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# **Outbreak among gay clubs stokes homophobic resentment in South Korea**

***A man unknowingly spread COVID-19 at gay clubs in Seoul. Now, media coverage is repeating antigay tropes.***

By Taylor Henderson

The Advocate (09.05.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3cnSkS1> - A recent coronavirus outbreak in Seoul has breathed new life into tensions over homosexuality in South Korea.

Before being diagnosed with COVID-19, a local man went out to several gay bars and unknowingly spread the virus. The 29-year-old, who had no symptoms of coronavirus, visited two convenience stores and five bars and nightclubs in Itaewon, a party district in Seoul. He later tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

The government believes the man exposed at least 1,500 people to the virus, and 14 people who were in contact with him, including the friend he went out with, have already been diagnosed. The number is expected to rise.

As it was the first local infection in four days, the incident has reignited fears of community spreading — and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments. South Korean officials and media reports have emphasized that the infections happened in gay bars, which advocacy groups believe is a way to blame the outbreak on the LGBTQ+ community. Human rights groups say this kind of reporting is "unnecessary" and "could incite hatred toward LGBT people and hinder the government's efforts to contain the spread of the virus," The Korea Herald reports.

In its effort in trying to contain the spread of COVID-19, Reuters reports the South Korean government traces individuals infected through CCTV footage, credit card statements, phone location data, and more. Health officials use that information to form lists of potential infections. Previously, they've widely disclosed details on diagnosed patients via cell phone alerts, including patients' gender, age, location, and workplace.

Homosexuality is legal in South Korea but LGBTQ+ people still face discrimination and lack workplace protections. The government's attempt to contain the spread of the virus could potentially out many people to their communities, families, or employers. The stigmas surrounding homosexuality might also scare away those who fear being outed from seeking testing and treatment.

"There is already stigma against gays in Korean society and the person went clubbing at such a critical moment (for containing the spread of COVID-19) as a country," Jay Kim, a gay man living in Seoul, told Reuters. "It's just obvious that (the media are focusing on) the worst combination (gays and clubbing) to make LGBT people even more of a target of hatred."

The Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights in Korea believes this kind of sensitive information is private, and irrelevant to public health. "It is not just unhelpful to disclose information of an individual's movement for prevention efforts, but also a serious human rights violation that invades the individual's privacy and has him outed to society," they said.

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