

# Stop stigmatising sexual minorities

LAST Friday's letter ("Distinguish between helping gays and supporting an agenda" by Mr Leo Hee Khian) cautioned against affirming same-sex attraction.

Mr Leo wrote that in Denmark, where there is same-sex marriage, "married homosexuals have been found to die at an age about 20 years younger than their heterosexual counterparts".

This statistic is disputed. It is drawn from a paper published by the Family Research Institute, a partisan organisation associated with the Christian right and branded as a hate group.

Its founder Paul Cameron has been censured by numerous professional organisations. He was also dropped from membership in the American Psychological Association for violating its ethics code.

The American Journal of Public Health published a study of mortality among Danes in same-sex marriages, which concluded that "claims of drastically increased overall mortality in gay men and lesbians appear unjustified".

In fact, supporting gay rights improves public health.

The New England Journal of Medicine published an editorial last month supporting same-sex marriage.

The doctors highlighted that "a fundamental tenet of all medical care is the acceptance of patients as they are, for who they are, with respect and without prejudice or personal agendas" and posited that "same-sex marriage should be accepted both as a matter of justice and as a measure that promotes health".

Make no mistake, this is not about ideological standpoints. This is a public health issue; homophobia kills.

A study by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, published in the journal Social Science & Medicine, found that LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) individuals who lived in communities with high levels of anti-gay prejudice have a shorter life expectancy, compared with their peers in the least prejudiced communities. The same study also found that the rates of suicide, homicide/violence and cardiovascular diseases were all substantially elevated among sexual minorities living within high-prejudice communities.

Considering such findings, how may the Government reconcile its heteronormative and heterosexist policies with the stated vision and mission of the Ministry of Health?

The science is clear. It is imperative that we stop stigmatising sexual minorities and start upholding their rights.

For all the moral grandstanding, surely we can agree that literally driving people to their death is unquestionably amoral.

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