

## Across China: Anti-HIV course all the rage in university

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LANZHOU, Dec. 1 (Xinhua) -- For Luo Xiaofeng's elective course in northwest China's Lanzhou University, students fill up the classroom and even crowd the aisles at least half an hour in advance.

Drugs and HIV/AIDS, sexual minorities and HIV/AIDS, sex education... topics that are traditionally sensitive and embarrassing for many Chinese due to a relatively conservative culture are now highlights of Luo's Sex and HIV/AIDS class which attracts over 1,000 applicants every year.

"Many of my classmates chose Luo's course as we never had the opportunity to learn sex-related knowledge this systematically and comprehensively before," said Niu Yue, a student from the School of Journalism and Communication. "One of the best things about the course is that it shows us sex is just as open to discussion as any other science."

Guiding students to scientifically prevent HIV/AIDS is why Luo's team set up the course. "Everything started from a field trip to a village in Yunnan where intravenous drug use was once a major cause of HIV infections, as the province borders the Golden Triangle, an area notorious for narcotics, in Southeast Asia," said the associate professor.

According to Luo, he was a Ph.D. student in AIDS epidemiology at Fudan University back then. "It was the first time I met an HIV-infected person, and frankly speaking, I was worried."

When eating with the person at first, Luo's eyes almost never left the chopsticks. "I concentrated on the pieces he clipped and avoided even moving my utensils to that area."

"The HIV/AIDS group is sensitive. The distrust directly leads to the slow progress of my work," he said.

It was a female village doctor who had been working on AIDS for a long time that ultimately changed Luo. "I saw that she was very natural in the whole process of communicating, touching and eating with the infected, treating them as any other people." Luo was then determined to learn from her and kept telling himself to "delete the stubborn bias about this special group."

Gradually, Luo accepted the patients from his heart. He would take a ladle and drink water from water tanks in their homes when thirsty. "The experience was memorable, making me unwavering to let more people know about the virus," he said.

With such a simple purpose, Luo launched an elective course for college students' health education in Lanzhou University in 2017, which involved some AIDS-related knowledge. The class was warmly received and as students expressed their willingness to know more, the teacher opened another elective course specializing in sex and HIV/AIDS in 2019.

He has also made the course content available nationwide through online platforms. So far, Luo's Sex and HIV/AIDS course has been viewed more than 9.82 million times, and tens of thousands of students from nearly 600 universities across China have taken it.

Though HIV/AIDS continues to be controlled at a low level in China, the problem of HIV/AIDS among young people has attracted much attention in recent years. According to data released in 2019 by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, about 3,000 new HIV cases are reported every year among young students aged 15 to 24 in the country, mainly due to unprotected sex.

In Luo's view, factors such as the physiological impulse of adolescents after sexual maturity and the lack of sex education contribute to the spread of HIV.

Among various anti-HIV/AIDS measures, publicity and education are considered to be the primary means and the most economical and effective "social vaccines," which are essential for teenagers, Luo said. Enditem



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