Why the Spread of HIV in Egypt Worries the U.N. AIDS Agency

One reason: “There is a 25 to 30 percent increase in incidents every year.”

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Officials with the United Nations are voicing their concern about the growing HIV epidemic in Egypt, reports The Associated Press.

“There is a 25 to 30 percent increase in incidents every year,” said Ahmed Khamis of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). “It’s alarming to us because of the growth of the epidemic and the discontinuation of interest from donors in funding.”

Social stigma poses another challenge in combating the epidemic, the AP reports, noting that in Muslim-majority Egypt, the virus is usually associated with homosexuality and is viewed as the result of lifestyle choices. People who test positive for the virus, including heterosexual women, are often jailed on false charges or shunned by family and society.

It is unclear how many people have HIV in the country. UNAIDS estimates more than 11,000, while the country’s health ministry puts that number closer to 7,000. (Egypt is home to about 95 million people.)

“Most recently,” Khamis told the AP, “we’ve been seeing people of a much younger age group infected with the virus. There is a higher risk now for adolescents and youths than in the past.”

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