Criminalizing Homosexuality Hampers HIV Prevention & Care

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Laws that criminalize homosexuality restrict the access to both HIV prevention and care services for men who have sex with men (MSM), aidsmap reports. Researchers presented three reports—one about such laws' more global public health impacts and two others specifically about the effects of Nigeria's new antigay laws—at the 20th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014) in Melbourne, Australia.

In one study, researchers surveyed over 4,000 MSM around the world in 2012, which was before a recent wave of new antigay laws, notably in Nigeria. The convenience sample of men was recruited through networks of the Global Forum on MSM & HIV. Eighty-two percent of the men had a college education, and 17 percent were HIV positive. About 25 percent lived in North America or Western Europe, another quarter in the Asia Pacific region, and a good number came from Eastern Europe and Latin America. There was smaller representation from other regions, including 6 percent from sub-Saharan Africa.

A total of 23.6 percent of sub-Saharan men reported that they had been arrested or convicted for homosexuality-related charges, along with 9.7 percent of Latin American men, 15 percent of those in the Caribbean, 13.2 percent in the Middle East and North Africa and 18.1 percent in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Evidence suggests that these men had reduced access to HIV prevention and care services. When compared to the rest of the men in the survey, those who had been arrested or convicted had a 23 percent reduced access to condoms, 21 percent reduced access to HIV testing and a respective 32 percent and 26 percent reduced likelihood of receiving medical care and mental health services. Convictions or arrests reduced the likelihood that HIV-positive men had accessed treatment by 52 percent.

Reports on the effects of the antigay laws in Nigeria also showed that the laws had driven MSM away from health services. A researcher told the AIDS conference that men reported they'd prefer to "die in the comfort of their beds" rather than seek out services that would label them as gay, thus putting themselves at risk of an arrest or a form of mob justice.

To read the aidsmap story, click here.

To read the global survey abstract, click here.

To read the two abstracts about Nigeria, click here and here.

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