

Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Accelerating Cervical Cancer Elimination in Jordan

Policy Brief

2024

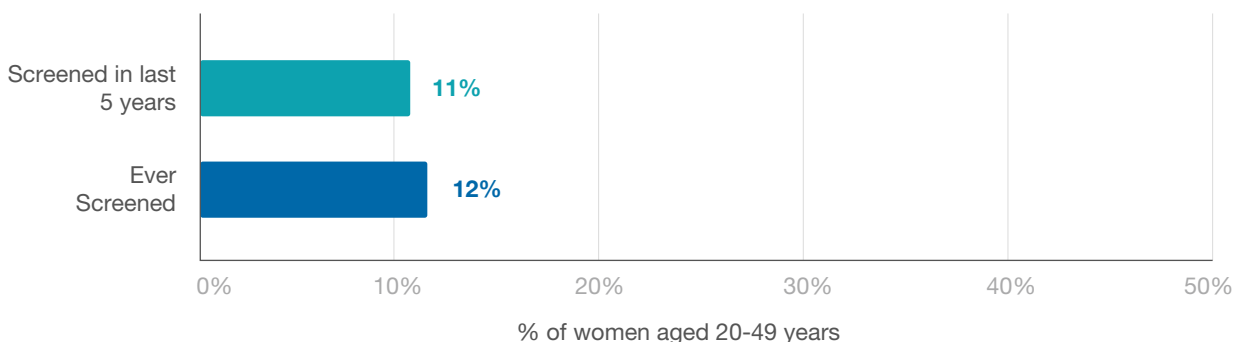
Executive Summary

Jordan's high mortality to incidence ratio (MIR) of 0.62 in cervical cancer is alarming (9), indicating that nearly two out of every three women diagnosed with the disease succumb to it. This stark reality, reflective of delayed care and treatment, underscores the critical need for immediate policy action to address this pressing issue. Cervical Cancer stands as a critical public health concern in the context of Jordan and its broader commitment to providing equitable and high-quality healthcare services, and within the remit of the national targets to enhance universal health coverage for the Jordanian population (7). Recognizing the urgency of combating this preventable and treatable disease, this policy brief outlines a comprehensive approach aligned with the

World Health Organization's "90-70-90" targets. The challenges in cervical cancer elimination in Jordan include gaps in vaccination, screening programs, lack of comprehensive data and research, limited public awareness, socioeconomic disparities affecting healthcare access, and the influence of societal norms and inadequate healthcare infrastructure on healthcare seeking behaviors.

To address these issues, this policy brief highlights the need to integrate Cervical Cancer Elimination into concerned health programs' plans to ensure measurable outcomes and timelines, enhancing healthcare infrastructure, and targeting all regions for access to screening, vaccination and treatment.

Screening for Cervical Cancer (2019)



1 in 10 women have been screened for Cervical Cancer in the last 5 years

Financial support and accessibility measures are proposed to reduce economic barriers and offering subsidies for screening and vaccination, particularly for low-income individuals. Tailoring public awareness campaigns to be culturally sensitive and integrating gender health interconnections in educational materials are also crucial. The plan also includes multisectoral collaboration among healthcare providers, educational institutions, community leaders, NGOs, and international partners, focusing on reaching high-risk groups with targeted interventions. Building robust data and information systems is also essential to

support policy decisions and monitor progress, while advocacy and strategic communication enhancement are necessary to prioritize sustainable health financing with a focus on women's health.

In conclusion, the elimination of cervical cancer in Jordan requires a multifaceted approach that includes evidence-based policy formulation, public education, awareness campaigns, and a robust monitoring system. By addressing the underlying factors and implementing these comprehensive strategies, Jordan can significantly reduce the burden of cervical cancer, thereby improving the health and wellbeing of its female population.

Approach

This policy brief is the result of a comprehensive synthesis of lessons learned and recommendations from a series of engagements conducted by EMPHNET, in collaboration with the Jordan Ministry of Health. These engagements included consultative stakeholder meetings (Including health professionals from the private sector, Academia, health professionals, NGOs, Media representatives, Women Advocacy and Empowerment Organizations, Local Health Influencers, and Thought Leaders), university visits, social media campaigns, and a webinar drawing on the extensive expertise of all involved. The initiatives have significantly contributed to raising awareness and enhancing the understanding of cervical cancer among the Jordanian population. This document serves as a consolidated scope, challenges, and recommendations that reflect the best course of action, as determined by the collective input from all activities and interactions within the project.

Introduction

Cervical cancer, a preventable and treatable disease, continues to pose a significant global health challenge, disproportionately affecting women in both developed and developing nations. In Jordan, although incidence is low, various factors have led to this disease becoming a public health concern, most prominent of which is its high morbidity to incidence ratio (MIR) (5). As part of its commitment to enhance women's health and reduce the impact of cervical cancer, it is imperative for Jordan to accelerate efforts towards its elimination.

Cervical cancer is primarily caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV). Despite the availability of effective preventive measures such as vaccination against HPV and regular cervical cancer screenings, the disease continues to claim lives due to barriers related to awareness, accessibility, cultural norms, and healthcare infrastructure. Addressing these challenges demands a comprehensive and targeted policy approach that spans from education and awareness campaigns to improved healthcare services and policy reforms (3).

On January 11, 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean launched the Regional Cervical Cancer Elimination Strategy for the Eastern Mediterranean, marking a significant milestone in the fight against this disease (4).

The Global Strategy to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Proposed Targets by 2030: 90-70-90 to End Cervical Cancer

%90

of girls fully vaccinated with the HPV vaccine by age 15



%70

of women using high-performance test by age 35 and again by age 45



%90

of women identified with cervical cancer receive treatment



This strategy aligns with the Global Strategy to Accelerate the Elimination of Cervical Cancer as a Public Health Problem, adopted by WHO Member States in 2020. It sets ambitious “90-70-90” targets for countries to achieve by 2030: 90% HPV vaccination coverage for girls by age 15, 70% screening coverage for women by ages 35 and 45, and 90% treatment for cervical precancer and management for women with cancer (1). This initiative is particularly relevant for our region, as cervical cancer is the sixth most common cancer in women in the WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region, with an estimated 89,800 women diagnosed and more than 47,500 deaths in 2020 (6).

This policy brief outlines key strategies to expedite the elimination of cervical cancer in Jordan. Through implementing the 90-70-90 strategy and by focusing on prevention, early detection, treatment, and fostering a supportive healthcare ecosystem, Jordan can take substantial strides towards reducing the incidence and impact of cervical cancer on women, families, and communities. Collaborative efforts involving governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, healthcare providers, and international partners, Jordan has an opportunity to make cervical cancer a rare and preventable disease within its borders.

This document examines the challenges currently impeding progress in cervical cancer elimination, offers evidence-based recommendations to overcome these obstacles, and highlights the potential benefits of a concerted national effort. By prioritizing the implementation of these strategies, Jordan can empower women to take control of their health, improve access to quality healthcare services, and ultimately create a future where cervical cancer is a preventable and manageable condition. The time for action is now, and this policy brief serves as a roadmap towards a healthier and brighter future for Jordanian women.

Crude cervical cancer incidence per 100,000 women (2020):

2.3

Age-standardized cervical cancer incidence per 100,000 women (2020):

2.9

Cervical cancer mortality-to-incidence ratio (2020):

0.62

The Underlying Factors

Cervical cancer is a leading cause of cancer related deaths among women in Jordan, posing a serious health threat to the population. Key aspects of the problem include:

Delayed Care

Despite the relatively low incidence of cervical cancer in Jordan, the country faces a disproportionately high mortality rate, as nearly two-thirds of diagnosed women ultimately succumb to the illness. This alarming trend is primarily attributed to late detection and delayed treatment.

Screening Programs' Gaps

There are significant barriers to accessing healthcare services, including cervical cancer screenings and treatments for women in Jordan (7). These barriers could be due to socioeconomic factors, cultural beliefs, or geographic disparities.

National Vaccination Program Gaps

The absence of the HPV vaccine from Jordan's national vaccination program poses a significant risk to effective cervical cancer prevention. Incorporating the vaccine into the national immunization program represents a forward-thinking approach to safeguard women's health and reduce future cervical cancer cases.

Stigma

Societal norms and the sensitivity surrounding sexuality and reproductive health in communities can significantly influence healthcare seeking behavior. Consequently, women may avoid pursuing early detection and treatment for conditions such as cervical cancer due to fears of social exclusion, discrimination, and stigmatization.

Lack of Data and Research

Inadequate surveillance systems and data collection methods can lead to underreporting and inadequate understanding of the burden of cervical cancer in Jordan. Limited research funding on cervical cancer may result in fewer studies and less data collection. Therefore, funding is essential for conducting surveys, epidemiological studies, and clinical trials.

Limited Awareness

There is a lack of public awareness about cervical cancer, its risk factors, and the importance of regular screening and vaccination. Studies show inadequate awareness among health workers and the general public in Jordan.

Healthcare Infrastructure

The capacity and availability of healthcare facilities and skilled personnel for diagnosis and treatment remain inadequate. Additionally, out-of-pocket expenses for healthcare services stand as barrier to utilize existing services.

Policy Recommendations

Partnership and Strategy Integration for Cervical Cancer Elimination

To effectively address cervical cancer in Jordan, a series of interrelated policy recommendations are proposed.

To meet the ambitious “90-70-90” targets, Jordan’s National Cervical Cancer Elimination initiative will emphasize the integration of cervical cancer prevention and treatment into existing women’s health programs as well as immunization programs. This integrated approach will facilitate the establishment of a comprehensive healthcare infrastructure, ensuring that high-performance screening programs, HPV vaccination, and treatment services are accessible nationwide, including urban, rural, and remote regions (2). By fostering partnerships among healthcare providers, educational institutions, community leaders, NGOs, and international partners, the strategy will strive for measurable outcomes within specific timelines. Financial support measures will be crucial in this endeavor, offering subsidies for screening and vaccination to overcome financial barriers, especially for low-income individuals, and expanding health insurance to cover these essential services. This unified approach aims to embed cervical cancer elimination efforts into the broader framework of women’s health, ensuring a cohesive and concerted effort to improve women’s health across Jordan (8).funding for Humanitarian R&I and streamlining bureaucratic processes.

Education, Advocacy, and Cultural Sensitivity

To effectively advance cervical cancer elimination efforts, it is critical to combine education, cultural sensitivity, advocacy, and strategic communication into a unified approach (2). This strategy involves designing and implementing awareness campaigns that are culturally sensitive and engaging, while also addressing prevailing cultural beliefs and integrating gender and health considerations. Employing innovative methods to train healthcare workers will further strengthen this approach. Concurrently, advocacy efforts will focus on securing sustainable funding for women’s health initiatives, ensuring alignment with national development objectives. Collaborating with NGOs, civil society organizations, and women’s groups is also essential to boost demand for cervical cancer prevention and treatment services. Leveraging digital platforms, these campaigns will deliver culturally tailored messages to promote awareness and support behavior change. This integrated approach is aimed at creating a comprehensive strategy that encompasses awareness, advocacy, and communication, driving forward the mission to eliminate cervical cancer (9).

Data Driven Policy Making and Continuous Evaluation

Establish a comprehensive data and information infrastructure to inform and guide policy-making in cervical cancer elimination. This system will enable continuous monitoring of progress against the “90-70-90” targets and facilitate the adaptation of strategies in response to new evidence and evolving circumstances (2). Regular evaluations of programs will be conducted, using global benchmarks and equity indicators, to ensure inclusive reach across all demographic groups. Through the integration of these recommendations, Jordan will develop a dynamic and effective framework aimed at decreasing the prevalence and severity of cervical cancer, ultimately steering towards its eradication as a significant public health issue (4).

Conclusion

As we conclude this policy brief, we emphasize the urgent need for action to combat cervical cancer in Jordan. It is crucial to enhance advocacy efforts and raise public awareness about this critical health issue. Our collective aim must be to break down barriers to healthcare access and address the significant gaps in current cervical cancer prevention, screening, and treatment programs.

Additionally, we strongly advocate for the integration of the HPV vaccine into Jordan's national immunization program as a key preventive measure. This step is fundamental in reducing the incidence of cervical cancer and saving lives.

It is imperative to foster a supportive and informed environment where women are empowered to seek care regardless of stigma and have access to the necessary resources for prevention and treatment. Strengthening the healthcare infrastructure, increasing investment in research, and enhancing data collection methods will further facilitate the effective implementation of the proposed policy recommendations.

This policy brief serves as a roadmap towards a future where cervical cancer is no longer a significant public health threat in Jordan. The time for action is now. Let us unite in our efforts to eliminate cervical cancer and ensure a healthier future for the women of Jordan.

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GHDJEMPHNET: Working Together for Better Health

The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) is a regional network that focuses on strengthening public health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and beyond. EMPHNET works in partnership with ministries of health, non-government organizations, international agencies, private sector, and relevant institutions from the region and the globe to promote public health and applied epidemiology. To advance the work of EMPHNET, Global Health Development (GHD) was initiated to build coordination mechanisms with partners and collaborators. Together, GHDJEMPHNET is dedicated to serving the region by supporting efforts to promote public health policies, strategic planning, sustainable financing, resource mobilization, public health programs, and other related areas.