



LebMASH Annual Report 2015





**Lebanese Medical Association for Sexual Health
(LebMASH)**

Annual Report 2015

- **President's Message**
- **About LebMASH**
- **Activities**
- **Finances and Budget**
- **Contact Us/Donate**
- **Board of Directors**



President's Message

Three years ago, LebMASH was merely an idea that our immediate past president, Hasan Abdessamad, envisioned. Today, LebMASH has materialized into an active and rapidly growing association. In three short years, LebMASH has been able to solidify its presence in Lebanon, as a key player in the field of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) health and sexual health. We have been able to do this due to the hard work and financial contributions of the board members, our network of volunteers and partners, as well as the support of individual donors.

This report details our activities and accomplishments over the past year. However, I would like to highlight three developments that I am particularly excited about: expanding our board, selecting our new coordinator, and receiving our first grant.

In June, Dr. Lama Bazzi joined our board. Dr. Bazzi is a Forensic psychiatrist based in New York. She trained with the internationally renowned Dr. Philip Resnick. She recently earned a seat serving on the Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association as the Early Career Trustee at Large to the Board of Trustees. She is also a member of Straight for Equality, a subsidiary of GLMA: Health Professionals for LGBT Equality in the United States. We admire Dr. Bazzi's energy, motivation and commitment to the mission and work of LebMASH.

In September, Vanessa Van Vliet joined our Board. Vanessa is a clinical psychologist and integrative psychotherapist, who is based in Lebanon. She has also worked with marginalized populations, including LGBT individuals and refugees. Aside from her ongoing clinical practice, she is currently working with torture survivors at Centre Nassim for the rehabilitation of torture victims, as well as abused women and children, and intimate violence perpetrators at KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation. Vanessa is an activist for human rights. She is particularly passionate about gender equality and LGBT rights in Lebanon.

In addition to the two new board members, after an extensive job application process, LebMASH selected Maya El Helou as our coordinator in September 2015. Maya is a graduate of the American University in Cairo, Egypt, where she earned her master's degree in gender and women studies in the Middle East and North Africa. She has worked as a consultant with several NGOs in Lebanon and has been involved in several publications in the area of sexuality

and gender studies. She has presented her work at several conferences and has received the Magda Al-Nowaihi student award for Gender Studies. Maya has quickly become an essential member of the LebMASH team. The third development was receiving our first grant for 15,000 USD in December 2015 from the Swiss Embassy in Beirut, to help us finance an awareness short movie targeting the issue of classification of homosexuality and conversion therapy.

A friend shared with me recently that she went to see an OBGYN doctor in Lebanon this past year. She was extremely happy with the doctor's approach to her condition and was impressed by his knowledge about sexual health. She asked the doctor about this and he shared with her that he had attended a training workshop with LebMASH and found it very helpful. With this and other personal accounts or posts on social media, we have started to see the effects of our work trickle into the lives of individual people using the health care system in Lebanon. This only reinforces my conviction of the importance of our work. In the coming year, and my last year as LebMASH president, I will ensure that we continue to be on track for implementing our various training and awareness raising projects and activities. In addition, I would like to focus on three main issues:

- 1- Continue to grow our board membership while continuing to maintain an environment that welcomes diversity and professionalism. Additionally, I would like to focus our attention on recruiting board members who have a nursing background
- 2- Expand and solidify our volunteer and partners network
- 3- Secure funding for LebMASH through larger grants in order to take on projects with larger impact

Our work is just starting. As we continue to grow, we will certainly face new challenges. But I am confident that with our solid team, we will be able to meet these challenges. I feel extremely lucky to be part of LebMASH and believe that LebMASH is so fortunate to have so many friends and supporters. It has been very rewarding and reassuring to see this support grow over the years, and I hope to continue to see it grow. From the bottom of my heart: Thank you!

Sincerely,
Omar Fattal, MD, MPH

Omar Fattal MD

About LebMASH

LebMASH is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization, registered in Lebanon, and governed by a board of directors that includes Lebanese health professionals based in Lebanon, the United States, and Canada. LebMASH aims at advancing sexual and reproductive health for all individuals in Lebanon, with particular focus on LGBT and other marginalized populations in Lebanon.

Our Mission:

Advancing healthcare for LGBT individuals and sexual/reproductive health for all individuals in Lebanon.

Our Logo and Our Vision:

Our vision is summarized by the three yellow diamond-shaped dots in our logo: the first dot represents training, education, and research in the area of LGBT health and sexual health; which leads to the second dot that represents awareness and increased knowledge; and that – in turn – builds the third dot, which represents change.

Our Objectives:

Spreading awareness and knowledge, as well as influencing attitudes and behaviors of health care providers regarding LGBT health and sexual health in Lebanon.

Spreading awareness and knowledge, as well as influencing attitudes and behaviors of the general public regarding LGBT health and sexual health in Lebanon.

Influencing and changing policies and legislations in professional organizations including schools, hospitals and governmental agencies to protect the health rights and well-being of LGBT individuals and sexual health in Lebanon.

Advancing research regarding LGBT health and sexual health in Lebanon.

Supporting other organizations that provide healthcare for LGBT and sexual healthcare in Lebanon.

Our Legal Status:

In April 2014, LebMASH became officially registered with the Lebanese government as not-for-profit, non-governmental organization, allowing LebMASH to operate in Lebanon in full compliance with Lebanese law.

Partnerships

LebMASH strongly believes in the importance of developing and maintaining strong partnerships and other collaborative agreements with other organizations and key players that share a similar point of view regarding human rights and sexual health. We believe that such partnerships create better opportunities for serving the community and lead to better outcomes.

Activities

Break the Silence 2015

Break the Silence (BTS) is a scholarship for students in the medical or health field, aimed at promoting interest and research in the area of sexual and LGBT health. Launched in 2013, this scholarship has become one of the core activities of LebMASH and has become a yearly opportunity for students to be sponsored to attend an international medical conference focused on LGBT health.

To be granted the scholarship, students in the healthcare field are required to submit an academic paper focusing on health of sexual minorities or on sexual health in Lebanon. The paper can be an original research paper or a literature review. Submission deadline usually falls on May 17th. Submissions are reviewed and graded by LebMASH's Board Members. The winner receives a 1,500 USD scholarship earmarked to attend a medical conference, usually the *GLMA, Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality* annual conference. GLMA has been supporting this LebMASH initiative by waiving the conference registration fee and providing a meeting space and capability for LebMASH board members.

BREAK THE SILENCE

The winner of BTS scholarship in 2015 was Mr. Ahmad Abu Mohammad, for the manuscript “The need for mental health research within the LGBT community in Lebanon.” Mr. Abu Mohammad joined Dr. Hasan Abdessamad, LebMASH board member, in Portland, Oregon for GLMA’s 33rd Annual Conference in September 2015.

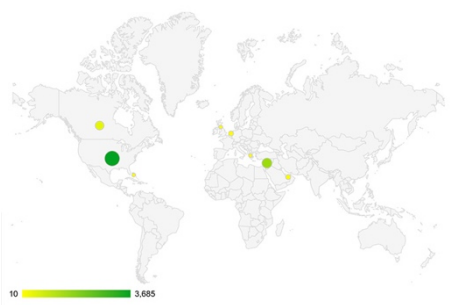
All students who submit to BTS have the opportunity to be mentored by LebMASH to have their work published online or in peer-reviewed journals. A successful crowdfunding campaign launched in 2015 secured funding for this research-promoting and capacity-building scholarship until 2018.



Zoomaal Crowdfunding Campaign

Appreciating the importance of the *Break the Silence* scholarship, LebMASH launched a crowdfunding campaign via Zoomaal in September 2015, in order to ensure the feasibility and sustainability of BTS for the next three years. Our goal was to raise \$5,000. We received support from 57 contributors who helped us raise \$5,760 and achieving 115% of our set goal. Thanks to their generous contributions, *Break the Silence* will continue to support research on LGBT health and sexual health for at least three more years.

 BREAK
THE **SILENCE**



Honoring Leaders in LGBT Health in Lebanon



On March 18 2015, LebMASH held a reception in Beirut, bringing together our board members with LebMASH partners, volunteers, staff and supporters. This event was also an opportunity to acknowledge the work of major players in the area of sexual health and sexual rights in Lebanon. LebMASH presented its first annual “Leader in LGBT health” award to Psychologist Dr. Brigitte Khoury in appreciation for her work and advocacy for sexual minorities in Lebanon. Dr. Khoury is changing the way LGBT people in Lebanon see themselves, and how others perceive and treat them in the health-care system and beyond.

The award and Dr. Khoury were featured in an article in The American Psychological Association’s Monitor on Psychology. The article was titled ‘Equal Health Rights for All’

Press Conference on the Stance of Religions Regarding Homosexuality



LebMASH partook in a symposium that took place May 28, 2015 at the Centre Catholique d'Information المركز الكاثوليكي للإعلام. The symposium was titled The Stance of Religions Regarding Homosexuality موقف الأديان من المثلية الجنسية and included leaders from different religious denominations, and was attended by the press and other concerned parties. LebMASH was represented by Dr. Chady Ibrahim, a psychiatrist and a LebMASH board member.

Anticipating negative attitudes during the conference, LebMASH wanted to be present and to provide a medical and scientific view on homosexuality. Dr. Ibrahim emphasized that homosexuality is not a disease and that it has been removed from the list of illnesses for many years. He reiterated LebMASH's position that since homosexuality is not an illness, it should not fall under section 534 of the Lebanese criminal code, which is used to prosecute "unnatural" sexual practices. In addition, Dr Ibrahim emphasized that being LGBT is neither a choice nor a condition that requires treatment.

Raising Awareness for Suicide Prevention



LebMASH participated in the campaign launched by Embrace Life (<http://www.lebmash.org/every-3-days-someone-commits-suicide-in-lebanon/>) to raise awareness on suicide in Lebanon, which took place on September 13th, 2015 in Beirut. Individuals from different backgrounds and of all ages gathered at Beit el Ward. Among those present were people who have lost loved ones to suicide, others struggling themselves with mental health issues and suicidal ideation, suicide survivors and supporters of this cause. LebMASH was represented by Board Member Vanessa Van Vliet.

The crowd marched towards the Rawsheh Rock – a very common “suicide” spot in Lebanon. Mental health professionals gave informative speeches, and suicide survivors shared moving and inspirational testimonials. Embrace Life announced the launching of a suicide hotline and a fundraising campaign for the hotline. According to Embrace Life NGO, someone commits suicide every three days in Lebanon. As LGBT individuals are at an even higher risk for suicide due to homophobia and social rejection, LebMASH found it essential to participate in this event and help raise awareness about suicide in Lebanon.



Himaya Symposium Workshop

Himaya is a Lebanese NGO that works with children across Lebanon who are victims of abuse and neglect. They also have a resilience center for children and adolescents where they can live in safety and continue their studies and receive the proper care. As part of Himaya's first annual symposium, which took place in June 2015, Dr. Chady Ibrahim from LebMASH conducted a workshop titled 'Mental Health Issues and Resilience among LGBT Adolescents.' The workshop was attended by 30-40 mental health professionals and social workers and included a talk about sexual trauma during childhood and its psychological consequences, as well as an interactive session about dealing with LGBT adolescents especially in resilience centers such as Himaya's.

Sexual Health Course at LAU



LebMASH gave a presentation on LGBT mental health in March 2015, at the Lebanese American University (LAU). The presentation was part of a sexual health course for psychology students and social work students. The course was overseen and presented by Dr. Sandrine Atallah who is one of LebMASH's partners.

The LebMASH talk was presented by Dr. Chady Ibrahim. It discussed some of the mental health conditions that might be more challenging for the LGBT community. It also discussed the most recent guidelines of the American Psychological Association for psychotherapists on how to work with LGBT clients.

LGBT Health in Medical Education

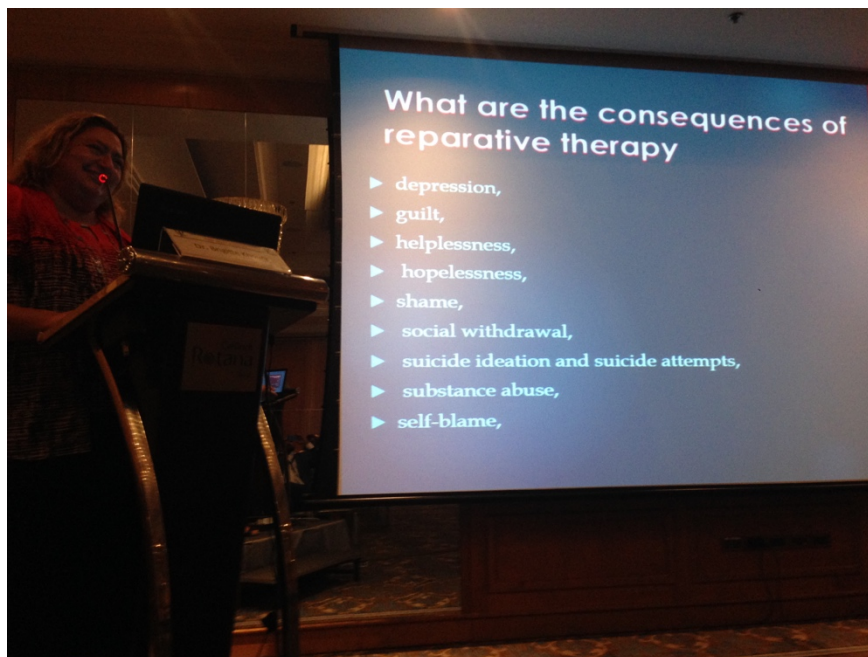
In March, 2015, LebMASH President, Dr. Omar Fattal, and Dr. Hala Kerbaj presented a lecture on the approach to LGBT people in the clinical setting to medical students at Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth (USJ). The auditorium was fully occupied, and the one-and-a-half-hour

session was noted for high interest in the subject by the students, as reflected by a lively Q&A session at the end of the lecture.

Lebanese Psychological Association Pan Arab Conference

LebMASH conducted a one-hour workshop during the first Lebanese Psychological Association (LPA) Pan Arab Conference. The Conference was attended by many psychotherapists from Lebanon and the Arab World. The workshop included 3 presentations:

- 1- Trauma and Its Psychological Consequences on LGBT Individuals in Lebanon and the Arab World, presented by Dr. Chady Ibrahim
- 2- Legal and ethical issues when dealing with LGBT Clients in Lebanon, presented by Dr. Hala Kerbage
- 3- The Role of the Psychologist In Dealing With LGBT Individuals: Reparative Therapy and Its Consequences, and Latest Guidelines by Dr. Brigitte Khoury.



Developing a curriculum about sexual and LGBT health



LebMASH is pleased to announce a new collaboration with Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to provide a Practicum (Internship) Opportunity to students with a strong interest in global health, sexual health, and/or LGBT health. Dr. Benjamin Miller is the successful student candidate for 2016 practicum.

Dr. Abdessamad from LebMASH is mentoring Dr. Miller through the development of an evidence-based culturally-applicable curriculum that focuses on sexual health and LGBT health. The curriculum will be the product of a detailed and wide national and regional literature review and one-on-one interviews with key players in Lebanon. It will be supplemented by evidence and experience from other similar curricula built and applied outside the region. The curriculum will be implemented for the first time in March 2016 during a LebMASH-sponsored workshop to medical students. A pre- and post-workshop survey will be implemented to assess the curriculum's impact.

Addressing gaps in Medical Student Education and Training



As part of its vision, LebMASH works with students in the health and medical field, to raise awareness and develop capacities in the area of sexual health in general with an emphasis on and non-discriminatory healthcare provision, particularly with regards to gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Accordingly, in March, LebMASH conducted a 2-day training workshop titled “Providing Healthcare to Diverse Populations.” The workshop was conducted in cooperation with the Lebanese Medical Students' International Committee (LeMSIC). The participants were medical students and psychology graduates from several universities in Lebanon, including AUB, BAU, LAU, UOB and USJ. The sessions were conducted by Drs. Hasan Abdessamad, Omar Harfouch, Chady Ibrahim and Nisrine Rizk.



We received a very positive feedback from participants, particularly with regards to working with LGBT individuals and addressing the particular health issues these individuals might face. LebMASH will be implementing this annual workshop again in March 2016, in cooperation with LeMSIC.

Finances and Budget

LebMASH's budget is largely based on contributions from its board members, as well as contributions from individuals through fundraising efforts. LebMASH had its third Halloween party and fundraiser in New York City on Friday Oct 30, 2015 at Loft 20. More than 150 people attended the event, some travelling in from Cleveland, San Francisco, Miami, Charleston, Philadelphia, Vancouver, Montreal, Boston and even Kuwait. Everyone enjoyed Lebanese appetizers, music and a live performance by Sultana. The event was organized by Nizar Ouf and was hosted by LebMASH board members: Omar Harfoush, Hossam Mahmoud, Rami Baz, Lama Bazzi, Omar Fattal, and Hasan Abdessamad. The event raised \$16,700. LebMASH would like to thank everyone who supported this event by attending or making a donation and all those who made this event possible especially the organizer, Nizar, as well as Ziad and Elias who donated the food and supplies and our volunteer, Deena. Furthermore, LebMASH would like to acknowledge the support of Research Institute Without Walls (RIWW), who was LebMASH's fiscal sponsor, making all donations tax-deductible in the USA.

In order to ensure sustainable funding for the *Break the Silence* (BTS) scholarship, LebMASH utilized crowdfunding via Zoomaal in September 2015. We were able to raise \$5,760 to support research on LGBT health and sexual health for at least three more years.

In addition, in November 2015 LebMASH received a 15,000 dollars funding from the Swiss Embassy, for an educational project, which funded the video "Shu El Sabab." The video is a short animation that addresses the medical classification of homosexuality and tackles the issue of conversion therapy. We will write more about this project in our next annual report.

Contact Us/Donate

As we have described in this report, LebMASH is able to do its work through the dedication of many volunteers, and our budget is still mainly based on individual contributions. Furthermore, our work would not be possible if it weren't for the amazing partnerships and collaborations that we have fostered throughout the past two years.

We are happy to open more communication channels, with both individuals and groups who share the vision and goals of LebMASH and who are dedicated to the promotion of sexual health and sexual rights. Whether you are a local or international organization, looking to collaborate or partnership, or whether you are an individual, who is interested in supporting LebMASH, we would be happy to hear from you.

We can be contacted through our:

Website: <http://lebmash.org>

Email address: info@lebmash.org

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/lebmashorg>

To make a donation: <http://donate.lebmash.org/>

Board of Directors

Hasan Abdessamad, MD

Dr. Hasan Abdessamad is an American and Canadian board certified Obstetrician and Gynaecologist based in Vancouver, British Columbia. He graduated with an M.D. in 2003 from the American University of Beirut. He pursued OBGYN training at University Hospitals Case Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio, before relocating to Canada. He has an interest in Transgender health and is part of the British Columbia Transgender Health Network. Dr. Abdessamad has been a human rights advocate for over a decade with a focus on LGBT rights in Lebanon. He is the founder and first president of LebMASH. He is a cofounder of The Foundation of Hope that enhances the lives of LGBT refugees and immigrants in Canada. He is also the founder of the Lebanese LGBT Media Monitor, a media watch and support group for LGBT equality in Lebanon.

Lama Bazzi MD

Lama Bazzi completed her General Psychiatry training at SUNY Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York. Much of her research has focused on projects that can benefit Lebanon, with a strong emphasis on global health and international psychiatry. After joining a research group at Harvard, she wrote a grant on Capacity Building in Alzheimer's Disease in distinct regions of Lebanon. By collaborating with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon, she became instrumental in developing an internationally-recognized, capacity-building workshop given to community workers in Lebanon. Dr. Bazzi went on to complete her Forensic Psychiatry training at Case Western Reserve University Hospitals. Recently, she earned a seat serving on the Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association as the Early Career Trustee at Large to the Board of Trustees. She is also a member of Straight for Equality, a subsidiary of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association in the United States. In her private outpatient practice, many of her patients are LGBT. Dr. Bazzi is currently the director of the Suffolk County Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program.

Omar Fattal, MD MPH

Dr. Fattal is a 1999 graduate of the American University of Beirut (AUB) Medical School. He also holds a Master's Degree in Public Health from AUB. He completed his residency in Psychiatry at

the Cleveland Clinic in 2005. Dr. Fattal is currently the Unit Chief of the Latino Inpatient Psychiatry Unit and the Associate Director of inpatient psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital in New York. He is also a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at New York University (NYU) and an Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the Faculty of Medicine at American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon. Dr. Fattal has served as a reviewer for The Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health and Psychosomatics. He is currently a member of the editorial board of the LGBT Health journal.

Omar Harfouch, MD

Omar Harfouch is a Medical Graduate from Saint Joseph University in Beirut and is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr Harfouch is an activist for different human rights. He was elected to the executive board of Helem, Lebanese LGBT rights organization in 2011 and in 2013. He was also elected as the coordinator of the Health Outreach Unit at Helem in 2010.

Harfouch was the coordinator for computer classes at the Migrant Workers Task Force (MWTF) from 2011 till 2015. He also founded the MWTF health fund to support migrant workers in need of health care in 2012. Harfouch was elected as the assistant national officer for reproductive health and AIDS at the Lebanese Medical Students International Committee in 2012. He was also the peer education coordinator in 2011, organizing sexual awareness sessions in different schools around Lebanon.

Chady Ibrahim, MD

Dr Ibrahim graduated from St Joseph University Medical School in 2009. After finishing his Residency in Psychiatry At Hôtel Dieu de France / Hôpital de la croix in Beirut Lebanon, he pursued a fellowship in Clinical sexology under the supervision of Professor Reynaert at Centre Hospitalier universitaire de Mont-Godinne, the university hospital for Université catholique de Louvain in Belgium . Shortly after graduation, he was recruited as junior instructor and visiting lecturer at the faculty in Louvain. Dr Ibrahim has a major interest in psychosomatic medicine and cognitive behavioral therapy. In addition to clinical practice, Dr Ibrahim has been working with multiple non-profit organizations ever since he came back to Lebanon. In 2014, he joined LebMASH in the hope of sharing his experience and expertise with the board.

Hossam Mahmoud, MD MPH

Dr Hossam Mahmoud is a Board Certified psychiatrist, practicing in the Greater Boston Area. He graduated with a M.D. from the American University of Beirut in 2003. From 2004 to 2006, he worked as a Medical Officer in the Women's and Reproductive Health Unit at the World Health Organization, in Cairo, Egypt. Dr. Mahmoud completed his residency training at McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois, in 2010. He has practiced psychiatry in both the United States and Canada. He is currently a psychiatrist at Melrose-Wakefield Hospital with Hallmark Health System in Massachusetts. Dr Mahmoud has served on the boards of directors of Heartland Alliance and Research Institute Without Walls, as well as the Illinois Psychiatric Society Council. Dr. Mahmoud is interested in LGBTQ mental health, refugee and immigrant mental health and the mental health of linguistic and cultural minorities.

Vanessa van Vliet (credentials missing)

Vanessa van Vliet is a clinical psychologist and integrative psychotherapist with training in Criminology from the School of Criminology of the University of Montreal. She also specializes in psychodynamic psychotherapy. Her professional experience covers children, adolescents and adults from various cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, in addition to her broad experience in the fields of addiction and with prisons. She has also worked with marginalized populations such as LGBT individuals and refugees. Aside from her ongoing clinical practice, she is currently working with torture survivors at the Centre Nassim for the rehabilitation of torture victims, as well as abused women and children, and intimate violence perpetrators at KAFA (Enough) Violence and Exploitation. Vanessa van Vliet is an activist for human rights. She is particularly passionate about gender equality, LGBT rights in Lebanon and the improvement of the Lebanese judicial and prison systems in terms of psychological assessments and rehabilitation of criminals and delinquents. Throughout the years, she has volunteered in various NGOs such as Jeunesse Anti-Drogue, Dar el Amal and Centre Libanais des Droits Humains.