

## Young Communities and the Impact of Wars and Conflicts on the Healthy Growth of Young People: Middle East as a Model Study

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### Abstract

*Wars and armed conflicts throughout history is the most serious and the biggest factor on demographic changes of human societies, especially those that live in a state of constant conflict over different time periods or continuously. The world has witnessed many wars and conflicts that led to the deaths of millions of people, mostly children and youth. Despite the presence of many local and international agreements to protect the civilians in times of conflict and war, however it loses its effectiveness since the first day of the war. The society called Middle East, is one of societies that deserve special study. A society worthy of studying the impact of wars on it because from the beginning it has been a young society witnessing wars and conflicts continuously for decades. Despite the impact of the war on all segments of society, however, the young people deserve a special study since it is run by the conflict and are consequentially affected directly and indirectly in its sustainability. The young people are most likely to be killed, disabled, imprisoned or engaged in terrorist organizations, and militias. All of this in an atmosphere of instability and the absence of physical, psychological and social rehabilitation and the consequent chronic problems lead to improperly growth of the largest class in the society .This paper will address the impact of war and conflict on young people in the Middle East, including discussing topics of youth unemployment and participation in wars and conflicts and its impact on the healthy growth of the younger generation in the Middle East in general. In light of this study, there will be thrown many proposals that could contribute to the healthy growth of the younger generation within the Middle East region in the long term.*

**Keywords:** wars and conflicts, the Middle East, young, young communities, psychological and social rehabilitation.

### Demographic Indicators in the Middle East Countries

The Middle East countries is a region centered on Western Asia and Egypt. ( table 1) show that Egypt is the most populated country around 88. 5 millions with 21. 585% of all total , while Cyprus come in the end of this list as a less populated country 0. 876 million with 0. 21% of all total . Egypt , Iran and Turkey are the majority of population in the region 21. 58%, 19. 21% and 19. 07% , respectively, representing combined more than 60% of all the over , while Iraq , Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Syria representing 8. 92% , 7. 69%, 6,52 and 5. 67% , respectively. While the rest of the countries range between 2% and less than 1% of all over .

Table 1: list of Middle Eastern countries and territories on the basis of population.

Country	population	% of pop.	Annual growth %	Absolute of annual growth	Estimated doubling time	Date
<b>Total</b>	<b>410,153,000</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,09</b>	<b>8,411,000</b>	<b>33</b>	

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Egypt	88,523,000	21,58	2,29	1,981,000	31	2015
Iran	78,778,000	19,21	1,29	1,001,000	54	2015
Turkey	78,214,000	19,07	1,34	1,035,000	52	2014
Iraq	36,575,000	8,92	2,9	1,030,000	24	2015
Saudi Arabia	31,521,000	7,69	2,44	751	29	2015
Yemen	26,745,000	6,52	2,95	766	24	2013
Syria	23,270,000	5,67	2,45	557	29	2011
UEA	8,933,000	2,18	1,57	138	45	2010
Israel	8,374,000	2,04	1,89	155	37	2015
Jordan	6,837,000	1,67	2,75	183	26	2015
Palestine <sup>5</sup> <sub>]</sub>	4,683,000	1,14	2,92	133	24	2014
Lebanon	4,288,000	1,05	1,78	75	39	2007
Oman	4,208,000	1,03	5,2	208	14	2015
Kuwait	4,161,000	1,01	3	121	23	2014
Qatar	2,386,000	0,58	6,76	151	11	2015
Bahrain	1,781,000	0,43	7,35	122	10	2010
Cyprus	876	0,21	0,46	4	151	2012

Source : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Middle\\_East\\_countries\\_by\\_population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Middle_East_countries_by_population)

On the other hand, the annual growth % range between 7.35% for Bahrain to 1.57% for UEA if we excluded Cyprus with 0.46%, it is easy to notice the High rate of growth, especially, in the Gulf states; Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia as 7.35%, 6.76%, 5.2 and 2.44, respectively, according to high growth rate the estimated doubling time running on the same mode, for example; Bahrain just need 10 years for doubling population, to be more than 3 millions by 2020. From the above (table 1), it is obviously that the Middle East region with that high population growth rate will be reached one

billions after a little decades, the Middle East is experiencing an unprecedented "youth bulge. ", for sure youth play an important role, for that the study will focus on youth.

### Demographic Indicators for Youth Ages 15 To 24 In Mena Countries

The Middle East region one of the most accelerated growth population in the world, Where youth constitute the largest proportions "youth bulge. " With 20 percent of its population between the ages of 15 and 25 representing about 45 million youth, this is the highest proportion of youth to adults in the region's history.

TABLE 2. SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS FOR YOUTH AGES 15 TO 24 IN MENA COUNTRIES

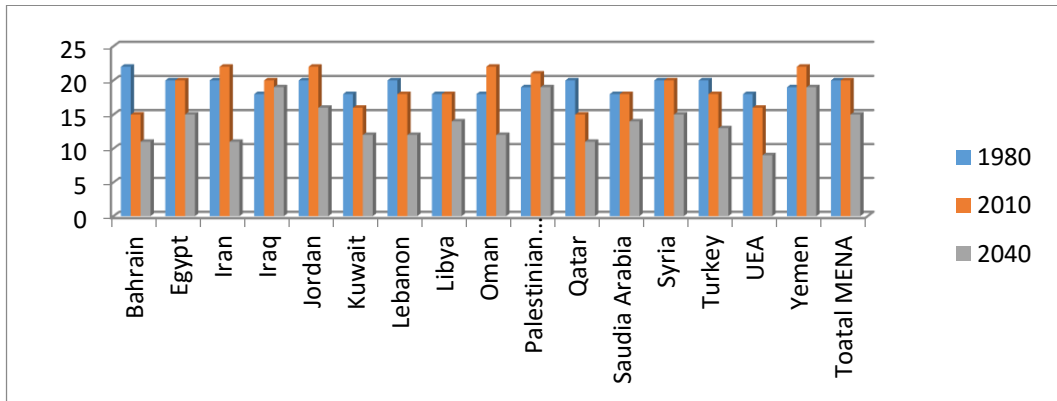
Country	Youth Population ( 1000s)			In youth as Percent of total			youth as % of working age Population
	1980	2010	2040	1980	2010	2040	
Bahrain	79	188	200	22	15	11	19
Egypt	8,889	16,009	17,624	20	20	15	31
Iran	7,648	16,253	9,559	20	22	11	31
Iraq	2,495	6,205	12,817	18	20	19	37
Jordan	448	1,332	1,463	20	22	16	37
Kuwait	246	423	552	18	16	12	22
Lebanon	569	759	580	20	18	12	26
Libya	558	1,124	1,171	18	18	14	27
Oman	208	611	448	18	22	12	31
Palestinian Terr.	289	858	1,544	19	21	19	39
Qatar	45	256	264	20	15	11	17
Saudia Arabia	1,743	4,947	6,032	18	18	14	27
Syria	1,748	4,166	4,747	20	20	15	35
Turkey	8,919	12,883	11,559	20	18	13	26
UEA	185	1,211	1,052	18	16	9	20
Yemen	1,524	5,327	9,955	19	22	19	42
Toatal MENA	35,593	75,552	79,567	19. 3	18. 9	13. 9	29. 19

Source: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision.

(Table2) shows that many countries in the region have reached the highest percentage of their youth bulge. , Youth (aged 15-25) as a proportion of the total population ranges from 15 % in Bahrai and Qatar , to 22% in Iran , Oman and Yemen, and the most populated country in the region Egypt are 20% and Syria share the same percent, Turkey , Saudi Arabia, libya and Libanon share same percent 18% . by 2040 most youth proportion of the population of Middle East countries will decline . UEA will be at the least order between the countries in the region with 9% , while Iraq , Yemen and Palestine will be 19% , and the most populated countries in the region Egypt , Iran , and Turkey will drop ; 20%to 15%, 22%to 11%, and 18%to 13% , respectively .

(Figure 1) shows that the Gulf states will be greatly reduced, leading to the decline of "youth bulge." , as Oman will drop 22% in 2010 to 12% by 2040 , also UEA will drop 16% in 2010 to 9% by 2040 . Average of MENA will drop from 18. 9% 2010 to 13. 9% by 2040, which means that the decline of the phenomenon of "youth bulge. " in the middle east countries .

Figure 1: Youth As Percent Of Total Population, AGES 15 TO 24 IN MENA COUNTRIES



Source: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision.

The mean of youth as percentage of working age population is around 30 percent, and it is noticeable that the highest youth as percentage of working age Population are the same countries which has seen wars and loss of security at the moment (table1) as ; Egypt , Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Yemen are 31% , 35% , 37% , 39% ,and 42% , respectively . The economies of MENA countries would be booming if a high percentage of youth both males and females had the opportunity to move into gainful employment. But a significant portion of young people face high rates of unemployment and low wages (Roudi, 2011).

### Conflicts in the Middle East and the participation of young people

The youth bulge in the Middle East plays a major role in the conflicts and instability through direct and indirect participation of youth. Unemployment and loss of employment due to wars and conflicts as well as the lack of youth-oriented services shape fertile ground for young people within the Middle East to participate in the ongoing conflicts.

There is a strong correlation between countries prone to civil conflicts and those with burgeoning youth populations. Some analyses have demonstrated that countries with a youth bulge (proportion of the adult population ages 15 to 29) of 41 percent or greater are at high risk of civil conflict. The vast majority of new civil conflicts in recent decades have occurred in countries in which at least 60 percent of the entire population is comprised of youth (ages 0 to 29) (Madsen et al, 2007). In one study based on interviews with young soldiers show that poverty, lack of schooling and low alternative income opportunities are risk factors and important reasons for participating in conflict with militant groups (Brett & Specht, 2004). In short, we can say that the participation of young people in the Middle East conflicts have firmly rooted in the lack of social policies for the protecting young people throughout the period prior to revolutions.

### Youth problems in war and conflict area

Since the youth is the most effective part in the conflict environment, they are the most vulnerable to psychological, social, physical and economic problems and exploitation by the militant fighters. Participation in the war means death, disability, prison, psychological and social problems, unemployment and dropping out of education and delay in marriage and family configure. These are the main problems faced by young people in armed conflicts and wars environment. As follows, we will discuss these problems individually to enable us to identify clearly the problems of young people in the communities of the conflict.

### Death or Murder :

In view of the roots of this problem, we find that history extends to the advent of colonialism to the Middle East for control of resources, sparking the diet of young people to defend their country, they were the first fighter rows which make them susceptible to direct injury and killing in large numbers, for example, current happenings in Palestine and Iraq. In addition Gates at el (2010) young men in particular are more likely to demonstrate against repressive governments .

In addition, the increase of inflation in the number of young people led to the aggravation of the conflict, which has affected the increase in the number of deaths of young people. The community of the Middle East, young and fertile floor of the conflict. Madsen et al (2007) that 80 percent of civil conflicts (defined as causing at least 25 deaths) occurred in countries in which 60 percent or more of the population is under age 30, it is another thing altogether to prove statistically that the youthfulness of the population is a cause of civil conflict.

In short, we can say that the youth bulge in the Middle East led to the increase in the number of deaths among young people after the Arab spring and the outbreak of the civil wars in many countries through active participation in the rebellion against the ruling power and involvement in the ranks of the militant fighters.

### Detention:

Detentions among young people and the accompanying prison for many years and death sentences in some countries due to the participation of youth in disputes acts had breached in governance systems in many Middle East countries, being one of the most important problems generated by the war and conflict .As well as the high prison sentences for many years and arbitrary judgments of thousands of young Palestinians as a result of their resistance to the Israeli occupation over the years extended its roots to 1948, is a clear example of the psychological, physical and social violence faced by young people as a result of their participation in the ongoing conflicts .It should be noted that the prison has an impact on young people from psychological, social and physical terms. Where the solitary confinement, torture, sexual harassment is considered risks faced by children and young people in prison in the war and conflict environment in the absence of human rights and monitoring. To view the harassment where the children and young people suffering in prisons; the following table contains a study of 100 Palestinian children in Israeli jails. This study presented the most important harassment of children and young people in prison.

**Table 3. Analysis of 100 interviews of Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons concerning torture (Quzmar: 2012, 2-4):**

<i>Type of torture</i>	<i>Number (out of 100 cases)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Binding of the hands	97	%97
Blindfolding of the eyes	92	%92
Beating	69	%69
Detention after midnight	65	%65
Verbal abuse	50	%50
Threat	49	%49
Signing of a confession in the Hebrew language	32	%32
keeping detainees in stress positions for prolonged periods	26	%26
Solitary confinement	14	%14

Threat of sexual abuse	12	%12
Sexual abuse	4	%4

As the counsellors explained, as a consequence of the traumatic experience of detention, child ex-detainees have developed a syndrome that is defined as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [hereinafter PTSD] . Hence, on the emotional level, child ex-detainees reported being haunted by the frightening moments they experienced while in detention, especially having nightmares which lead many to wetting their beds. Other manifest symptoms reported include increased levels of fear, agitation, frustration, sadness, lethargic, and depression, low self esteem, anger, accompanied by hostile and aggressive behaviour towards others or themselves. Due to being imprisoned, child ex detainees feel insecure, communicate less, and resort to isolation due to a lack of sufficient coping mechanisms to overcome the high level of psycho-social difficulties they have experienced (SCS: 2008, 11).

In general it can be said that children's exposure to prison in conflict environment affects the psychological, social and physical development in the absence of rehabilitation and the continuation of violent events and live in a violent environment. Thus, the participation of young people in conflict within the Middle East can be traced easily to traumatic experiences in detention, whether in childhood or in young adulthood .

### Disability

War led to the increase in the ratio of disability in community conflict inside the Middle East in general and among young people in particular. Disabilities resulting from the war are the most dangerous of the suffering of youth in the Middle East because of poverty, lack of physical and mental health and rehabilitative services. The continuation of the armed conflict has led to a crisis treatment on the local hospitals, and medicines interruption has also led to the aggravation of many injuries that led to permanent paralysis or temporary disability.

### Education

There is no doubt that most of the Middle East countries suffer from enrollment in higher education problem where the youth bulge and lack of educational institutions and the low quality of educational material led to the creation of a gap in this area and a negative impact on the healthy growth of young people .In addition, the ongoing wars and conflicts have exacerbated the problem and the destruction of educational institutions targeted by artillery fire in many countries this led to depriving millions of children and young people of their right to education. As a result of the prison and disability, asylum and unemployment and poverty exacerbated by conflicts within the Middle East, many young people have not the ability to pursue higher education.

### Unemployment

Despite young people's a product of social, economic and cultural structure where they live, in the same time the most conflict with this structure. Young people have always been pioneers of change progress (Karataş, 2001). Poor economic performance may be far more likely to lead to conflict when significant numbers of youth, particularly unemployed young men, are present (WDR, 2011).

Unemployment, poverty and inequality are considered the main features of the economic situation of many Middle Eastern countries especially among the young and accumulated this phenomenon with internal conflicts. As unemployment among young people has grown since the beginning of the war, it also was one of the most prominent reasons why young people are involved in conflicts and terrorist organizations and militias within the Middle East. ILO statistics in Table 4 for 2015 has shown that there is a marked increase in unemployment among young people in the Middle East. Clear to us through these statistics that the synchronized increase with the onset of the civil war in many countries.

Table 4: Youth unemployment rate in Middle East

	2009	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Youth unemployment rate	24. 0	28. 7	29. 1	29. 5	29. 8	29. 9	29. 9	29. 9	29. 9

Source: World employment and social outlook: Trends 2015 / International Labour Office. – Geneva: ILO, 2015

### **Middle East Youth Involvement in Rebel Movements, Terrorist Organizations, Militias and Revolutions**

There is statistical evidence of a link between high relative youth populations and an increased risk of armed conflict. Structural models which forecast these risks combined with early-warning systems that monitor known trigger factors (such as youth unemployment and educational reversals) can therefore help identify countries with higher and lower risks of violence. A key factor driving youth involvement in violence is the structural exclusion and lack of opportunities faced by young people, which block or prolong their transition to adulthood and can lead to frustration, disillusionment and, in some cases, their participation violence. The principle “structural” factors that underlie youth exclusion are: (a) un- and underemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities; (b) insufficient, unequal and inappropriate education and skills; (c) poor governance and weak political participation; (d) gender inequalities and socialization; (e) a legacy of past violence. One quarter of young people in the Middle East are unemployed and unlikely to be able to afford housing, access credit, get married or start a family. The root cause of this youth exclusion lies in the rigid institutions and social norms that mediate transitions from school to work and family formation interconnected markets such as education, labour, housing and marriage. This stalled transition to adulthood has become known as waithood and fosters widespread frustration and discontent among young people (Hilker & Fraser 2009). In short, the economic crises and widespread unemployment, lack of education and government neglect of the role of young people in the Middle East countries over the long years are the important factors that prompted the youth to participate in revolutions. Consequently, young people join organizations and militias which run the conflict and making them susceptible to the killing and torture, disability and unemployment.

### **Social services and the healthy growth of young people**

In order for a healthy growth of young people and to avoid instability and violence in particular, focus should be on monitoring economic opportunities for young people, and particularly on providing employment or educational opportunities for youth in periods of economic decline. While expanding opportunities for education generally pacify youth cohorts, some evidence suggest that as opportunities for higher education is expanded, lack of employment opportunities for highly educated youth may contribute to instability (Urdal, 2011).

The majority of the Middle East countries lack for proper social policy for the protection of youth and their growth, and it shows in the lack of planning for the Youth social Services, educational, and economic. Despite the lack of such services, but the NGOs have played an important role for years in providing social services for youth through youth centers and provision of anti-unemployment, awareness and organization programs. Therefore, it is necessary to draw a social policy designed to protect youth by offering social services, organized in cooperation between civil domestic and international institutions operating within the Middle East, in the absence of the role of the state or government institutions that marginalized the youth and their role over the past decades.

For the healthy growth of the youth, we have to find the cultural institutions that will prepare a fertile ground for the growth of the intellectual and cultural youth through social and cultural services. Youth centers and sports events consider as services that will contribute to spend leisure among youth, thus contributing in the proper Growth. In short, it can be said that social services should be provided for youth for proper upbringing and protection that they might not be victims of conflicts and wars, simply, can be summarized that health and education services, social security, employment and the provision of financial resources will contribute in the assessment of leisure and integration in the cultural and social life, these measures will keep youth away from violence and conflicts.

### **Discussion and suggestions**

Middle East is experiencing a great growth (youth bulge), in general, for decades the youth were marginalized by most Middle East countries, and did not find them a place in the fragile social policy. This marginalization of (youth bulge) is no longer beneficial to a lot of countries and shows resentment of their economic and life conditions through the revolutions that took place in many countries, it was a time bomb so to speak. Where the participation of youth in the Arab Spring was as a result of a fledgling stressful environment that wiped out the ambition of youth by their drawbacks of the economic crisis and the subsequent of poverty, unemployment and fragile education system and the lack of youth participation policies. In addition, the occupation and its wars sparked in the region, where a harmful aspects for the youth, including

the resulting of destructive aspects of life in general, and youth was a direct target . The result was a large number of deaths , injuries , disabilities, imprisonment ,increasing unemployment and participation in the military actions and militants.

That any initiative to create a youth-conscious generation, in the shadow of war and conflict are considered useless, because peace is the environment that creates fertile ground for a proper generation. Since the non-governmental local and international institutions play a significant role in working with youth during times of crisis, we must have programs to raise awareness and move towards a democratic culture that has respect for human rights , freedoms, equality , the idea of justice, participation and consultation. Youth in most Middle East countries were deprived of these rights.

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