

Traffic Jam!

Pile-up of HIV cases, sex trafficking rises, flashing light to the world

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We live in a world of numbers. The stock market. Standardized tests. Bills and receipts. But people are usually outraged in an increase in something that's detrimental to them, which is why the world should be in an uproar over the latest findings in Tangerang, Indonesia.

In 2011, the KPA—the HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation commission—recorded 428 people with HIV and 146 people with AIDS. In 2012, a whopping 1,515 people in the regency were found to be living with HIV.

If that's not shocking enough, the data is only from the months of January to September, and these are only the people who were actually *tested*. In other words, there are still four months unaccounted for and many other people unwilling to test for this devastating disease.

There does seem to be an underlying reason for this drastic increase in HIV. Initially thought to be spread through sharing needles, it was found that HIV was mostly spread through unsafe sex.

Speaking of unsafe sex...get a load of these numbers. According to Multa Fidrus' article "Worries as HIV spreads like wildfire in Tangerang," "the sex worker population of the regency has increased by between 500 and 650 each year of late." Each. Year.

So...one world problem is linked to another world problem? A shunned disease linked to a shunned practice? No...it *must* be coincidence.

Or is it?

HIV is a curious disease in the sense that it doesn't directly kill its victims. It targets the immune system, bringing down the soldiers of the resistance, and the victim, as a result, eventually develops AIDS. However, even then, AIDS isn't what kills—it's what the now-weakened host contracts that a healthy person would generally be able to handle, such as the common cold or pneumonia, possibly even TB.

Although the three main modes of transmission are through blood, intercourse, and pregnancy, risky sexual behavior was clearly the reason that there was a spike in the number of identified HIV/AIDS cases in Tangerang. HIV is indeed spread through blood, semen, and vaginal secretions. And well I'll be damned...sexual intercourse generally involves semen and vaginal secretions.

Tangerang's immediate problem, according to KPA manager Hady Irawan, is that there is an insufficient number of officers to identify HIV cases and an insufficient number of volunteers to assist people with HIV.

The world's immediate problem is that there is no general consensus on how to deal with HIV.

Sex trafficking has always been an international problem, and if it's promoting the transmission of HIV—which is also a critical international issue—there needs to be a more global approach towards HIV prevention.

So what to do...target the sex trade or target HIV? Treat the disease or treat the symptoms? Proper education and regulation concerning both would make a huge difference. By better acknowledging and tolerating both, more people would be more willing to be tested, and consequently, potentially more people can be saved from this debilitating illness.

What's at stake if we continue down this path of self-destruction? People will continue to be untested and untreated, thus spreading HIV and producing children with this unfortunate disease. Tangerang is just the first chapter in the *War and Peace* of our future with HIV.