

The GLOBE

Public health news from around the world

Few countries offer constitutional protections for LGBT citizens

ONLY A HANDFUL of countries in the world have constitutions that guarantee equality on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, according to the most comprehensive global study of the topic to date.

Recently published in the *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, the analysis found that just five countries explicitly assure equality for citizens based on sexual orientation and gender identity, while 13 countries between 1990 and 2014 adopted constitutional prohibitions against same-sex marriage or provisions that allow legislation that forbids same-sex marriage. Overall, 22 of the 193 countries recognized by the United Nations have introduced case law or legislation to support same-sex marriage, according to the analysis, which was conducted by the World Policy Analysis Center at the University of California-Los Angeles Fielding School of Public Health.

"Constitutional rights are a promise of fundamentally fair and equal treatment and provide a critical path to recourse when a violation occurs," said Jody Heymann, MD, PhD, MPP, a co-author of the study and dean of the Fielding School of Public Health, in a news release. "While marriage equality is an important start, it is not enough to prevent discrimination at work, in housing or many other spheres of life. It is crucial for constitutions to guarantee equal rights and protection from discrimination to LGBT individuals in all spheres."

According to the study, constitutions in Bolivia, Ecuador, Fiji, Malta and the United Kingdom explicitly guarantee equal rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity, while constitutions in Mexico, New Zealand, Portugal, South Africa and Sweden guarantee equal rights based only on sexual orientation. Of the 193 national constitutions included in

the study, none explicitly protect the right to marriage equality. Overall, researchers found that constitutional protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens are still rare, especially when compared to anti-discrimination provisions based on sex, race, ethnicity or religion.

"The increase in constitutional protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity does not signal a growing global consensus on the rights of LGBT individuals," the study stated.

In related news, a three-paper series on transgender health released in June reported that up to 60 percent of transgender people worldwide suffer from depression. Published in *The Lancet*, researchers reported that transgender people are also at greater risk of engaging in risky behaviors and face a significantly higher risk of HIV infection, adding that the frequent stigma, discrimination and abuse that transgender people experience contribute to such risk factors. Between 2008 and 2016, more than 2,100 transgender people were murdered across the world, though researchers said many such murders often go unreported or misreported.

In response to the health challenges transgender people face, researchers called for a number of actions, including revisions to the World Health Organization diagnostic manual that would remove the diagnoses for transgender people from the chapter on mental and behavioral disorders. *The Lancet* series also called on physicians to be trained in transgender health needs and urged lawmakers to ensure that anti-discrimination laws include transgender people.

For more on the series, visit www.thelancet.com. For the *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* article, visit <http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf>. ■

— Kim Krisberg

GLOBE IN BRIEF

Bangladesh to build on health progress

In June, the World Bank approved \$150 million to help Bangladesh strengthen its health systems and services, especially among the country's poor.

According to the World Bank, the additional funding will aid Bangladesh in sustaining and enhancing immunization coverage, improving childbirth services at public health facilities and confronting multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. In addition, the funding will support health information technology improvements, including the country's first web-based complaint system.

Already, Bangladesh's health system improvement efforts have resulted in a 40 percent reduction in maternal mortality since 2010 as well as a 29 percent reduction in mortality among children younger than 5 between 2007 and 2014.

"Bangladesh's progress in improving health outcomes is remarkable," said Qimiao Fan, PhD, World Bank country director for Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, in a news release. "Yet many Bangladeshis struggle to access quality health services, costing the economy millions of dollars in days lost due to poor health."

With the additional \$150 million in funding, the World Bank's support of Bangladesh's health improvement projects comes to \$508.9 million.

For more information, visit www.worldbank.org.

Australia gun reform reduced deaths

Following the enactment of gun reform in the mid-1990s, Australia has experienced zero mass shootings and a rapid decline in firearm deaths, according to a study published in June in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

In 1996, following a mass shooting that killed 35 people, Australian lawmakers banned rapid-fire long guns, and all six Australian states and two territories began a mandatory

buyback of prohibited firearms.

To gauge the effect of such reforms, researchers analyzed official death statistics as well as news reports of mass shootings in the years following the new gun laws taking effect. They found that while 13 fatal mass shootings occurred in Australia between 1979 and 1996, no fatal mass shootings have occurred since reform took effect.

The study also found an average decline of 4.9 percent per year between 1997 and 2013 in firearm deaths, compared to an average decline of 3 percent per year from 1979 to 1996.

"Australian citizens, professional organizations and academic researchers all played productive roles in developing and promoting evidence-informed policies and demanding that their lawmakers adopt measures to prevent the loss of life and terror of gun violence," stated a *JAMA* editorial accompanying the study. "Citizens

in the United States should follow their lead."

South Africa program targets female health

A new national initiative in South Africa is aimed at improving the health of young women and girls.

Announced in June, the initiative will address the structural barriers that put young women and girls at higher risk for disease. For example, South African women and girls ages 15 to 24 are four times as likely to contract HIV as males in their age group.

In the new initiative, South Africa will work with the Global Fund, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the German Development Cooperation to cut HIV infections among young women and girls, prevent teen pregnancies, reduce gender-based violence, keep girls in schools and boost economic opportunity for young women.

To learn more, visit www.theglobalfund.org. ■

— Kim Krisberg

Get Involved in APHA's PHACT Campaign

TAKE ACTION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH!



We are making meaningful progress as public health advocates, including the recent regulation of all tobacco products. But the work is far from done. Join us to make sure the collective public health voice is heard loud and clear.

During the PHACT campaign, public health supporters meet with legislators, attend public forums and engage in media social media advocacy activities.

Download APHA's PHACT resources to get started.

www.apha.org/phact



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