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State, Society & Governance in Melanesia

Celebrating 20 years of SSGM and 70 years of Pacific studies at The Australian National University

Assessing Condom Use in Tangga Seribu, Jayapura, Papua

Petrus K. Farneubun, Mariana Erny Buiney and Apriani Anastasia Amenes

In Brief 2016/20

This In Brief reports on research by a team from the Department of International Relations, Cenderawasih University, Papua, from October to November 2015. The research focused on female sex workers in Tangga Seribu, one of the illegal brothels in Jayapura, the provincial capital. The aim of the research was to investigate how condoms are used in Tangga Seribu and how national and provincial laws promoting the use of condoms are implemented.

In Papua, the most common mode of HIV/AIDS transmission is unprotected sexual intercourse (UNICEF Indonesia 2012). Despite numerous studies on HIV/AIDS in Papua leading to strong recommendations and intensive campaigning on the use of condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS infections, plus national and provincial regulations on HIV/AIDS, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Papua is still the highest in Indonesia. The latest government survey estimates about 3 per cent of indigenous Papuans and 0.4 per cent of non-indigenous residents are HIV positive (West Papua Province Department of Health 2014). HIV affects the general population, not just 'high-risk' groups such as sex workers or intravenous drug users. With urbanisation and a growing cash economy, the number of locations and opportunities for sexual transactions have increased dramatically in Papua. There are now an estimated 200 locations for sexual services in Jayapura City and the surrounding district (Cenderawasih Pos 10/12/2015).

Condom use among high-risk groups in Papua is low (Butt et al. 2002; Maimunah 2012). The latest government survey suggests that only 16.5 per cent of men consistently use condoms during paid vaginal sex, while the national target is 65 per cent (West Papua Province Department of Health 2014). In the same study, just 5.8 per cent of men and 1.2 per cent of women reported that they consistently use condoms in extramarital sex. Dr Arnoldus Tiniap of the West Papua Province Department of Health concludes that although there is an increase in the reported consistent use of condoms compared to the last survey in 2006, overall, the consistent

use of condoms in extramarital sex during the past 12 months is still low.

To support the use of condoms, the Indonesian health minister issued [law no. 21/2013](#) on the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Article 14 stresses the importance of consistent use of condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS infections. Article 11 specifies that campaigning for the use of condoms in any high-risk sexual intercourse which potentially transmits disease should be done as part of health promotion. Likewise, the government of Papua issued [local regulation no. 8/2010 on HIV/AIDS](#). Articles 4(a) and 9(a) stipulate that anyone at high risk of being infected and/or infecting his or her partners should use condoms consistently. However, there is no mechanism and no clause specified in the documents to impose penalties against those who knowingly infect other persons.

Characteristics of Sex Workers at Tangga Seribu

Although it is illegal, the Tangga Seribu brothel has been in existence since 1999. Currently, there are around 31 female sex workers in Tangga Seribu, mostly from Java. We distributed a questionnaire to 15 sex workers and interviewed 2 HIV-positive sex workers at Tangga Seribu. We also interviewed one indigenous Papuan man who was receiving counselling and support from YPKM (Yayasan Pengembangan Kesehatan Masyarakat or Papua Community Health Development Foundation). The age range of the sex workers is 27–47 years, and most are older than 40 years. In terms of education, three are primary school graduates, five graduated from junior high school, three graduated from senior high school and four did not report their level of education. Six had worked as a sex worker for 1–5 years, while three had worked as sex workers for about 1 year, 6–10 years and more than 10 years, respectively.

Some were sex workers in Java before coming to Papua and some became sex workers in Papua because they were deceived with the promise of a good job in Papua. Some were originally sex workers in other areas like Timika, the

town that services the Freeport gold mine, and then moved to Jayapura. In Jayapura, they underwent HIV tests organised by YPKM. Although some are HIV positive they have not revealed their HIV status to potential clients for fear of possible consequences. One of the HIV-positive respondents stated that she was working in the brothel to support her family living in Java.

Condom Use among Sexual Partners of Tangga Seribu

All the sex workers at Tangga Seribu acknowledged that they had been informed by YPKM and the Papua AIDS Commission about the government regulations on HIV prevention and their obligation to use condoms. However, they said that their sexual partners are still reluctant to use condoms. According to YPKM, most of the clients at Tangga Seribu are indigenous Papuans and the use of condoms is low among them because there is a general perception that condoms reduce sexual pleasure. From the 15 respondents, seven said the dominant reason that clients do not use condoms is because of lack of awareness about the importance of condoms for HIV protection. Four respondents said the main reason clients do not want to use condoms is because it reduces the feeling of sexual satisfaction. Three sex workers said that there are many factors influencing client preferences not to use a condom and no single dominant factor. Meanwhile, when asked whether clients ever initiate the use of condoms, all 15 respondents said no.

Sex workers use different ways of persuading their partners to use condoms. The most common method is explaining the risk of not using a condom (63.1 per cent), followed by threatening not to serve (26.3 per cent), and offering a reward such as free sex or additional service time (5.2 per cent). Sex workers over 35 years of age are the most active in persuading partners to use condoms and they use more than one way to persuade them. We asked the respondents whether any of them believed that their partners are healthy or not infected and therefore there was no need to use a condom, and all said no.

Conclusion

Our research confirms that the use of condoms among high-risk sex partners in Papua is low. One of the main reason is

men's lack of awareness of the importance of condoms for preventing HIV. The perception that using condoms will reduce sexual satisfaction is still dominant. Solving this problem, it is important that government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and religious leaders continue to educate men about the importance of condoms for HIV prevention. HIV/AIDS issues should also be integrated with health programs to raise awareness about healthy lifestyles. Although there has been campaigning on the use of condoms, regulations from Indonesia's health minister and the provincial government, and a strong appeal from the international community to use condoms consistently, these strategies have not changed men's behaviour. The law has a strong social influence in Papua, and the government and NGOs might focus more on promoting awareness of the condom regulations rather than just promoting condoms. More research with men would help identify ways to promote condom use and healthy sexual relationships.

Author Notes

The authors are all lecturers at the Department of International Relations, Cenderawasih University, Papua. Their research interests focus on traditional and non-traditional security issues in Papua and how they affect human security and government policy.

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