



HIV/AIDS in the Philippines: Living in Dangerous Times

Maria Dulce F. Natividad, PhD, Assistant Professor, Asian Center

Michael L. Tan, PhD, Chancellor and Professor of Anthropology

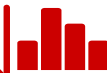
Social Observatory of the University of the Philippines Diliman

November 2017



- ◆ **From “low and slow” to “the most explosive in the Asia Pacific region”**
- ◆ **Between 2010-2016, HIV cases have more than doubled -- from 4,300 to 10,500**
- ◆ **Mostly from sexual contact, particularly among MSM**
- ◆ **A significant percentage of HIV prevalence among injecting drug users**
- ◆ **79% of HIV transmissions among young people ages 15-34**

Source: HIV/AIDS and Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) Registry of the Philippines (HARP), Department of Health, June 2017



Quick Statistics

Latest

*June 2017

Cumulative

(Jan 1984-June 2017)

Total Reported Cases	1,013	45,023
Asymptomatic Cases	888	40,717
AIDS Cases	125	4,306
Male	944	41,917
Female	69	3,095
Total PLHIV on ART		21,035
Reported Deaths	29	2,185

Source: HIV/AIDS and Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) Registry of the Philippines (HARP), Department of Health, June 2017



Photo source: Raffy Lerma—Philippine Daily Inquirer

“



“Your (police) duty requires you to overcome the resistance of the person you are arresting ... [if] he resists, and it is a violent one ... you are free to kill the idiots, that is my order to you,” Aug. 28, 2017

“You drug addicts, since you've been identified, avoid the streets, stay in your homes because I will throw you in Manila Bay. I'll make you fertilizer for the fish,” April 3, 2017

The ones who died in Bulacan, 32, in a massive raid, that is good. We could just kill another 32 everyday, then maybe we could reduce what ails this country),” Aug. 16, 2017

“And they (human rights activists) make so much noise. What about the human rights? They can only make recommendations. They can write anything. Condemn the police, condemn everybody, when it comes to the recommendations, there's nothing,” Oct. 12, 2017

9,432 homicide
cases

2,692 deaths from
“presumed legitimate
law enforcement
operations”

Estimates of **12,000**
to 13,000 extra-
judicial killings



“

Political theater and a class war

A police general, in a roundtable conducted at the University of the Philippines:

**“We all know what the solution is for drugs...
just burn down the slums.”**



War on Drugs: Techniques to deploy fear

Oplan Tokhang (knock & invite)
Drug list/surrenderees
Drop boxes
Community warnings
Mandatory drug tests
Declaration of drug-free zones
Extrajudicial killings



Some findings

on drugs and HIV/AIDS risks from the current study

- ◆ Injecting drug use is no longer limited to shooting galleries in Cebu (a southern city) offering Nubain (nalbuphine, an opioid analgesic). Instead, people are injecting shabu (metamphetamine hydrochloride) powder mixed into a solution.
- ◆ There is a clear nexus now between drug use and sexual activity, which means we cannot limit risk management to PWID (people who inject drugs).
- ◆ Party and Play (PNP), together with the rise of social media for dates, are important to monitor and analyze. Postings on sites like Grindr have code words like “ice” and “fly” to suggest sex and drugs.



Shadow populations

- ◆ Given continuing discrimination against MSMs, and especially transgendered people, we continue to see shadow populations that rely on mutual help and trust networks for information, risk management and harm reduction.
- ◆ The risks are not just for HIV/AIDS but also for survival, protection from harassment and discrimination.



Our findings on HIV/AIDS and drugs

- ◆ Drug use remains poorly documented, statistics manipulated to project an epidemic, but without context.

Shabu (metamphetamine hydrochloride) remains the major abused drug but there are all kinds of differences across classes in substances used and their social contexts. Party drugs like Ecstasy for the rich run up to A\$50 a pill; shabu for the poor and middle classes (A\$12.55 per sheet). Marijuana, together with shabu, are part of an older “libangan” (passing time) menu to deal with urban poverty: from marital problems to keeping awake at work (especially night shifts), general anomie and despair.

- ◆ Drug programs and HIV interventions are treated separately and disconnected from each other.



“They are slaughtering us like animals”

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/07/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-philippines-drugs-killings.html>



Impact of the war on drugs

- ◆ Destabilization of trust and mutual support networks that are key to harm reduction strategies of drug user communities. This erosion/disintegration of social capital has driven MSMs, drug users and other marginalized groups further into the shadows and make harm reduction strategies harder to maintain.
- ◆ A harm reduction program for IDUs was shut down in Cebu. IDUs in Cebu have in fact backed out from public consultations, legislative hearings, fearful that they might be arrested, foreclosing public discussion of harm reduction.
- ◆ Outreach programs for MSM and drug users in Quezon City have been discontinued. Even local government behavior surveys + other data mapping (conducted at night) have been stopped to protect frontline providers from police operations.



Impact of the war on drugs

- ◆ Growing vulnerability of MSMs to State terror, ranging from extortion to outright EJK (although we have not been able to document any deaths).
- ◆ Because of the arbitrariness of the war on drugs, a trivialization of laws and social programs. The name of the game is evasion: if you can get away with it, and you probably will if you are rich or have connections, well and good.
- ◆ Sexual encounters and drug use take on an arbitrariness: in these dangerous times, who cares? “Better to die happy than die by *tokhang**.”

* Tokhang is a term relating to the police ‘knocking on the door and ‘appeal’ (i.e. a euphemism for an interrogation)



Community Responses

- ◆ Local government units, the Catholic Church, and community organizations are showing more interest in addressing the drug issue and have shown openness to harm reduction programs
- ◆ Opening of space for discussion about the link between drug use and HIV, and harm reduction at the local level (not at the national level)
- ◆ Opportunity to evaluate and integrate HIV intervention and drug/rehab programs that are treated separately until now

DDB chief: Nueva Ecija drug rehab facility a 'mistake,' 'impractical'

By Audrey Morallo (philstar.com) | Updated November 1, 2017 - 1:11pm

Tweet 50 Share 1331 googleplus 0 Email 0 Like 2.3K



The money spent to construct the mega drug rehabilitation facility in Nueva Ecija could have been used to fund smaller, community-based anti-drug programs, DDB Chairman Dionisio Santiago said. File photo

MANILA, Philippines — The construction of a massive drug-rehabilitation facility in Nueva Ecija is a "mistake" and "impractical," according to the chairman of the Dangerous Drugs Board.

Recent clarification:

CNN Philippines, November 2 — The 10,000-bed mega-drug facility in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija is a "**miscalculation**," the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) chief said. DDB Chair Dionisio Santiago clarified a previous statement that the major rehabilitation center was "impractical" and "a mistake." Instead, Santiago prefers smaller regional and community-based facilities, which he believes will only cost P300 million each.

Source: PhilStar and CNN Philippines



Postscript

In October, Duterte announced the war on drugs would be transferred to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, which has a small staff. A few days after transferring responsibilities to PDEA, he wondered aloud in a press conference:

“Would there be enough resources for this agency to deal with the problem effectively. I don’t know.”

<http://www.interaksyon.com/watch-duterte-notes-pdea-lack-of-resources-for-war-on-drugs/>



Acknowledgement

- ◆ Renier Louie Bona, Research Assistant
- ◆ ACHIEVE
- ◆ SHIP
- ◆ NoBox
- ◆ Quezon City Health Department
- ◆ Bishop Pablo David
- ◆ Rosheic Sims
- ◆ Anonymous Key Informant Interviewees