to produce simultaneous estimates of disease incidence, prevalence, remission, and mortality. Multiple datasets from hospital, emergency/outpatient departments, and survey datasets are fed into these incidence models. We separately estimated inpatient and outpatient injuries.

To estimate incidence from the shock cause-of-injury categories (collective violence and legal intervention), the mortality rate for these cause-of-injury categories was multiplied by the average country-year-age-sex-specific incidence-to-mortality ratios within several cause-of-injury categories that likely exhibit similar case fatality ratios (such as road injuries, fires, interpersonal violence, and other unintentional injuries) (GBD 2015 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators 2016; Haagsma et al. 2016).

We imposed a hierarchy to select the nature-of-injury category that leads to the largest burden when an individual experiences multiple injuries. Then, we separated matrices (for inpatient and outpatient injuries) to estimate the proportions of incident cases in each of the cause-of-injury categories that resulted in each of the nature-of-injury categories (N-codes). We produced incidence of inpatient and outpatient injuries by cause and nature of injury. Then we estimated short-term disability by nature-of-injury category for all incident cases of inpatient and outpatient injuries. We estimated the average duration for each nature-of-injury category and derived short-term prevalence by multiplying incidence and duration.

We then applied DisMod-MR 2.1 to estimate the long-term prevalence for each combination of cause-of-injury and nature-of-injury from incidence and the long-term mortality risk in cases with long-term disability. After correction for comorbidity with other non-fatal diseases, YLDs were calculated as prevalence times a disability weight. More details on the process are available elsewhere

(GBD 2015 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators 2016; Haagsma et al. 2016).

Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) were calculated for each type of injury through summation of YLLs and YLDs (GBD 2015 DALYs and HALE Collaborators 2016).

Uncertainty

We have propagated uncertainty from all different sources such as input data or adjustment process, using standard GBD methods of repeating all calculations 1000 times, each time drawing from distributions rather than point estimates for all the relevant parameters in our models. We then used 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles as the lower and upper bounds of the 95% uncertainty interval (UI). For the injury mortality estimates, the estimation of model uncertainty is inherent to the ensemble modeling method. Some of the rates that we present are age-standardized using the GBD standard population (GBD 2015 DALYs and HALE Collaborators 2016; GBD 2015 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators 2016; Haagsma et al. 2016; GBD 2015 Mortality and Causes of Death Collaborators 2016).

Results

In 2015 in the EMR, 28,695 individuals (95% UI: 25,474–37,832) died from self-harm, 35,626 individuals (95% UI: 20,947–41,857) from interpersonal violence, and 143,858 individuals (95% UI: 63,554–223,092) from collective violence and legal intervention. These numbers show a significant increase from those in 1990, accounting for a 100% increase in self-harm, 152% increase for interpersonal violence, and 1027% increase for collective violence and legal intervention. In comparison, during the same time, the number of deaths in other parts of the world due to self-harm and interpersonal violence increased by 19 and 12%, respectively, and decreased by 67% for collective violence and legal intervention. Male to female ratio of deaths in 2015 in EMR was 2.4 for self-harm, 4.0 for interpersonal violence, and 3.3 for collective violence and legal interventions.

Among the total number of deaths in the EMR due to interpersonal violence, firearms and sharp objects accounted for 14,158 (8782–17,306) and 7195 (3758–10,864) deaths, respectively, in 2015.

In 2015, the age-standardized death rate (ASDR) of self-harm in the EMR (5.1 per 100,000, 95% UI: 4.6–6.6) was lower than that of all other World Health Organization regions (Fig. 1), and the ASDR of interpersonal violence in the EMR (5.7 per 100,000, 95% UI: 3.8–6.6) was less than the Americas and African regions, and higher than the

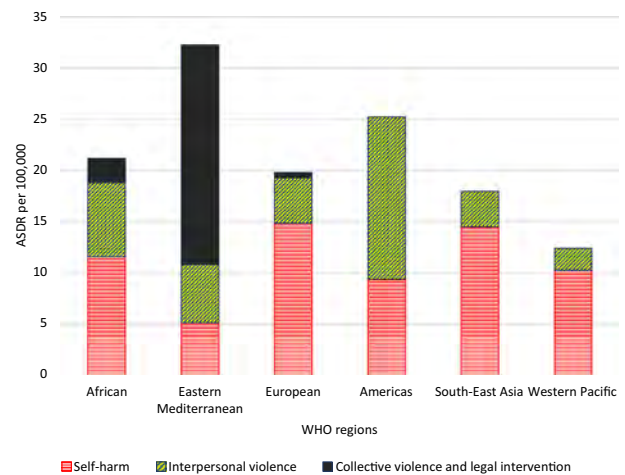


Fig. 1 Age-standardized death rates (ASDR) per 100,000 from self-harm, interpersonal violence, and collective violence and legal intervention (Global Burden of Disease 2015 study, WHO Regions, 2015)

other WHO regions. However, the ASDR of collective violence and legal intervention (21.5 per 100,000 population, 95% UI: 9.3–33.5) was much higher in the EMR than other WHO regions (Fig. 1). The patterns for all-age death rates were relatively similar.

Total number of deaths due to intentional injuries (self-harm, interpersonal violence, collective violence and legal intervention) showed an increasing trend between 1990 and 2015 in the EMR (Fig. 2); the most important increase was observed between 2010 and 2015, and was mainly due to collective violence and legal intervention.

Figure 3 shows the age–sex distribution of deaths due to different types of intentional injuries in the EMR (2015). Males had higher rates, except for the youngest and oldest age groups. Among males, the mortality was considerably higher in people aged 20–24 years. Girls under 5 years old had a higher mortality from intentional injuries (Fig. 3)

The highest ASDR of self-harm was observed in men of Djibouti, Somalia, and Afghanistan, and women of Somalia, Djibouti, and Iraq (Fig. 4). Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia had the highest ASDR of interpersonal violence for both men and women (Fig. 5). The highest ASDR of collective violence and legal interventions was observed in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq for both sexes (Fig. 6). Syria had an ASDR of 138.2 per 100,000 for women (95% UI: 48.8–228.2) and 478.0 per 100,000 for men (168.8–789.0) for collective violence and legal intervention in 2015.

DALYs from self-harm, interpersonal violence, and collective violence and legal intervention in 2015 totaled 1,425,494 (95% UI: 1,258,222–1901,949), 1,997,224 (95% UI: 1,184,027–2,325,345), and 10,107,643 (95% UI: 5,381,404–14,787,629), respectively. YLLs were the main component of DALYs for all kinds of intentional injuries;

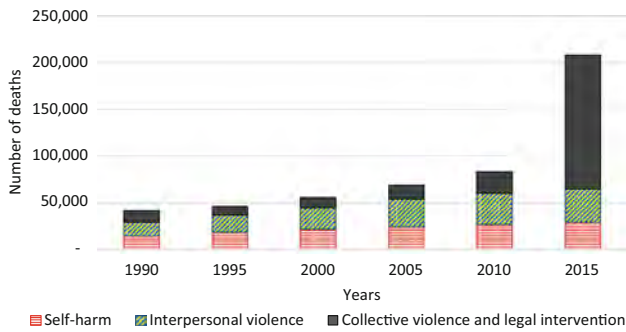


Fig. 2 Number of deaths due to intentional injuries (Global Burden of Disease 2015 study, Eastern Mediterranean Region, 1990–2015)

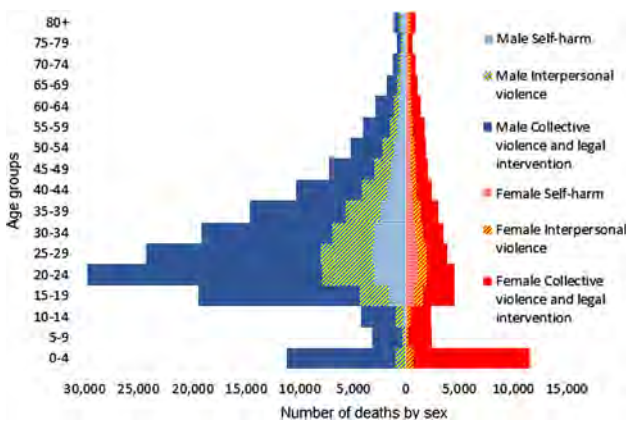


Fig. 3 Age–sex distribution of deaths due to intentional injuries (Global Burden of Disease 2015 study, Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2015)

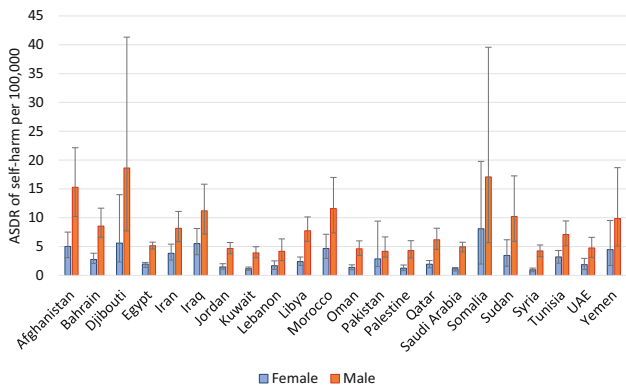


Fig. 4 Age-standardized death rates (ASDR) from self-harm per 100,000 men and women in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Global Burden of Disease 2015 study, Eastern Mediterranean countries, 2015)

YLLs accounted for more than 98.5% of DALYs for self-harm and interpersonal violence and 85.9% of DALYs for collective violence and legal intervention.

Lebanon had the highest median percentage of total DALYs from intentional injuries, followed by Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. The lowest median percentage

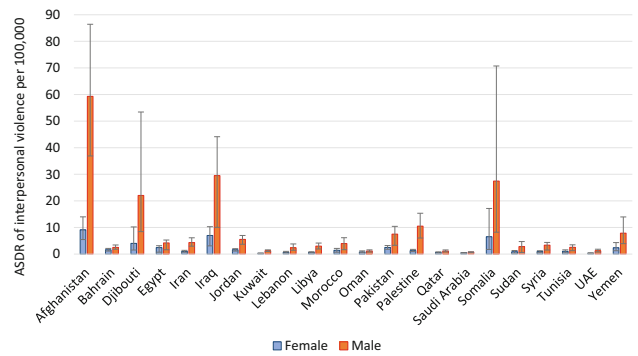


Fig. 5 Age-standardized death rates (ASDR) from interpersonal violence (per 100,000 population), for men and women in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Global Burden of Disease 2015 study, Eastern Mediterranean countries, 2015)

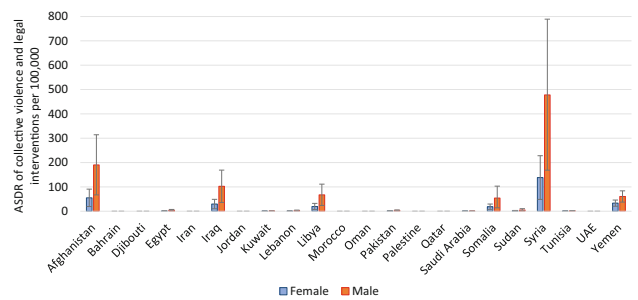


Fig. 6 Age-standardized death rates (ASDR) for collective violence and legal intervention (per 100,000 population), for men and women in the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Global Burden of Disease 2015 study, Eastern Mediterranean countries, 2015)

was in Saudi Arabia, followed by Egypt and Oman (e-Table 1).

In 2015, collective violence and legal intervention was the fifth-leading cause of DALYs in the EMR, the first-leading cause of DALYs in five countries (Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya), and the second-leading cause in Lebanon. In Syria, 49.7% of total DALYs (95% UI: 30.8–62.2) in 2015 were due to collective violence and legal intervention.

Discussion

Our study showed that the burden of intentional injuries is increasing rapidly in the EMR. It is not a surprise that the burden of collective violence and legal intervention has increased dramatically in the last few years and is currently higher than rest of the world due to the unrest in the region. However, our study showed a rise in self-harm and interpersonal violence during the same time period that was much faster than in other parts of the world. Clearly the

unrest and conflicts are causing deaths due to collective violence and legal interventions, but they are also correlated with increased burden from self-harm and other diseases (Murray et al. 2002; Ben Khelil et al. 2016). All countries with the highest mortality rates of self-harm and interpersonal violence (Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti, and Iraq) have been affected by multiple episodes of civil or inter-state wars and social unrest, as well as terrorism during 1990–2015. Our study calls for efforts to stabilize the region politically and reduce the burden of disease due to the current situations.

Young men are the most typical victims of intentional injuries, especially interpersonal and collective violence. This pattern is relatively similar to other regions of the world (Degutis 2013). Girls and boys under 5 years old had a large share of total deaths due to collective violence. This might be due to their generally higher vulnerability in emergency situations. Like the pre-conflict state, mortality is higher among children than individuals over 5 years during a conflict; however, individuals over 5 are usually affected more than young children. In other words, while the general mortality rate of children under 5 is around ten times that of individuals over 5 in pre-conflict states, it decreases to around double during a conflict state (Guhapir and Panhuis 2004). The age pattern of deaths due to collective violence might be related to several factors such as type of war (for instance, civil wars versus inter-state wars) and main types of arms involved (individual light weapons compared to heavy artillery and weapons of mass destruction).

The absolute and relative importance of direct injuries from collective violence and legal intervention has increased significantly in the region in recent years. Although the region has experienced several conflicts in recent decades, the Syrian war has increased deaths and burden of collective violence significantly in recent years. The total burden imposed by war is certainly higher because it also indirectly increases death and disability from other diseases. On the other hand, the number of people who died from a war is not limited to the time period of its occurrence. Previous studies show that several years after termination of wars, people are at higher risk of death due to its consequences such as remaining land mines. In addition, some people suffer from the long-term complications of injuries such as amputations and spinal cord injury for years after war and are at risk of premature death for the same reasons (Mousavi et al. 2014).

In this study, mortality and burden of self-harm in the EMR were lower than in other regions of the world. Although religious and cultural beliefs might have contributed to these low rates, the burden of self-harm also might be affected by cultural and religious barriers, social stigma, and legal punishments that encourage victims,

families, and governments to hide the information (Malakouti et al. 2015a). Methods of suicide in the EMR show some differences from other regions of the world. Hanging and poisoning are the most common methods of suicide; however, there are also differences between and even within countries (Morovatdar et al. 2013). These are important because there are specific interventions to prevent each type of suicide. Many of the preventive strategies focus on finding individuals who are at higher risk of suicide attempts, such as those with mental illness after discharge from a hospital (Ghanbari et al. 2015). In Iran, some trials have been done to integrate suicide prevention services into primary health care (PHC), which increases universal access to and sustainability of these services (Malakouti et al. 2015b, c).

Interpersonal violence is an important cause of DALYs in some of the countries of the EMR, especially Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Djibouti. It is not always easy to separate interpersonal violence from collective violence, especially when a civil war is taking place. In this study, firearms had a major contribution to total deaths from interpersonal injuries. Although having a gun is illegal in most of the countries of the region, having access to weapons is not difficult in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq (after being involved in civil wars for several years).

Our study has some limitations. First, reports on intentional injuries (especially self-harm and legal intervention) are subject to underreporting or even being covered up in many countries. We used the general GBD methodology to address underreporting of deaths; however, underreporting might be different for specific causes of deaths. Second, the number of war victims is not usually accurate due to poor health information systems and political considerations of reporting; many of the countries involved in conflicts do not have a reliable health information system even in their pre-conflict states. Third, we did not evaluate the indirect effects of collective violence (war) on health workforce, infrastructure, and food security. These factors can considerably increase the attributable burden to war. Finally, we did not account for the impact of the influx of refugees on the health systems and disease burden of the host countries.

Conclusions

Our study documented the burden of intentional injuries due to the conflicts and unrest in the EMR. Moreover, we showed an increased burden from other intentional injuries at the same time. Our findings call for increased efforts to stabilize the region and assist in rebuilding the health systems, as well as increasing transparency and employing preventive strategies to reduce self-harm and interpersonal injuries.

GBD 2015 Eastern Mediterranean Region Intentional Injuries

Collaborators: Maziar Moradi-Lakeh, MD, Department of Community Medicine, Preventative Medicine and Public Health Research Center, Gastrointestinal and Liver Disease Research Center (GILDRC), Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Raghid Charara, MD, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon. Charbel El Beheraoui, PhD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Ibrahim Khalil, PhD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Ashkan Afshin, MD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, United States. Nicholas J. Kassebaum, MD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States, Department of Anesthesiology & Pain Medicine, Seattle Children's Hospital, Seattle, Washington, United States. Michael Collison, BS, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Adrienne Chew, ND, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Kristopher J. Krohn, BA, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Farah Daoud, BA/BS, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Danny Colombara, PhD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Nicholas Graetz, MPH, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Michael Kutz, BS, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington. Haidong Wang, PhD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Foad Abd-Allah, MD, Department of Neurology, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt. Laith J. Abu-Raddad, PhD, Infectious Disease Epidemiology Group, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar, Doha, Qatar. Aliasghar Ahmad Kiadaliri, PhD, Department of Clinical Sciences Lund, Orthopedics, Clinical Epidemiology Unit, Lund University, Lund, Sweden. Muktar Beshir Ahmed MPH, College of Health Sciences, Department of Epidemiology, ICT and e-Learning Coordinator, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia. Khurshid Alam, PhD, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, The University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, Australia, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia. Suliman Alghnam, PhD, King Abdulah International Medical Research Center, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Center For Injury Research and Policy, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, United States. Reza Alizadeh-Navaei, PhD, Gastrointestinal Cancer Research Center, Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, Mazandaran, Iran. Rajaa Al-Raddadi PhD, Joint Program of Family and Community Medicine, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Khalid A. Altirkawi, MD, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Nahla Anber, PhD, Mansoura University, Mansoura, Egypt. Palwasha Anwari, MD, Self-employed, Kabul, Afghanistan. Leticia Avila-Burgos, PhD, National Institute of Public Health, Cuernavaca, Mexico. Ashish Awasthi, PhD, Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, India. Aleksandra Barac, PhD, Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia. Suzanne L. Barker-Collo, PhD, School of Psychology, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand. Neeraj Bedi, MD, College of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Jazan, Saudi Arabia. Zulfiqar A. Bhutta, PhD, Centre of Excellence in Women and Child Health, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan, Centre for Global Child Health, The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto, ON, Canada. Rohan Borschmann, PhD, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, Melbourne, VIC, Australia. Soufiane Boufous, PhD, Transport and Road Safety (TARS) Research, University of New South Wales, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Zahid A. Butt, PhD, Al Shifa Trust Eye Hospital, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. Carlos A. Castañeda-Orjuela, MSc, Colombian National Health Observatory, Instituto Nacional de

Salud, Bogota, Colombia, Epidemiology and Public Health Evaluation Group, Public Health Department, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota, Colombia. Koustuv Dalal, PhD, Centre for Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, School of Health and Medical Sciences, Orebro University, Orebro, Sweden. Hadi Danawi, PhD, Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States. Diego De Leo, DSc, Griffith University, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Samath D. Dharmaratne, MD, Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Shirin Djalalinia, PhD, Undersecretary for Research & Technology, Ministry of Health & Medical Education, Tehran, Iran. Kerrie E. Doyle, PhD, RMIT University, Bundoora, VIC, Australia; Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, Australia. Alireza Esteghamati, MD, Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. André Faro, PhD, Federal University of Sergipe, Aracaju, Sergipe, Brazil. Mar-yam S. Farvid, PhD, Department of Nutrition, Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, Harvard University, Boston, MA, United States, Harvard/MGH Center on Genomics, Vulnerable Populations, and Health Disparities, Mongan Institute for Health Policy, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA, United States. Seyed-Mohammad, Fereshtehnejad, PhD, Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society (NVS), Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden. Florian Fischer, PhD, School of Public Health, Bielefeld University, Bielefeld, Germany. Tsegaye Tewelde Gebrehiwot, MPH, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia. Reyna A. Gutiérrez, PhD, National Institute of Psychiatry Ramon de la Fuente, Mexico City, Mexico. Nima Hafezi-Nejad, MD, Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Randah Ribhi Hamadeh, DPhil, Arabian Gulf University, Manama, Bahrain. Samer Hamidi, DrPH, Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Josep Maria Haro, MD, Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de Déu—CIBERSAM, Sant Boi de Llobregat (Barcelona), Spain. Delia Hendrie, MA, Centre for Population Health Research, Curtin University, Bentley, Western Australia, Australia. Guoqing Hu, PhD, Department of Epidemiology and Health Statistics, School of Public Health, Central South University, Changsha, China. Jost B. Jonas, MD, Department of Ophthalmology, Medical Faculty Mannheim, Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg, Mannheim, Germany. Amir Kasaeian, PhD, Hematology-Oncology and Stem Cell Transplantation Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran; Endocrinology and Metabolism Population Sciences Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Peter Njenga Keiyoro, PhD, Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases, Nairobi, Kenya, School of Continuing and Distance Education, Nairobi, Kenya. Yousef Saleh Khader, ScD, Department of Community Medicine, Public Health and Family Medicine, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan. Ejaz Ahmad Khan, MD, Health Services Academy, Islamabad, Pakistan. Jagdish Khubchandani, PhD, Department of Nutrition and Health Science, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, United States. Jacek A. Kopec, PhD, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Heidi J. Larson, PhD, Department of Infectious Disease Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom; Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Asma Abdul Latif, PhD, Department of Zoology, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan. Cheru Tesema Leshargie, MPH, Debre Markos University, Debre Markos, Ethiopia. Raimundas Lunevicius, PhD, Aintree University Hospital National Health Service Foundation Trust, Liverpool, United Kingdom, School of Medicine, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom. Mohammed Magdy Abd El Razek, MBChB, Aswan University Hospital, Aswan Faculty of Medicine, Aswan, Egypt. Azeem Majeed, MD, Department of Primary Care & Public Health, Imperial College London, London, England, United Kingdom. Reza Malekzadeh, MD,

Digestive Diseases Research Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran; Digestive Diseases Research Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Ziad A. Memish, MD, Saudi Ministry of Health, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. College of Medicine, Alfaisal University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Tuomo J. Meretoja, PhD, Comprehensive Cancer Center, Breast Surgery Unit, Helsinki University Hospital, Helsinki, Finland; University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland. Ted R. Miller, PhD, Pacific Institute for Research & Evaluation, Calverton, MD, United States; Centre for Population Health, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia, Australia. Shafiu Mohammed, PhD; Health Systems and Policy Research Unit, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna, Nigeria. Institute of Public Health, Heidelberg University, Heidelberg, Germany. Carla Makhoul Obermeyer, DSc, Center for Research on Population and Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon. Felix Akpojene Ogbo, MPH, Centre for Health Research, Western Sydney University, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Michael Robert Phillips, MD, Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine, Shanghai, China; Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, United States. Farshad Pourmalek, PhD, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Mostafa Qorbani, PhD, Non-communicable Diseases Research Center, Alborz University of Medical Sciences, Karaj, Iran. Amir Radfar, MD, A T Still University, Kirksville, MO, United States. Anwar Rafay, MS, Contech International Health Consultants, Lahore, Pakistan, Contech School of Public Health, Lahore, Pakistan. Afarin Rahimi-Movaghar, MD, Iranian National Center for Addiction Studies (INCAS), Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Vafa Rahimi-Movaghar, MD, Sina Trauma and Surgery Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Rajesh Kumar Rai, MPH, Society for Health and Demographic Surveillance, Suri, West Bengal, India. David Laith Rawaf, MD, WHO Collaborating Centre, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom; North Hampshire Hospitals, Basingstoke, United Kingdom, University College London Hospitals, London, United Kingdom. Salman Rawaf, MD, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom. Satar Rezaei, PhD, School of Public Health, Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran. Mohammad Sadegh Rezai, MD, Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, Sari, Iran. Gholamreza Roshandel, PhD, Golestan Research Center of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Gorgan, Iran; Digestive Diseases Research Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Mahdi Safdarian, MD, Sina Trauma & Surgery Research Center, Tehran, Iran. Saeid Safiri, PhD, Managerial Epidemiology Research Center, Department of Public Health, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Maragheh University of Medical Sciences, Maragheh, Iran. Payman Salamati, MD, Sina Trauma and Surgery Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Abdallah M. Samy, PhD, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt. Lawrence Kansas, United States. Benn Sartorius, PhD, Public Health Medicine, School of Nursing and Public Health, University of Kwa Zulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa; UKZN Gastrointestinal Cancer Research Centre, South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), Durban, South Africa. Soraya Seedat, PhD, Stellenbosch University, Cape Town, South Africa. Sadaf G. Sepanlou, PhD, Digestive Diseases Research Institute, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Masood Ali Shaikh, MD, Independent Consultant, Karachi, Pakistan. Badr H. A. Sobaih, MD, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Karen M. Tabb, PhD, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois, United States. Arash Tehrani-Banihashemi, PhD, Preventive Medicine and Public Health Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Mohamad-Hani Temsah, MD, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Abdullah Sulieman Terkawi, MD, Department of Anesthesiology,

University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, United States, Department of Anesthesiology, King Fahad Medical City, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Outcomes Research Consortium, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, OH, United States. Roman Topor-Madry, PhD, Institute of Public Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Jagiellonian University Medical College, Kraków, Poland; Faculty of Health Sciences, Wrocław Medical University, Wrocław, Poland. Kingsley Nnanna Ukwaja, MD, Department of Internal Medicine, Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Olalekan A. Uthman, PhD, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom. Mehdi Yaseri, PhD, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Ophthalmic Research Center, Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran. Naohiro Yonemoto, MPH, Department of Biostatistics, School of Public Health, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan. Mustafa Z. Younis, DrPH, Jackson State University, Jackson, MS, United States. Aisha O. Jumaan, PhD, Independent Consultant, Seattle, Washington, United States. Theo Vos, PhD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Simon I. Hay, DSc, Oxford Big Data Institute, Li Ka Shing Centre for Health Information and Discovery, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Mohsen Naghavi, PhD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Christopher J. L. Murray, DPhil, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States. Ali H. Mokdad, PhD, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, United States.

Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical standards This manuscript reflects original work that has not previously been published in whole or in part and is not under consideration elsewhere. All authors have read the manuscript and have agreed that the work is ready for submission and accept responsibility for its contents.

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Electronic Supplementary Material

Article title:

Intentional injuries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 1990–2015: Findings from the Global Burden of Disease 2015 study

Authors:

GBD 2015 Eastern Mediterranean Region Intentional Injuries Collaborators

Corresponding author:

Ali H. Mokdad

Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, United States

Email: mokdaa@uw.edu

e-Table 1. Percent share of intentional injuries from total disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region countries (Findings from the Global Burden of Disease 2015 study, Eastern Mediterranean countries, 1990–2015)

Country	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Afghanistan	6.3%	5.0%	3.7%	14.3%
Bahrain	2.9%	2.8%	2.3%	3.7%
Djibouti	1.5%	1.5%	0.8%	2.1%
Egypt	0.8%	0.9%	0.3%	1.4%
Iran	2.6%	2.6%	1.6%	3.2%
Iraq	7.8%	6.0%	4.2%	16.1%
Jordan	2.1%	1.8%	1.5%	3.7%
Kuwait	4.3%	2.7%	2.1%	13.1%
Lebanon	12.6%	11.6%	8.4%	22.4%
Libya	3.7%	1.9%	1.4%	12.5%
Morocco	1.4%	1.5%	1.0%	1.8%
Oman	0.9%	0.9%	0.5%	1.3%
Pakistan	1.0%	0.9%	0.6%	1.6%
Palestine	5.5%	4.9%	3.7%	8.9%
Qatar	2.1%	2.0%	1.8%	2.4%
Saudi Arabia	0.8%	0.8%	0.5%	1.1%
Somalia	2.2%	2.1%	1.1%	3.8%
Sudan	1.7%	1.7%	1.1%	2.3%
Syria	9.4%	1.2%	1.0%	50.2%
Tunisia	1.2%	1.2%	0.8%	1.5%
UAE	1.9%	2.0%	1.6%	2.1%
Yemen	3.5%	1.4%	0.7%	14.6%

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Group name: GBD 2015 Eastern Mediterranean Region Intentional Injuries Collaborators

Prefix	First Name	Middle Na	Middle Na	Last Name	Email Address	Highest degree	Department	Institution/Org	Institution	Institution	Institution	Department	Institution	Institution	Institution	Institution				
Dr.	Maziar			Moradi-Lal	mazmoradi@gmail.com	MD	Department	Iran University of Medical Sciences	Tehran				Iran							
Dr.	Raghid			Charara	raghidc@gmail.com	MD		American University of Beirut	Beirut				Lebanon							
Dr.	Charbel			El Bcherao	charbel@uw.edu	PhD		Institute fo Washington University of												
Dr.	Ibrahim			Khalil	ikhail@uw.edu	PhD		Institute fo Washington University of												
Dr.	Ashkan			Afshin	ashkan.afshin@gmail.com	MD		Institute fo Washington University of	Seattle	WA			United_States							
Dr.	Nicholas	J		Kassebaur	nickjk@uw.edu	MD		Institute fo Washington University of	Seattle		Washingto	United_Stat	Department	Seattle Chi	Seattle	Washingto	United_States			
Mr.	Michael			Collison	mhc314@uw.edu	BS		Institute fo Washington University of	Seattle		Washingto		United_States							
Ms.	Adrienne			Chew	apchew@uw.edu	ND		Institute fo Washington University of					United_States							
Mr.	Kristopher	J.		Krohn	kkrohn1@uw.edu	BA		Institute fo Washington University of	Seattle		Washingto		United_States							
Ms.	Farah			Daoud	farahd@uw.edu	BA/BS		Institute fo Washington University of												
Dr.	Danny			Colombara	dvc2@uw.edu	PhD		Institute fo Washington University of												
Mr.	Nicholas			Graetz	ngraetz@uw.edu	MPH		Institute fo Washington University of	Seattle		Washingto		United_States							
Mr.	Michael			Kutz	kutz13@uw.edu	BS		Institute fo Washington University of												
Dr.	Haidong			Wang	haidong@uw.edu	PhD		Institute fo Washington University of	Seattle		Washingto		United_States							
Prof.	Foad			Abd-Allah	foad.abdallah@kasralainy.edu.eg	MD		Department	Cairo University	Cairo			Egypt							
Dr.	Laith	J.		Abu-Radda	lja2002@qatar-med.cornell.edu	PhD		Weill Cornell Medical College												
Dr.	Aliasghar			Ahmad Kia	aliasghar.ahmad_kiadaliri@med.lu.se	PhD		Department	Lund University	Lund			Sweden							
Mr.	Muktar	Beshir		Ahmed	muktar27@yahoo.com	MPH		College of I	University	Jimma	Oromiya		Ethiopia							
Dr.	Khurshid			Alam	khurshid.bd@gmail.com	PhD		Murdoch C of Melbourne	Parkville	Victoria	Australia		The Univer	Melbourne	VIC	Australia	The Univer	Sydney	NSW	Australia
Dr.	Suliman			Alghnam	salghna1@jhu.edu	PhD		King Abdulah International Medical Research Center	Riyadh	Riyadh	Saudi_Arat	Center For Johns Hopl	Baltimore	MD		United_States				
Dr.	Reza			Alizadeh-Navaei		PhD		Gastrointe:Sciences	Mazandaran				iran							

Dr.	Rajaa	Al-Raddadi	saudiresearcher@yahoo.com	PhD	Joint Program of Family and Community Medicine	Jeddah	Makkah	Saudi_Arabia					
Dr.	Khalid A.	Altirkawi	kaltirkawi@ksu.edu.sa	MD	King Saud University	Riyadh		Saudi_Arabia					
Dr.	Nahla	Anber	nahlaanber@hotmail.com	PhD	Mansoura University	Mansoura		Egypt					
Dr.	Palwasha	Anwari	anwari222@gmail.com	MD	Self-employed National Institute of Public Health	Kabul	Kabul	Afghanistan					
Dr.	Leticia	Avila-Burg	leticia.avila@insp.mx	PhD	Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences	Cuernavaca	Morelos	Mexico					
Mr.	Ashish	Awasthi	ashishbhui@gmail.com	PhD	University of Lucknow	Lucknow	Uttar Pradesh	India					
Dr.	Aleksandra	Barac	aleksandrabarac85@gmail.com	PhD	Faculty of Medicine University of Belgrade	Belgrade	Belgrade	Serbia					
Dr.	Suzanne L.	Barker-Coll	s.barker-coll@auckland.ac.nz	PhD	School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine	Auckland		new_zealand					
Dr.	Neeraj	Bedi	drnbedi@yahoo.com	MD	Aga Khan University	Jazan		Saudi_Arabia					
Dr.	Zulfiqar A.	Bhutta	zulfiqar.bhutta@aku.edu	PhD	Centre for Health Services Research and Promotion	Karachi		Pakistan	Centre for The Hospit	Toronto	ON	Canada	
Dr.	Rohan	Borschmar	rohan.borschmann@unimelb.edu.au	PhD	The University of Melbourne	Melbourne VIC		Australia	Murdoch C	Melbourne VIC		Australia	
Dr.	Soufiane	Boufous	soufiane@unsw.edu.au	PhD	University of New South Wales	Sydney		New South Australia					
Dr.	Zahid A	Butt	zabutt3@yahoo.com	PhD	Al Shifa Trust Eye Hospital	Rawalpindi	Punjab	Pakistan					
Dr.	Carlos A.	Castaned	ccastanedao@ins.gov.co	MSc	Nacional de Salud	Bogota	Bogota, DC	Colombia	Epidemiolc	Universida	Bogota	Bogota, DC	Colombia
Prof.	Koustuv	Dalal	koustuv.dalal@oru.se	PhD	Centre for Walden University	Orebro	Orebro	Sweden					
Dr.	Hadi	Danawi	hdanawi@aol.com	PhD	University of Griffith	Minneapolis	Minnesota	United_States					
Prof.	Diego	De Leo	d.deleo@griffith.edu.au	DSc	University of Queensland	Brisbane		Queenslan	Australia				
Dr.	Samath D.	Dharmarat	samath62@yahoo.com	MD	Department of Health & Medical Education	Peradeniya		Sri_Lanka					
Dr.	Shirin	Djalalinia	shdjalalinia@gmail.com	PhD	Undersecretary of Health	Tehran	Tehran	Iran					
Prof.	Kerrie E	Doyle	auntykerrie.doyle@rmit.edu.au	PhD	RMIT University	Bundoora	VIC	Australia	Australian	Canberra	ACT	Australia	
Prof.	Alireza	Esteghama	esteghamati@tums.ac.ir	MD	Endocrinol Sciences	Tehran	Tehran	Iran					

Prof.	Andr��	Faro	andre.faro.ufs@gmail.com	PhD	Federal University of Sergipe	Aracaju	Sergipe	Brazil			
Dr.	Maryam S	Farvid	mfarvid@hsph.harvard.edu	PhD	Department of Harvard University	Boston	MA	United_States	Harvard/MBoston	MA	United_States
Dr.	Seyed-Mohammad	Fereshtehr sm.fereshtehnejad@ki.se		PhD	Department of Karolinska Institutet	Stockholm		Sweden			
Dr.	Florian	Fischer	f.fischer@uni-bielefeld.de	PhD	School of Psychology University of Bielefeld	Bielefeld		North Rhin Germany			
Mr.	Tsegaye	Tewelde	Gebrehiwotsegaye.tewelde@yahoo.com	MPH	Jimma University	Jimma	Oromia	Ethiopia			
Dr.	Reyna A	Guti��rrez	gutrey@imp.edu.mx	PhD	National Institute of Psychiatry Ramon de la Fuente	Mexico City		Distrito Federal Mexico			
Dr.	Nima	Hafezi-Nejmi	nimah@nimahn@gmail.com	MD	Department of Endocrinology Sciences	Tehran	Tehran	Iran			
Prof.	Randah	Ribhi	Hamadeh.randah@agu.edu.bh	DPhil	Arabian Gulf University	Manama		Bahrain			
Dr.	Samer	Hamidi	s.hamidi@hbmsu.ac.ae	DrPH	Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University	Dubai		United Arab Emirates			
Dr.	Josep Maria	Haro	27652jha@comb.cat	MD	Parc Sanitari Sant Joan de D��u - CIBERSAM	Sant Boi de Llobregat		Spain			
Ms.	Delia	Hendrie	d.v.hendrie@curtin.edu.au	MA	Centre for Curtin University	Bentley	WA	Australia			
Dr.	Guoqing	Hu	huguoqing009@gmail.com	PhD	Department of Central South University	Changsha	Hunan	China			
Prof.	Jost B	Jonas	Jost.Jonas@medma.uni-heidelberg.de	MD	Department of Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg	Mannheim		Germany			
Dr.	Amir	Kasaeian		PhD	Department of Hematology Sciences, Tehran University of Medical Sciences	Tehran	Iran	Iran	Endocrinology Tehran University		Iran
Dr.	Peter	Njenga	Keiyoro.pkeiyoro@yahoo.com	PhD	Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases	Nairobi	Kenya	Kenya	School of Nairobi	Kenya	Kenya
Prof.	Yousef	Saleh	Khader.yskhader@just.edu.jo	ScD	Jordan University of Science and Technology	Irbid	Irbid	Jordan			
Dr.	Ejaz	Ahmad	Khan.ejaz@hsa.edu.pk	MD	Health Services Academy	Islamabad	Punjab	Pakistan			
Dr.	Jagdish	Khubchandani	khubchandani@bsu.edu	PhD	Department of Ball State University	Muncie	Indiana	United_States			
Dr.	Jacek	A	Kopec.jkopec@arthritresearch.ca	PhD	University of British Columbia	Vancouver	BC	Canada			

Dr.	Heidi	J.	Larson	Heidi.Larson@lshmt.ac.uk	PhD	Department of London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine	London		United_Kingdom	Institute for University of Seattle	WA	United_States
Dr.	Asma		Abdul Latif	asma5latif@hotmail.com	PhD	Department of Lahore College for Women University	Lahore	Punjab	Pakistan			
Mr.	Cheru	Tesema	Leshargie	chertesema@gmail.com	MPH	Debre Markos University	Debre Mar	Amhara	Ethiopia			
Prof.	Raimundas		Lunevicius	rlunevichus@yahoo.com	PhD	Aintree University Hospital National Health Service Foundation Trust	Liverpool		United_Kingdom	School of Medicine University of Liverpool		United_Kingdom
Dr.	Mohammed		Magdy	Abc hoda_734@hotmail.com	MBBCh	Aswan Faculty of Medicine	Aswan		Egypt			
Prof.	Azeem		Majeed	a.majeed@imperial.ac.uk	MD	Imperial College Department of London	London	England	United_Kingdom			
Prof.	Reza		Malekzade	malek@tums.ac.ir	MD	Digestive Diseases Sciences Tehran University of Medical	Tehran		Iran	Digestive Diseases Tehran University Tehran		Iran
Prof.	Ziad	A.	Memish	zmemish@yahoo.com	MD	Saudi Ministry of Health Helsinki University	Riyadh		Saudi_Arabia	College of Medicine Alfaisal University Riyadh		Saudi_Arabia
Dr.	Tuomo	J.	Meretoja	tuomo.meretoja@hus.fi	PhD	Comprehensive Hospital	Helsinki		Finland	University of Helsinki		Finland
Dr.	Ted	R	Miller	miller@pire.org	PhD	Pacific Institute for Research & Evaluation	Calverton	MD	United_States	Centre for Curtin University Perth	WA	Australia
Dr.	Shafiu		Mohammed	shafiu@atgmail.com	PhD	Ahmadu Bello Health Sciences University	Zaria	Kaduna	Nigeria	Institute of Heidelberg Heidelberg	Baden Wuerttemberg	Germany
Prof.	Carla	Makhlouf	Obermeyer	cm39@aub.edu.lb	DSc	American University of Beirut	Beirut		Lebanon			
Dr.	Felix	Akpojene	Ogbo	felgbo@yahoo.co.uk	MPH	Western Sydney Centre for University	Sydney		New South Australia			
Prof.	Michael	Robert	Phillips	mphillipschina@outlook.com	MD	Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine	Shanghai		China	Emory University Atlanta	Georgia	United_States
Dr.	Farshad		Pourmalek	farshad.pourmalek@ubc.ca	PhD	University of British Columbia	Vancouver	British Columbia	Canada			
Dr.	Mostafa		Qorbani		PhD	Alborz University of Medical Sciences	Karaj		Iran			
Dr.	Amir		Radfar	aradfar@atsu.edu	MD	A T Still University	Kirkville	MO	United_States			

Dr.	Anwar		Rafay	rafay.aku.epibio@gmail.com	MS	Contech International Health Consultants	Lahore	Punjab	Pakistan	Contech Sc	Lahore	Punjab	Pakistan
Dr.	Afarin			Rahimi-Mc rahimia@tums.ac.ir	MD	Iranian Nat Sciences University of Medical	Tehran	Iran	Iran				
Prof.	Vafa			Rahimi-Mc v_rahimi@tums.ac.ir	MD	Sina Traum Sciences Society for Health and Demographic Surveillance	Tehran	Tehran	Iran				
Mr.	Rajesh Kumar		Rai	rajesh.iips28@gmail.com	MPH		Suri	West Beng	India				
Dr.	David	Laith	Rawaf	drawaf@ic.ac.uk	MD, MBBS	Imperial College London WHO Colla	London		United_Kingdom	North Ham	Basingstroke	United_Kingdom	University London
Prof.	Salman		Rawaf	s.rawaf@imperial.ac.uk	MD	Imperial College London	London		United_Kingdom				
Dr.	Satar		Rezaei	satar.rezaei@kums.ac.ir	PhD	Kermanshah University of Medical	Kermanshah		Iran				
Dr.	Mohammad Sadegh		Rezai	drmsrezai@yahoo.com	MD	School of P Sciences Mazandaran University of Medical	Sari	Mazandar	Iran				
Dr.	Gholamreza		Roshandel	roshandel_md@yahoo.com	PhD	Golestan R Sciences	Gorgan		Iran	Digestive D	Tehran Uni	Tehran	Iran
Dr.	Mahdi		Safdarian	mahdisafdarian@gmail.com	MD	Sina Trauma & Surgery Research Center	Tehran		Iran				
Dr.	Saeid		Safiri	saeidsafiri@gmail.com	PhD	Maragheh University of Medical	Maragheh		Iran				
Prof.	Payman		Salamati	psalamati@tums.ac.ir	MD	Manageria Sciences	Tehran	Tehran	Iran				
Dr.	Abdallah	M.	Samy	asamy.ku@fulbrightmail.org	PhD	Ain Shams University	Cairo		Egypt	Lawrence	Kansas		United_States
Prof.	Benn		Sartorius	sartorius@ukzn.ac.za	PhD	University of Stellenbosch	Durban		South_Afri	UKZN Gast	South Afric	Durban	South_Africa
Prof.	Soraya		Seedat	sseedat@sun.ac.za	PhD	University of Stellenbosch	Cape Town	Western C:	South_Africa				
Dr.	Sadaf	G	Sepanlou	sepanlou@yahoo.com	PhD	Tehran University of Medical	Tehran	Tehran	Iran	Digestive C	Sciences		

Dr.	Masood	Ali		Shaikh	masoodalishaikh@gmail.com	MD	Independent Consultant	Karachi		Pakistan				
Dr.	Badr	H	A	Sobaih	bsobaih@ksu.edu.sa	MD	King Saud University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Riyadh	middle pro	Saudi_Arabia		Riyadh		Saudi_Arabia
Dr.	Karen	M.		Tabb	ktabb@illinois.edu	PhD	School of S Champaign Iran University of Medical	Champaign Illinois		United_States				
Dr.	Arash			Tehrani-Ba	tehranib@gmail.com	PhD	Preventive Sciences	Tehran	Tehran	Iran				
Dr.	Mohamad-Hani			Temsah	Temsah1@yahoo.com	MD	King Saud University of	Riyadh		Saudi_Arabia		King Faisal Riyadh		Saudi_Arabia
Dr.	Abdullah	Suliaman		Terkawi	asterkawi@gmail.com	MD	Department Virginia	Charlottesville VA		United_States		Department King Fahad Riyadh		Saudi_Arabia Outcomes Cleveland (Cleveland OH United_States
Dr.	Roman			Topor-Mac	roman.topor-madry@uj.edu.pl	PhD	Jagiellonian University Institute of Medical College	Kraków		Poland		Faculty of Wrocław Wrocław		Poland
Dr.	Kingsley	Nnanna		Ukwaja	ukwajakingsley@yahoo.co.uk	MD	Federal Teaching Department Hospital	Abakaliki		Ebonyi State Nigeria				
Dr.	Olalekan	A		Uthman	olalekan.uthman@warwick.ac.uk	PhD	Warwick University	Coventry		United_Kingdom				
Dr.	Mehdi			Yaseri	myaseri@tums.ac.ir	PhD	University of Medical Sciences	Tehran	Tehran	Iran		Ophthalmic Shahid Beh Beh Tehran	Tehran	Iran
Mr.	Naohiro			Yonemoto	nyonemoto@gmail.com	MPH	Department Kyoto University	Kyoto		Japan				
Prof.	Mustafa	Z		Younis	younis68@hotmail.com	DrPH	Jackson State University	Jackson	MS	United_States				
Dr.	Aisha	O		Jumaan	aishaoj@gmail.com	PhD	Independent Consultant	Seattle		Washington United_States				
Prof.	Theo			Vos	tvos@uw.edu	PhD	Institute of Washington University of	Seattle		Washington United_States				
Prof.	Mohsen			Naghavi	naghham@uw.edu	PhD	Institute of Washington University of	Seattle		Washington United_States				
Prof.	Simon	I.		Hay	sihay@uw.edu	DSc	Oxford Big Oxford University of	Oxford		United_Kingdom		Institute of University Seattle		Washington United_States
Prof.	Christophe	J	L	Murray	cjm@uw.edu	DPhil	Institute of Washington University of	Seattle		Washington United_States				
Prof.	Ali	H.		Mokdad	mokdaa@uw.edu	PhD	Institute of Washington	Seattle		Washington United_States				