Criminal Minds?

Destigmatizing “unlawful” transmissions

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Remember last May when an HIV-positive man in Texas was sentenced to 35 years in prison for harassing a public servant with a “deadly weapon” because he spat on a police officer? While that type of case is rare, HIV-exposure and transmission cases are on the rise here and around the globe. In countries as far-reaching and diverse as Zimbabwe and Switzerland, people can be indicted regardless of intent or even knowledge of their own HIV status.

In response to this disturbing trend, the Global Network of People Living With HIV/AIDS (GNP+) launched the Global Criminalisation Scan (gnpplus.net/criminalisation)—the only website that monitors such prosecutions. By tracking this information, the site hopes to empower HIV-positive people, shed light on misguided legislation and inspire change in public policy worldwide.

“These laws are damaging to people living with HIV,” says Martin Stolk, GNP+’s communications officer. “Placing responsibility exclusively on HIV-positive people dilutes the public health message that everyone should practice safer behaviors and that sexual health is a shared responsibility.”

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