

The Yemen Special Interest Group has committed to producing a quarterly newsletter for the Faculty of Public Health, highlighting some of our work and opportunities. This is our first edition.

Update on the situation in Yemen

The civil war in Yemen is now in its 9th year, drawn out by complex proxy war dynamics involving various global powers, (see overview here [War in Yemen | Global Conflict Tracker \(cfr.org\)](#)).

A UN report in 2021 estimated the death toll from Yemen's war to be 377,000, including those killed as a result of indirect and direct causes. Indirect causes such as hunger and infectious diseases are estimated to be responsible for 60% of deaths, and children under five make up 70% of all deaths. [Assessing the Impact of War in Yemen: Pathways for Recovery | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](#).

A recent commentary from Chatham House considers the role of fragile egos in prolonging the conflict [The poisonous egos in Yemen's tragedy - Kalam \(chathamhouse.org\)](#).

Peace talks have been progressing on the basis that Saudi is looking to exit the war, although events relating to Houthi engagement in the Israeli war on Gaza may jeopardize the recent peace plan handed to the UN special envoy to Yemen. [Yemen peace plan at risk over Houthi attacks in shipping channels, says US | Yemen | The Guardian](#)

Although there are significant challenges in providing support for Yemen whilst the conflict continues, as a Special Interest Group our aim is to raise awareness and advocacy about the situation in Yemen. There is often very little public, media or political attention given to this 'forgotten war'. We also seek to strengthen the public health workforce in Yemen, and to provide networking opportunities for anyone in that public health global community that is interested in Yemen.

Update on our current work as a Special Interest Group

Our main work on **advocacy** is in partnership with the [National Reconciliation Movement](#) (NRM), which is a multi-disciplinary network of Yemenis working together for peace. The health workstream is attended by one of our SIG members and some of the NRM members in health track have looked at the recent two of the World Bank Reports on Yemen to consider potential avenues for action. The first is titled Yemen Dynamics Needs Assessment, Phase 3 and the second is titled Yemen 2022, The Future [المستقبل](#).

One of the immediate aims of the NRM is to Establish a national initiative for peace, justice, recovery, and national reconciliation. At the moment, NRM works on [nine tracks](#) including health.

To strengthen the **public health workforce** in Yemen, in February we launched the Yemen Public Health Praxis, a new initiative in partnership with HPY-UK (Health Professional for Yemen – UK), [Yemen SIG](#) (Faculty of Public Health), and [Peoples-Praxis](#). It offers health professionals in Yemen a mentoring programme that they can apply for, from anywhere in Yemen.

You will find a summary of this work on [our blog](#) which was published recently. The work is progressing well considering the challenges of communicating with mentees in Yemen and mentors around the world who are willing to support Yemeni health professionals pursuing and developing their PH professional carriers. Over 60 people applied for the programme, due to the licence with Mentor City we can only support ten people at a time.

Recent visit to Yemen:

One of our SIG members visited Taiz, a city in Yemen, for one week this Spring. It was their first visit in 10 years and some of their reflections are shared here.

“The journey inside Yemen was long and at points difficult, it took 8 hours to get from Aden to Taiz because the road was in poor condition and there were 32 checkpoints. Before the war, the journey from Aden to Taiz used to take a couple of hours with a good road all the way.

Healthcare in Taiz:

There appeared to be a significant shortage of primary health care and public health services, such as vaccinations. It seemed that most health care must be paid for, whereas there were previously government-funded providers that were free of charge. There are still private clinics and private tertiary centres, some of which have subsidised treatment through private donors. The majority of healthcare provision is through private pharmacies, which *“have proliferated during the war. You can see pharmacies like corner shops in Taiz City. Some militias are owners of these pharmacies. Anyone can go and get whatever medicine they like from the pharmacy counter without any prescriptions. They are full of different medicine.”*

As part of the trip our SIG member visited the Dean of the Taiz Health Institute. The Institute currently runs a reduced teaching programme with four courses: Pharmacology, Nursing, Medical assistant and Midwifery. Our SIG member asked what support we could provide through our partnerships and the following opportunities were raised:

1. Refurbishing the institute following destruction from the fighting, and two of the institute still being used to shelter internally displaced people.
2. Provision of support to increase knowledge and skills in public health:
 - Developing an online strategy for public health, covering [23 districts](#) of Taiz¹
 - Supporting researchers with their publications
 - Developing short online courses in public health
 - Online support for graduates who were unable to move further with their career after a three-year public health training
 - Continue with the online mentor/mentees programme via the Yemen Public Health Praxis
 - Short online public health courses for students who are doing their public health studies
 - Online public health course leading to master's degree

We have been able to connect the Health Institute with a development organisation to contribute to the refurbishment work. As a SIG we will continue to develop our offer for public health training and support.

Life in Taiz

"... I passed by Suq Assamil and Gawlat Houth Alashraf. It was [previously] a lively area buzzing with economic activities like taxis, restaurants, shops, book shops, cafes, a qat market, a library and more. On this visit, the area was deserted. Almost all business shops and restaurants were closed. A five-minute walk from Gawlat Alhouth was the dividing line between the Huthis and the IRG-controlled areas. I was told that if anyone tries to cross that line, he/she will be shot dead. Many of the houses in Suq Assamil are still closed. I was told that the whole area was controlled by Daaish affiliated group at the beginning of the war. They raised their black flags everywhere. I was also told that many innocent people were murdered by Daaish group and buried in these houses. Until today, people talk about these crimes but they don't know in which houses."

Although people cannot cross between the separately controlled areas, they can still travel.

"I saw Almarkazi in Altahreer Square in Taiz the same way I saw it 10 years ago before the war. It was buzzing. I could see fruit, vegetables, the fish market, businesses open, taxis, and motorcycles taxis stunning my ears with the noise. My surprise was about the availability of the local fruit and vegetables. They are all there fresh to buy if you have the money. I was told that this abundance of fruit and vegetables was thanks to the war. Producers neither export their products outside Yemen nor transport and sell them elsewhere locally due to blockade and road barriers.

Restaurants are open beyond midnight. Young people males and females drive up to Jabal Saber in the middle of the night for chewing qat, have shisha or simply go out for the night listen to music, and enjoy the view of Taiz city from above."



'Mango season still comes to Yemen' Original art by Rachel Handley 2023

Summary of recent publications by SIG members and associates:

Attal B, Dureab F, Abbara A. Yemen: current peace talks must also prioritise health *BMJ* 2023; 381 :p1242 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.p1242>

AlKarim T, Abbara A, Attal B

Armed conflict alone does not explain the devastation of Yemen's health system
BMJ Global Health 2021;6:e004740. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-004740>

Opportunities for getting involved in our SIG:

- Support our advocacy work through the National Reconciliation Movement. NRM is readily available to support any health advocacy work aiming to improve health in Yemen. This could be done through the wide reach of network NRM has access to in Yemen and around the World.
- Be part of the People's Praxis for Yemen! If you are in Yemen and interested in being supported with public health mentoring or academic projects, or are anywhere in the world and have some public health or academic experience and are interested in being a mentor to a Yemeni, get in touch.
- To strengthen health education in Yemen, we are collating short online courses on a wide range of public health topics. If you know of any good courses that we could add to our database let us know.
- We are collecting stories about Yemen and building a network of action for Yemen. If you have any recent or current projects to support people in Yemen, we would love to hear from you.
- Please share this **newsletter** with anyone you think might be interested and get in touch if you would like to be added to our supporter mailing list (we will contact you with a bit more information on what this means).
- Don't stop talking about Yemen!

To get involved in any of the above pieces of work contact: Ann Hoskins drannhoskins@gmail.com
(Chair of Yemen SIG)

For any comments, suggestions or questions relating to this newsletter contact: Rachel Handley
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