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2018 SRA International Fellow Address

From the Biomedical to the Wounds Inside: Re-conceptualizing Health in War



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Abstract. This presentation focuses on the effects of war on health. Drawing on the Palestinian experience of chronic protracted war and displacement with no end in sight, it demonstrates that available indicators of the effects of war on health such as destruction of infrastructure, numbers dead, injured and disabled are necessary to assess the effects of war on health, but not sufficient. Other locally and regionally developed measures important for revealing the suffering endured by survivors will be discussed. Based on lived experience and research, this presentation highlights the need to re-conceptualize and develop new metrics to assess the effects of war on health which go beyond classical measures. The foundation concept of social suffering is identified as a key concept to use when trying to understand what happens to the health of survivors in war, linking social suffering to ‘subjective’ and objective health indicators.

Biography. Rita Giacaman, the 2018 SRA International Fellow, is a professor of public health at the Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University, occupied Palestinian territory. A founding member of the Institute, she was a researcher/practitioner in the 1980’s Palestinian social action, which led to the development of the Palestinian primary health care model. In the 1990s, she participated in building the Palestinian community based disability rehabilitation network. Since 2000, she has been focusing on the impact of chronic war-like conditions and exposure to violence on the health and well-being of Palestinians, with an emphasis on psychosocial health among adolescents and young people; and the development of measures to assess health and well-being in conditions of protracted violence. She has published extensively locally and internationally. Rita was awarded an Honorary PhD from LSE in 2011 for having made an “outstanding contribution to the increased understanding or appreciation of ‘the causes of things’...”