

KUHP bill harms sexual health

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Agustina Doren, 29, has spent almost a decade working across Sulawesi as a midwife. During this time, she has come to realize how insufficient the health information in the region is, especially regarding reproduction health.

"I knew a man who wore condoms on his thumb because that was how we demonstrated it in a simulation," she said on Sunday.

Many more people may experience similar confusion, with the draft of the Criminal Code (KUHP) bill currently under deliberation set to criminalize the act of showing contraceptive and abortion tools.

There are three articles in the bill that regulate the display of contraceptive and abortion tools. The articles stipulate that only authorized and appointed officials are allowed to give presentations on the tools and procedure to the public.

If passed into law, offenders would face a maximum penalty of Rp 10 million (US\$740) in fines, but would not face time in prison. This is a change from the prevailing law, which carries a maximum sentence of two months' imprisonment.

The government and lawmakers have argued the articles were necessary to uphold decency in the country.

The KUHP National Reform Alliance, which consists of numerous NGOs focused on health-related issues, urged the government on Sunday to remove the articles from the draft bill.

The alliance said limitations on information would detract from the government's family planning

Under bill, unauthorized persons face sanctions for displaying contraceptives

Family planning program relies on volunteers

(KB) program and increase cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

"The number of medical workers is insufficient for the number of people who require education on contraceptive use. We need the assistance of volunteers to educate people," Ramona Sari, a representative from the Indonesian Family Planning Association (PKBI), told the press on Sunday.

Family planning counseling and promotion has long been carried out by field officers of the National Demography and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN). However, their numbers have dropped to 15,000 in early 2018 from 40,000 in the 1980s. Unpaid volunteers have also assisted BKKBN officials.

The agency has set a goal to lower the country's fertility rate to 2.1 children per woman by 2025. The fertility rate currently stands at 2.4 according to BKKBN data.

The program's success depended on the assistance of volunteers, said BKKBN family planning and reproduction health deputy head Dwi Listyawardani. She added that volunteers were needed in 75,000 villages across Indonesia.

"If the bill is passed, volunteers may become scared of facing prosecution," she said.

Information on family planning, reproductive health and STDs is mainly provided by NGOs, according to the alliance's latest data, gathered in cooperation with the United Nations Pop-

ulation Fund (UNFPA).

Only 17 percent of reproductive health information and 8 percent of HIV and AIDS information comes from government health care workers.

"The bill will harm health awareness programs at the national," Dini Haryati, Cipta Cara.Padu Foundation (YCCP) program manager, said.

The alliance said the bill would also impede Indonesia's achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular those pertaining to health and gender equality. The alliance also believed the bill would harm efforts to improve the quality of people's lives in Indonesia, one of the nine priorities (Nawacita) outlined by President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's administration.

However, head of the National Board of Legal Development, Enny Nurbaningsih, claimed the NGOs would still have the same legal capacity to provide counseling on contraceptive use, and argued that instead of criminalizing their activities, the law would protect them.

"We [government and lawmakers] have accommodated suggestions from NGOs. Providing counseling is legal as long as they can prove it is for educational purposes only," she said.

Arsul Sani, a United Development Party (PPP) politician and member of the bill deliberation committee, echoed this sentiment.

"The law only criminalizes unauthorized civilians and unlisted activists," he said, adding that the drafting team had reached the final stage of their deliberations and would most likely not revise the articles. "We expect to finish the bill before mid-year." (srs)