The Palestinian Women’s Mental Health Initiative

A Program of the Palestinian Neuroscience Initiative and the Al-Quds University Cognitive Neuroscience Lab (ACNL): http://neuroscience.med.alquds.edu/

In cooperation with the Rutgers University Center for Neuroscience in Newark, NJ

Contacts:
Dr. Joman Natsheh, M.D. (jomannatsheh@gmail.com), Professor Mark Gluck, Ph.D. (gluck@pavlov.rutgers.edu)

Mission Statement
We propose to establish a Palestinian Women’s Mental Health Initiative through the Palestinian Neuroscience Initiative and Al-Quds University Cognitive Neuroscience Lab at Al-Quds University Medical School to promote three aims:

1. Train female Palestinian doctors to be the next generation of mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, neurologists, and neuroscientists.
2. Support research on mood disorders among Palestinian women, conducted by female doctor/scientists at Al-Quds University Medical School.
3. Conduct public-health education programs throughout the West Bank to reduce the stigma associated with mental health disorders, especially mood disorders, thereby encouraging wider access to treatment.

Motivation
This project is motivated by the need to improve the current situation of Palestinian women’s mental health, in light of four facts:

1. Women, worldwide, are twice as likely than men to develop Clinical Depression and other mood disorders.
2. Palestinians living in the West Bank have an overall rate of depression that is three times as high as in the U.S. or Europe.
3. There are very few practicing psychiatrists in the region. Of these, only three are women. This creates a barrier to treatment for women with mood and other disorders because most Palestinian women are reluctant to discuss personal mental-health issues with male psychiatrists.
4. Currently, the high social stigma and shame associated with mental illness among Palestinians (on par with social views in the U.S. fifty years ago) renders patients, especially women, far less likely to seek treatment.

Future Impact
(1) Increase the number of highly trained, locally practicing Palestinian female doctors, particularly those specializing in women’s mental health.
(2) Create a better social environment for Palestinian women that supports their seeking medical advice for mental health problems.
(3) Enhance the local Palestinian infrastructure for neuroscience and psychiatric research related to women, as conducted by female doctors.
(4) Contribute original research papers and scientific findings, with Palestinian female authors, to international bio-medical journals and conferences that further understanding of mental health issues relating to the Palestinian case, and women in general.

Proposed Budget
(1) Full-time research and training coordinator: $15,000.
(2) Research expenses (subject fees, patient travel, genetic and bioassay analyses): $20,000.
(3) Community-based public education programs: $5,000.
(4) Travel to international scientific conferences and training programs: $5,000.
(5) Visiting scientists and scholars for training and mentoring: $5,000.
Total: $50,000/year.