

Research warns Indonesia gay bashing is fuelling HIV epidemic

By Stephen Wright
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Disowned by his father and ill-equipped to deal with the stigma of HIV/AIDS, a young man who died in the central Indonesian city of Yogyakarta early this year had “effectively committed suicide” by stopping anti-viral medication, according to a doctor familiar with the case.

The 20-year-old man’s shocking death is a sign of an out-of-control but little acknowledged epidemic of HIV among gay men in Indonesia that researchers say is now being fuelled by a gay hate climate whipped up by the country’s conservative political and religious leaders.

After the young man died in February at a Yogyakarta shelter, no one from his immediate family took the body, said Sandeep Nanwani, a doctor and HIV outreach worker. The previous year, Nanwani had helped raise funds to move him from Jakarta, the capital, where he’d lost his job due to his deteriorating health.

“The family disowned him. They didn’t want anything to do with him,” said Nanwani. “In the shelter, he felt like there’s nothing, no future. And then he started skipping his medications.”

According to the United Nations, human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, affects more than a quarter of Indonesian men who have sex with men, a dramatic increase from five percent in 2007. In Jakarta and the capital of Bali province, Denpasar, the rate is 1 in 3.

In common with the wider population of HIV-positive people in Indonesia, the majority are not tested for HIV until developing symptoms of illness indicating their immune system has been compromised. Only a small minority receive anti-viral medications that can give people with HIV near-normal life expectancy.

Condom use and testing individuals from high-risk groups for the virus — before it weakens the immune system causing Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS — are both crucial to curbing its spread, according to communicable disease experts.

But Indonesia is failing at both and is now making it even more difficult for health workers to reach gay and bisexual



men. Highly publicized police raids targeting gay men and a vicious outpouring of anti-LGBT rhetoric from officials and other influential figures since early 2016 have caused significant disruption to HIV awareness and testing programs, according to a Human Rights Watch report.

Many of the outreach workers interviewed by the rights group reported “substantial and unprecedented negative impacts on their ability to contact and counsel” gay and bisexual men, the report said.

In Jakarta, raided venues such as saunas and clubs that were among the so-called “hotspots” for health workers to make contact with gay men closed.

“The remaining locations are getting harder and harder to work at,” said a health worker interviewed by Human Rights Watch. “Fewer and fewer guys agree to get tested or take condoms each time.”

Laura Nevendorff, a researcher at the HIV Research Center at Atma Jaya Catholic University, said the police practice of using condoms as evidence against gay men has had a pernicious ripple effect, turning the crucial rubber safeguard into possible grounds for criminal prosecution.

Though deeply frowned upon, homosexuality is not illegal in Indonesia. Police have used an anti-pornography law to prosecute gay men.

“They are afraid,” said Nevendorff. “They think if they are carrying condoms, it could jeopardize their safety.”

Because of conservative morality in the world’s most populous Muslim nation and the intense LGBT backlash, Indonesia’s HIV prevention strategy does not openly target gay or bisexual men, who along with injecting drug users, female sex workers, and transgender people are the high-risk groups in the Indonesian epidemic.

Instead, overtaxed nongovernment organizations are trying to fill the gap in a climate hostile to their work.

The failure of that approach is clear when compared with Thailand, a neighboring developing country of similar income level to Indonesia that has addressed the epidemic more openly.

About nine percent of Thai gay and bisexual men have the HIV virus, compared with 26 percent in Indonesia, according to U.N. data. More than 90 percent of the people estimated to have HIV in Thailand have been tested and know their result, compared with only 1 in 3 in Indonesia.

Ignatius Praptoraharjo, a public-health policy expert and HIV researcher at Atma Jaya, said the epidemic is set to worsen, particularly among young men, who are already dominating new infections.

“We believe the anti-homosexual

INCREASE IN INFECTIONS. In this March 17, 2016 file photo, a man walks past an anti-LGBT banner with writings reading “Indonesia is on LGBT emergency” and “LGBT is a contagious disease, save the young generation from LGBT people” outside the headquarters of a conservative Islamic group in Jakarta, Indonesia. The death of a 20-year-old man with HIV who died after he “effectively committed suicide” by stopping anti-viral medication is a sign of an out-of-control but little-acknowledged epidemic of HIV among gay men in Indonesia that researchers say is now being fuelled by a gay hate climate fostered by the country’s conservative political and religious leaders. (AP Photo/Tatan Syuflana, File)

[rhetoric] will fuel the HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men,” he said.

Among gay and bisexual men aged 24 or younger, the center’s research shows no difference in frequency of condom use between those who have HIV and those who don’t.

Effectively, “they are waiting in turn to be infected,” he said.

Differences in care between Indonesia and Thailand are also stark.

Just 12 percent of people with HIV in Indonesia are taking anti-viral medication, compared with nearly 70 percent in Thailand.

Nanwani said the toll of the health crisis is “hidden” from view.

Frequently, people with HIV/AIDS are dying alone, either afraid to reveal their health status — and in many cases their sexual orientation — to their families or rejected by them when they do.

Nanwani said a community group he is involved with in Yogyakarta paid for about 10 burials last year of people who died from HIV/AIDS because they left no information of family to contact.

In the case of the 20-year-old man who died in February, an aunt took his body for burial in his deceased mother’s village.

On Facebook, he posted frequently about his failing health and dismay at the rising tide of anti-LGBT sentiment in Indonesia.

His final message said god would help him recover if only his mind was capable.

“Thanks for the support and prayers,” he wrote.

Toxic tanneries forced to move pollute new Bangladesh

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for better waste treatment facilities in Savar.

All of the companies that responded said they no longer get any leather from tanneries in Bangladesh. Some said they never did.

Macy’s, Timberland, and Clarks continue to have products made there.

“Clarks has no direct or indirect relationship with any tannery in Bangladesh,” the company said in a statement. Its Bangladesh manufacturer sources all of its leather from outside the country, and the company continuously audits all of its partners, the statement said.

At the new Savar industrial center, an AP reporter found that a central effluent treatment plant had yet to be fully functional, contradicting claims from authorities that it’s been reinforced.

Chinese engineers working on the plant refused to talk.

In addition to delayed operations at the effluent treatment plant, a new problem has started: repeated breaches in the embankment of a pond where solid waste is supposed to be held. This is allowing more pollution — mixed with rainwater — to flow into the river.

“This is worrying. The embankment has been repaired repeatedly, but because of the monsoon, the breaches developed again,” said Delowar Hossain, a plant consultant.

Abu Naser Khan, chairman of the Save the Environment Movement, said the new

site has multiple infrastructural deficiencies, causing serious pollution in the area.

“It’s killing the river, it’s poisoning soil, and it’s destroying the whole environment,” Khan said. “Dangerous chemicals are still flowing into the river.”

It’s clear, he said, that relocating the toxic leather tanning factories from intensely polluted Hazaribagh has just moved the environmental disaster to another place.

“It seems the government does not care for the environment. Similar things are happening here,” Khan said. “It’s really frustrating that authorities are failing to understand the serious environmental consequences from pollution, which could be averted.”

Khan said their complaints “are falling into deaf ears.”

Bangladeshi leather-goods manufacturers were reluctant to comment.

An official at a leading exporting factory said the company shouldn’t suffer for the failure of the authorities.

“We have lodged complaints again and again, but still the effluent treatment plant is not fully functional and the pace of development inside the tannery belt is very slow,” said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing retribution.

“The government has shouldered all responsibilities for preparing all infrastructures of the new site,” he said. “We have nothing to contribute here.”

Mendoza reported from San Francisco, California.

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Difficulty level: Medium #89483

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue’s puzzle

Puzzle #62515 (Easy)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

8	4	6	3	9	2	5	1	7
5	7	3	6	4	1	9	8	2
9	1	2	7	5	8	4	6	3
7	3	5	8	6	4	2	9	1
1	8	4	9	2	7	6	3	5
6	2	9	5	1	3	8	7	4
4	5	8	1	3	6	7	2	9
3	9	7	2	8	5	1	4	6
2	6	1	4	7	9	3	5	8

Hackers infiltrated Cambodia’s politics

BEIJING (AP) — The U.S. cybersecurity firm FireEye says it has found evidence that a Chinese hacking team it believes is linked to Beijing has penetrated computer systems belonging to Cambodia’s election commission, opposition leaders, and media.

FireEye said it did not find evidence that the Chinese hackers are working to sway Cambodian elections on July 29 in the ruling party’s favor, but the findings may cast a murky geopolitical shadow over the elections critics already say will be neither free nor fair. China’s Foreign Ministry has rejected the allegations.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, a staunch ally of Beijing, had faced what analysts predicted would have been a tight race before he jailed opposition leader Kem Sokha last year, accusing him of treason, and courts disbanded the main opposition party.