



Youth Declare War, but it is the Older that Must Fight and Die!

David Atallah¹ and Yara Abdelkhalek^{1,2*}

¹Department of Gynecology & Obstetrics, Hôtel-Dieu de France University Hospital, Lebanon

²Department of Functional Pelvic Surgery and Oncology, Geoffroy Saint Hilaire Clinic, France

Editorial

Cervical cancer is historically considered a disease of the sexually active women. According to the actual guidelines, screening tests are only offered until the age of 65. Afterwards, women are considered safe and thus no further follow up is proposed.

Recently, Dilley et al. showed that more than 20% of women diagnosed with cervical cancer are age 65 or older [1]. They doubted the current guidelines and thought ‘it’s time to re-evaluate cervical cancer screening after age 65’ [1]. This reminds us of the situation in Lebanon.

We believe that we are losing the fight against cervical cancer in this country. In the World Cancer Day 2020, Dr E Dean stated that the goal is to have less than 4 new cases of cervical cancers per 100,000 women per year. In 2018, cancer of the cervix affected 4.1 per 100,000 women in western Asia (Figure 1) [2] including Lebanon, thus the incidence in our country seems ideal.

However, in 2008 the lowest Age Standardized Incidence Rate (ASIR) values of cervical cancer were found in western and south-central Asia, with Lebanon having only 3.8 cases per 100,000 women per year (Figure 2) [3]. Ten years later, the ASIR increased to 5.7 per 100,000 (Figure 3) [4]

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*Correspondence:

Yara Abdelkhalek, Department of Functional Pelvic Surgery and Oncology, Geoffroy Saint Hilaire Clinic, 9 rue de Quatrefages, Paris, France, Tel: +33-768496877; Fax: +33-186461424;

E-mail: yaraabdelkhalek1@gmail.com

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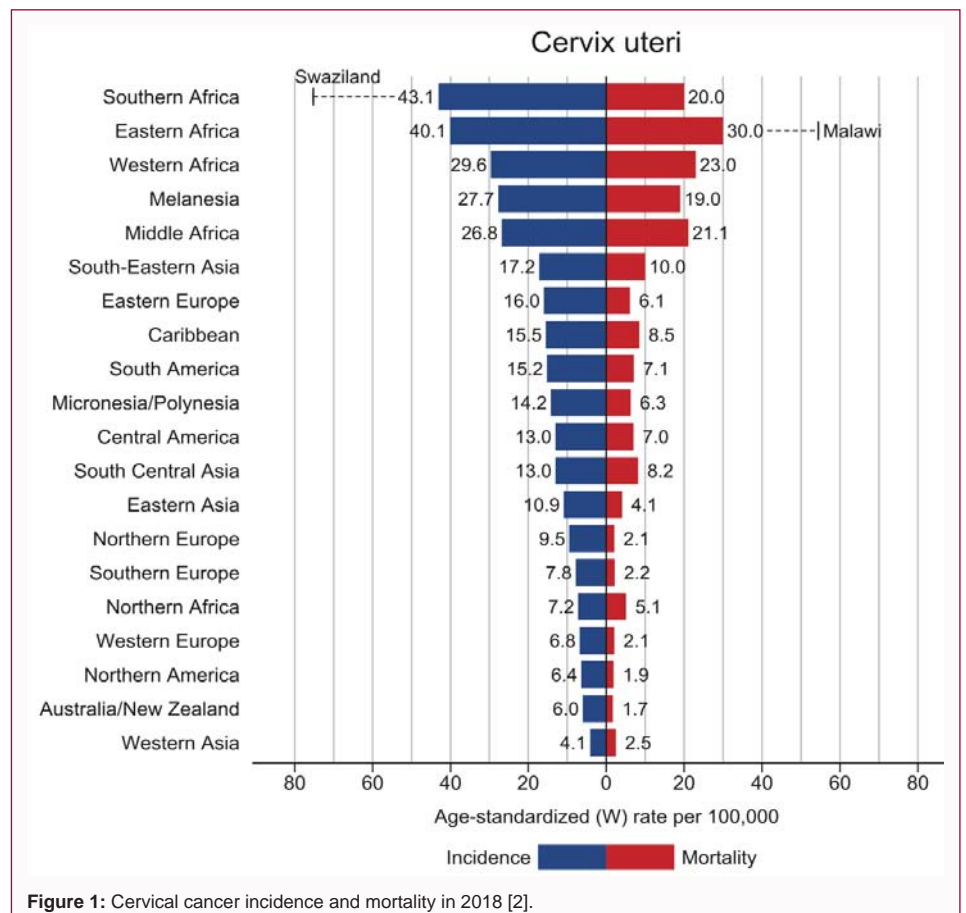


Figure 1: Cervical cancer incidence and mortality in 2018 [2].

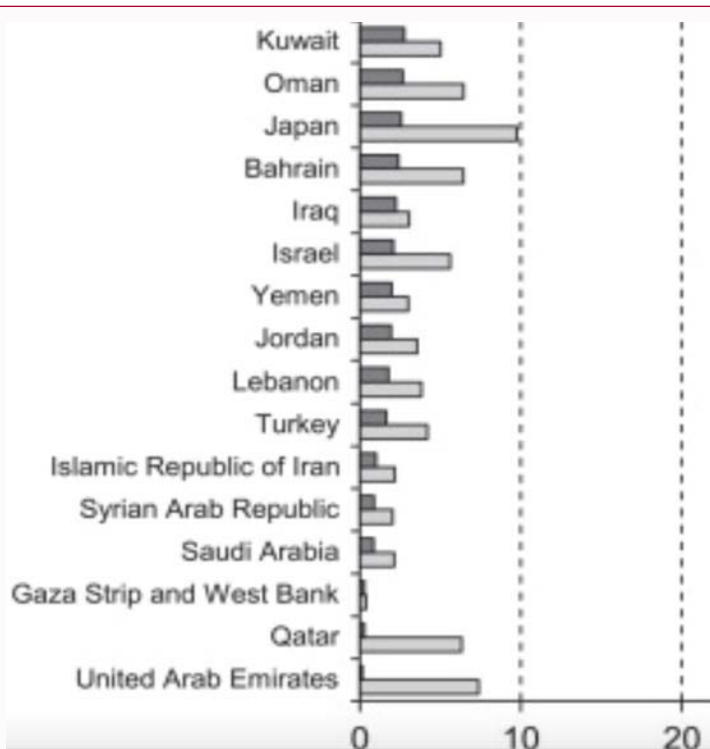


Figure 2: The lowest ASIR values (<5/100,000) in 2008 [3].

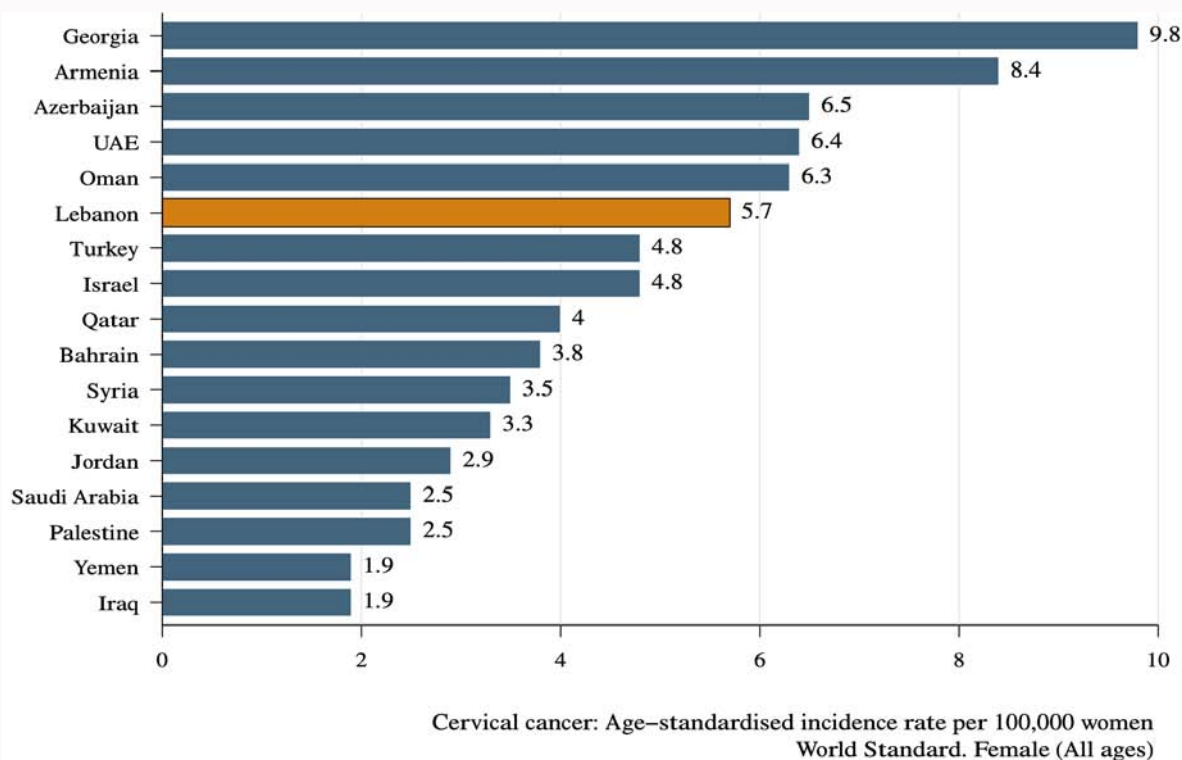


Figure 3: Age-standardized incidence of cervical cancer per 100,000 women in 2018 [4].

and Lebanon became the country with the third highest incidence of cervical cancer in the Middle East (Figure 3) [4]. In fact, according to the Lebanese ministry of public health cervical cancer cases are increasing, with 192 new cases in 2018 compared to less than 100 in 2005 (Figure 4).

In western Asia, the highest incidence of cervical cancer is found in women aged 45 to 49 years, whereas in Lebanon the most affected age group is women above 75 years old (Figure 5) [4]. Furthermore, when comparing new cases in Lebanon vs. Western Asia countries according to each age group, we found a ratio of 3.2% vs. 8.36% in

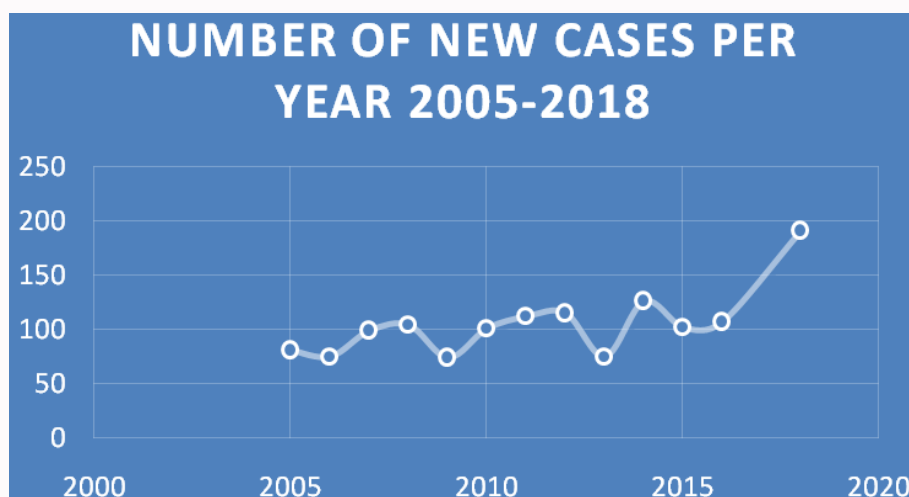


Figure 4: New cases of cervical cancer in Lebanon, according to the MOPH and the IARC.

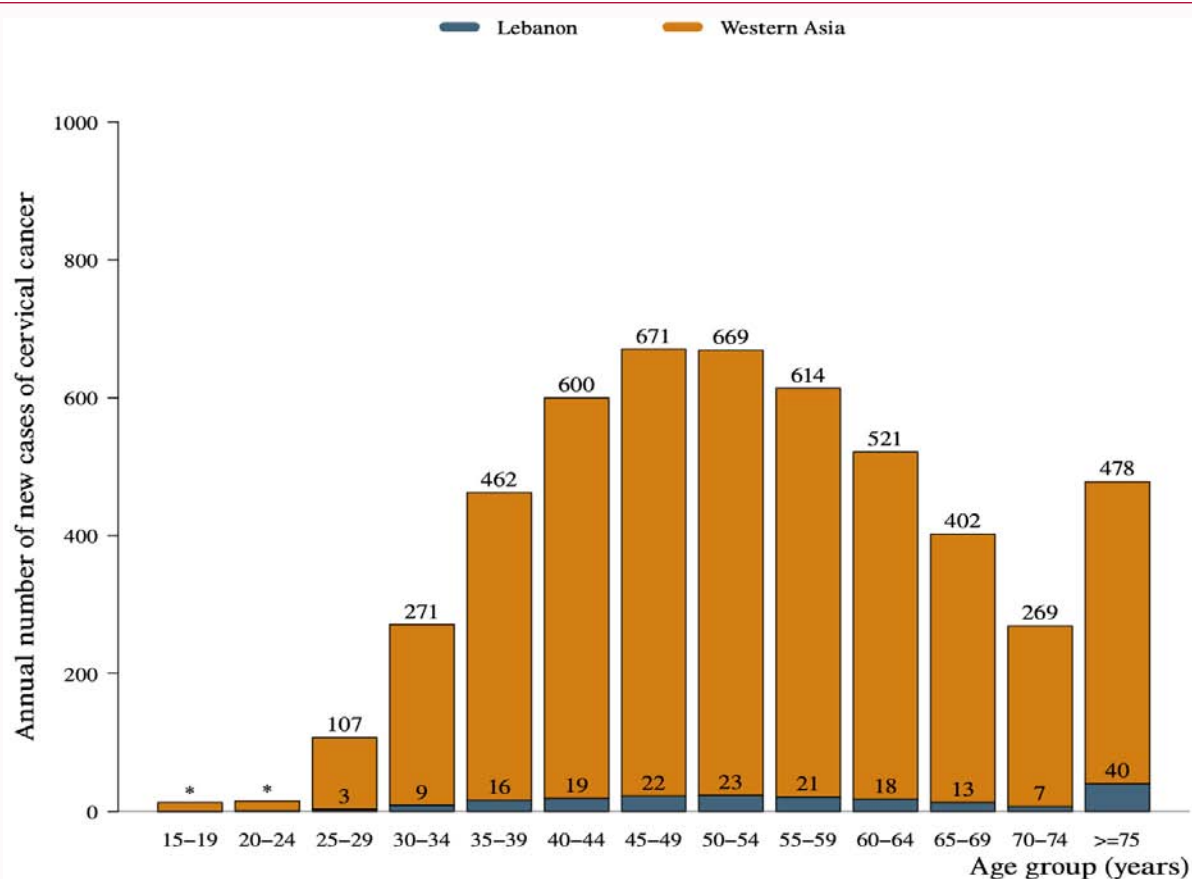


Figure 5: Annual number of new cases of cervical cancer by age group in Lebanon and Western Asia (ICO/IARC HPV Information Centre).

the young (45 to 49 years) and older group (above 75 years old) respectively (Figure 5) [4]. Thus, cervical cancer in Lebanon is more frequent in women after 75 years compared to our neighbors. This may be caused by an inadequate previous screening in these women. A study published in 2017 showed that our national prevalence of Pap smear screening is only 35% [5].

Moreover, death rates are higher in Lebanon. As mentioned above, 192 new cancer cases were registered in Lebanon in 2018 along with 125 deaths, compared to 5,092 in western Asia and 2,995

deaths (Table 1) [4]. In our practice, patients are treated according to the international guidelines, thus the higher mortality rates seen in our country are probably related to patients presenting with more advanced disease and consequently less chance of survival. Likewise, the crude incidence rate, crude mortality rate, ASIR and cumulative risk at 75 years are higher in Lebanon compared to the other western Asia countries (6.3 vs. 3.9, 4.1 vs. 2.3, 5.7 vs. 4.1 and 0.6 vs. 0.4, respectively) (Table 1) [4].

Cervical cancer is preventable through HPV vaccination, a

Table 1: Cervical cancer incidence in Lebanon and Western Asia in 2018.

Indicator	Lebanon	Western Asia	World
Annual Number of New Cases	192	5092	569847
Death	125	2995	311365
Crude Incidence Rate	6.3	3.9	15.1
Crude Mortality Rate	4.1	2.3	8.2
Age-Standardized Rate	5.7	4.1	13.1
Age-Standardized Mortality Rate	3.6	2.5	6.9
Cumulative Risk (%) at 75 years	0.6	0.4	1.4
Cumulative Risk (%) at 75 years	0,4	0.3	0.8

vaccine that is not yet included in the Lebanese vaccination schedule. A cross-sectional study in 2018 showed that Lebanese physicians and mostly gynecologists do not follow the international vaccination recommendations [6], thus many women remain unprotected.

Owing to the lack of awareness and appropriate screening, we are losing the battle against cervical cancer in Lebanon. Recent studies showed that its incidence is increased, mostly in older women, thus it is our time to fight back by promoting HPV vaccination and Pap smear screening even after 65 years.

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