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NU-Q Study Explores Health Information and Monitoring Among Youth

Doha, Qatar – December 2, 2017 -- Despite nation-wide efforts to educate Qatari adolescents about health conditions and how to stay healthy, a recent study by Northwestern University in Qatar (NU-Q) found that health campaigns in Qatar are less impressive for young Qataris than one would hope.

The study, “Health Information and Monitoring Among Qatari Adolescents,” provides an in-depth understanding of how Qatari youth acquire information about health issues of all kinds. The results of the study were launched at a symposium held at NU-Q, with attendees from health institutions around Qatar, including the National Center for Cancer Care & Research, Qatar Cancer Society, Primary Health Care Corporation, Sidra Medicine, and Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. This marked the first time that these organizations had come together to address the issue of health communication with adolescents.

Among the study’s key findings are that young people in Qatar still rely heavily on interpersonal sources of health information, including their parents, siblings, friends, and medical providers. Nevertheless, the vast majority of teens also turn to the internet and social media for health information – important sources that are somewhat neglected by major health campaigns.

“Qatari youth are suffering from serious health conditions – above all being overweight,” said Klaus Schoenbach, lead researcher and NU-Q senior associate dean. “Our study found that Qatari teens are turning to the internet to find solutions, cures, and understand symptoms; however, the judgment and skills are often lacking to know how to assess and deal with the abundance of information they come across online.”

Schoenbach, an internationally known media researcher, collaborated with Ellen Wartella, an expert on children’s media and health and the Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani Professor of Communication Psychology and Education at Northwestern University, and Salma Mawfek Khaled, assistant professor and survey researcher at Qatar University’s Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI).

“This study, the first of its kind in Qatar, underscores the importance of ensuring that accurate, appropriate, and easily accessible health information is available to youth online. It also suggests the need to improve digital health literacy among Qatari adolescents,” said Everette E. Dennis, dean and CEO of NU-Q.

The study assessed results from interviews with more than 1,100 Qatari teenagers, aged 13 – 20 years. The interviews were administered in Arabic by the Social and Economic Research Institute (SESRI) staff at Qatar University.

Other key findings:

- More than 40 percent of Qatari teens claim to seek health information online at least once a week, and 20 percent do so daily.
- “Googling” a topic is the most common way Qatari adolescents search for health information online.
- Social media – specifically Twitter – are popular sources for health information.
- Major health campaigns have not been memorable among Qatari teens.
- Qatari teens choose their health information sources based on *confidentiality* and *convenience*.

The project received a \$270,000 grant from the Qatar National Research Fund’s (QNRF) National Priorities Research Program (NPRP) - a grant program designed to foster a research culture in Qatar.

To view the complete report, visit: teenshealth.qatar.northwestern.edu

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About Northwestern University in Qatar

Northwestern University in Qatar draws from its parent organization, [Northwestern University](#) (Evanston, Illinois), a distinguished history, famous programs and an exceptional faculty. Founded in partnership with Qatar Foundation, NU-Q provides a framework through which students explore the world and, ultimately, shape its future through its distinguished schools of [communication](#), [journalism and strategic communication](#), and [liberal arts](#).