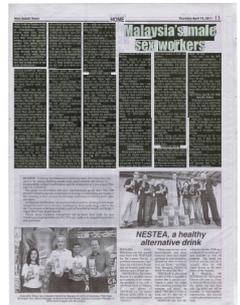


Headline **Malaysias male sex workers**  
Date **14 Apr 2011**  
MediaTitle **New Sabah Times English (KK)**  
Section **Home**  
Journalist **N/A**  
Frequency **Daily**  
Circ / Read **23,655 /**

Language **English**  
Page No **I-13**  
Article Size **270 cm<sup>2</sup>**  
Color **Black/white**  
ADValue **524**  
PRValue **1,572**



# Malaysia's male sex workers

(Mak Nyah or Pondan is the Malay term for transvestites or cross-dressers. Society frowns upon these terms, even though these people have their own reasons for leading lives as the opposite gender. This article delves into the life of "Atuk", a HIV positive transvestite who has been through many hardships – sexual abuse, drug addiction, and prostitution – but has now turned over a new leaf to help those in the same predicament.)

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Most of the public is aware of female sex workers and their unrecognised trade in Malaysia. However, how many know of the more elusive male sex workers?

Only those who are acquainted with these people can reveal details of their background and their clandestine activities. One such person is a transvestite called 'Atuk'.

Atuk, whose real name is Roslan Hamzah, 52, had come across these people when he was plying his own trade in the notorious Lorong Haji Taib. He now works for an outreach programme to help people like himself and male sex workers.

Atuk is HIV positive but has renounced destructive habits, such as taking drugs and renting out his body for sex.

## **PUSHED TO A CORNER**

What makes one end up as a male sex worker?

Trivials of life and drug abuse are among the chief reasons cited by men who disregard their ego, dignity, and religious beliefs and end up selling their bodies to those who want to satisfy their lust.

Some may have applied for

jobs several times and failed to secure one. Even those who could obtain work could hardly make ends meet, especially when living in Kuala Lumpur. So these people, too, become vulnerable and many ended up as male sex workers to supplement their income.

On the scale of earnings, Atuk had this to say: "On the average, if you are handsome, has an attractive physique, still young, you can earn between two to three hundred ringgit per day with up to three customers."

Asked about their ages, Atuk said there were some sex workers as young as 14 and others as old as 30.

"They cannot exceed 30 years of age and they have to be real men, never mind if they are married," notes Atuk.

According to Atuk, most sex workers entertain guests after taking drugs or liquor.

"Out of 50 people, I can say 48 will entertain customers this way," said Atuk.

Normally, male sex workers take syabu (ice) and heroin, or at least liquor.

Ice is the street name for methamphetamine, which is popular among addicts.

## **VICTIMS OF FATE?**

As described by Atuk, some join the trade because of the influence of friends, while a few ignorant ones, especially those who migrate from villages to towns looking for employment, also end up as sex workers.

Many have also told Atuk that they were in the trade for fun or to make quick money.

"This is one story that I have heard. When the boy reached Pudu Raya, he asked for directions from the wrong per-

son, a male sex worker, who instead influenced the boy to join the trade.

"They will say if you want an easy life, this is the way. If you have the looks...."

"Those who came from the villages want jobs but when they hear of opportunities like this to make easy money without having to work hard, only have to entertain gay men, mak nyah, or women; they may want to give a try.

"They are just ordinary men, like most with the instincts to get married and have a family..." noted Atuk.

## **WHO ARE THEY**

Almost everyone wants to know who these male sex workers are. From his own experience and outreach work, Atuk noted that male sex workers were mostly Malays.

He also learned that some male sex workers come from as far as Sabah, Sarawak, Thailand, and China.

Atuk has also observed that many male sex workers in the city hail from Kelantan.

He recalled the unfortunate story of two brothers in the trade from Kelantan.

"The elder one was infected with HIV first, and the younger one contracted HIV later, after both brothers shared the same needle to inject drugs," he said.

When Atuk first got to know them, the elder one was 15 and the younger one 14.

"That is the reality and worst, still I saw the elder one changing girlfriends, though he was HIV positive," he added.

## **FEARING THE DISEASE**

Asked about the number of male sex workers, Atuk said

he knows about 100 of them in the city.

Atuk, himself, is worried about the fate of male sex workers and the impact of their activities on others.

"What is the implication for their partners, their customers, their parents, society? If they get married, what is the effect on their children?"

"Many of those that I met later were new faces, I don't know where they came from," he said. And what happened to those that Atuk used to know? Where are they now?

"What is worrying me is their state of health, something that most choose to ignore. This is among the issues that I often raise on discussions relating to HIV/AIDs," he added.

Atuk also said that he once encountered a male undergraduate who entered the sex trade to make money.

In another instance, Atuk had come across a married soldier who doubled as a sex worker to supplement his income. "He told me his salary was not enough," Atuk said.

## **EXTENDING ASSISTANCE**

While serving the PT Foundation, the largest community-based organization that provides outreach for HIV high risk groups in Kuala Lumpur, Atuk noted that his outreach

Headline **Malaysias male sex workers**  
Date **14 Apr 2011**  
MediaTitle **New Sabah Times English (KK)**  
Section **Home**  
Journalist **N/A**  
Frequency **Daily**  
Circ / Read **23,655 /**

Language **English**  
Page No **I-13**  
Article Size **270 cm<sup>2</sup>**  
Color **Black/white**  
ADValue **524**  
PRValue **1,572**

work was aimed at male sex workers.

According to Atuk, he meets them and explains the dangers of their activities. He gives them advice on preventing the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STD), including HIV/AIDS.

The male sex workers are provided with free condoms.

Atuk is quite critical of the fact that male sex workers are ignored and that not much effort is made to help them.

"I see their problem in the wider perspective. If he is HIV positive, what is the effect to his partner? If he is sharing needles and contracts Hepatitis C, what is the effect on his children, wife?

"We are aware that wives are increasingly contracting HIV from their husbands.

"In the context of HIV prevention, we can advise them to take precautions to protect themselves from STDs, including HIV.

"After taking our advice, and if they decide to turn a new leaf, that is really good, great," noted Atuk.

#### **DISEASE RISK**

Atuk said that some male sex workers had a false notion that they were not at risk of contracting diseases.

"Moreover, some may have left the trade but may not know that they have contracted dis-

eases," he said.

"You can't see the HIV symptoms immediately; it took me seven or eight years to see the symptoms. I believe I was first infected with HIV 17 years ago due to my way of life. But only in 1996, was I confirmed as being HIV positive," he said.

Atuk also fears that many may know that they have the disease but opt to keep it a secret and continue with their trade.

#### **GETTING BACK TO THE RIGHT PATH**

Atuk feels it is never too late to get back on the right track. Youth, he said, is highly inquisitive in nature and need proper guidance from parents to stay away from negative behaviour.

Atuk gave liquor as an example. "In Kedah, I have seen teens 17 and 18 years of age gulp beer from bottles wrapped in newspaper while driving.

"So whatever we try at a young age, if they are not good, it is best not to try it in the first place.

"Seek knowledge to find the right path. Don't look for the wrong path.

"I believe when we join the good group we will be good. If we are in the bad group, we will become bad too," he stressed. — Bernama