COUNTRY RESEARCH SECTION

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... 1
1. ACRONYMS AND NAMING CONVENTIONS .......................................................... 2
2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ....................................................................................... 3
3. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................... 3
   Purpose of this paper ................................................................................................. 3
4. LAWS REGARDING SEXUAL MINORITIES ............................................................ 4
   4.1 ENFORCEMENT AND PUNISHMENT ............................................................ 4
   4.2 STATE PROTECTION ....................................................................................... 6
5. SEXUAL MINORITIES .............................................................................................. 7
   5.1 HOMOSEXUALS / GAY MEN ........................................................................... 7
   5.2 MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM) .................................................... 7
   5.3 TRANSGENDERS / TRANSEXUALS ............................................................. 8
   5.4 LESBIANS ....................................................................................................... 9
   5.5 BISEXUALS ................................................................................................... 9
6. OTHER ISSUES ......................................................................................................... 10
   6.1 PREVAILING SOCIAL ATTITUDES ............................................................... 10
      6.1.1 FAMILIAL ATTITUDES ......................................................................... 10
      6.1.2 SOCIETAL ATTITUDES ......................................................................... 10
      6.1.3 POLICE, JUDICIAL AND STATE ATTITUDES ....................................... 13
   6.2 HIV / AIDS ..................................................................................................... 13
   6.3 SUPPORT SERVICES / THE GAY MOVEMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS
      GROUPS .............................................................................................................. 14
7. AVOIDANCE MEASURES ......................................................................................... 15
8. REFERENCES .......................................................................................................... 16
1. ACRONYMS AND NAMING CONVENTIONS

CRS  Country Research Section  
HRW  Human Rights Watch  
NYT  The New York Times  

For the purpose of this paper the terms ‘gay’ and ‘homosexual’ refer only to men in male-male relationships. Bisexual is a term used to denote someone who chooses sexual contact with both genders. However, both terms are problematic in discussing the self-identification of an individual from Egypt. As Berg and Millbank note:

Western understandings of minority sexual identity development have been deeply influenced by the idea of a linear process of self-knowledge moving from denial or confusion to ‘coming out’ as a self-actualized lesbian or gay man.

This is problematic for a number of reasons in the case of Egyptians. The idea of a gay identity has a relatively short history in Egypt, and is not one that all ‘men who have sex with men’ (MSM) embrace. Furthermore, the taboo surrounding homosexuality is so strong that some people are not aware of the concept of homosexuality though they may have such feelings. They may only become aware that others experience the same feelings when exposed to information on the internet for example, which remains the privilege of the wealthy (around 13 per cent of the population have access²).

No cases were found by CRS of people who describe themselves as bisexual in Egypt, though numerous examples were found of men who are married (often for the sake of conforming to social norms) while maintaining sexual relations with men.

A distinction is sometimes made between the roles of passive and active participants in sexual intercourse (referred to in some documents and by some men to describe themselves or others as ‘tops’ and ‘bottoms’ respectively), which effect both self-identification and identification by others as homosexual. It is not clear whether this is true of all MSM in Egypt.

Women in female-female relationships are referred to here only as lesbians. Very little information is available on this group.

The definition of ‘transsexual’ is sometimes contested, however in this report only one example has been found of a transsexual, who in this case underwent a gender reassignment.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homosexuals are the sexual minority most widely reported on in Egypt and therefore constitute the primary focus of this report. The report finds that following the ‘crackdown’ on homosexuals in Egypt in 2001 (the so called Queen Boat case) and since the release of the major 2004 Human Rights Watch report (CISLIB17379) on this issue there was a reduction in the incidences of arrest and abuse by police. However, this lull ended in 2006-2008 with three cases of arrests of 11 or more suspected gay men, the latter two involving men suspected of carrying HIV. These people were arrested and subjected to treatments similar to those experienced by those detained in 2001, but with additional abuse including being handcuffed to desks and later chained to their hospital beds. No major incidents have been reported in the 18 months prior to writing.

The report first considers the laws applied to cases against homosexuals then looks at the enforcement of those laws and punishment by authorities. It considers state protection which appears to be lacking for all the minorities discussed here, though very little information is available on any groups other than gay men. Further attention is given to the difficulties of applying Western conceptions of sexual orientation in the Egyptian context. Familial, societal and official attitudes to homosexuality and HIV are explored in chapter 6, as is the prevalence and treatment of HIV/AIDS sufferers. Brief comments are made on support services and avoidance measures, though little new information was uncovered on these issues.

3. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this paper

This paper intends to provide decision makers with an update on, and addendum to the 2005 CRS paper, ‘Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt’ prepared by the Country Research Section (then, the Country Information and Protection Support Section), referred to subsequently as the 2005 CRS report. This paper should be read in conjunction with the 2005 CRS report and will frequently refer to that document for further details, particularly in those areas where little or no change has occurred, such as the relevant laws, history or cultural traits. Some relevant information from prior to 2005 that has not been mentioned in the 2005 CRS report is also added here.

As with the 2005 CRS report, this paper will address human rights issues without necessarily excluding forms of harm or treatment which do not have Refugee Convention grounds. Decision makers must be satisfied in examining each case that the harm found is motivated by a Refugee Convention ground and amounts to persecution. Consideration of whether a fear of persecution for a Convention ground is well founded will also need to be undertaken as usual.

3 “Homosexuals and Transsexuals in Egypt”, Country Information and Protection Support Section EGY090905. [NB: this report may not be cited as an original source – see the caveats on the title page]

4 For discussions on potential issues around assessing the case of a homosexual claimant, such as cultural difference and the issue of secrecy, see Laurie Berg and Jenni Millbank, “Constructing the
4. LAWS REGARDING SEXUAL MINORITIES

No change in the laws or their application has been reported since the 2005 CRS report. However, the following additional information may be of use in understanding the relevant laws.

The use of Article 98 (f) of the penal code relating to contempt for religion seems to have occurred solely in the situation of two individuals charged with this offence during the notorious Queen Boat case, where a total of 52 men were charged with the more commonly applied crime of “habitual debauchery”. There may have been some evidence relating specifically to their cases that resulted in these charges. This Article of the penal code is not noted to have been applied more broadly to other cases against homosexuals.

In 2004, HRW noted a particular case involving number of men, who were charged with habitual debauchery, but one person was also charged under Article 8 with “managing a house” for debauchery. Furthermore:

each of the defendants was charged under article 1(a) of the law, which punishes “inciting,” “assisting,” “facilitating,” or “employing” others to commit debauchery. And all the defendants were also charged under article 1(b), which punishes inciting, assisting, facilitating, or employing a person under 21 to commit debauchery—since four were between 19 and 21. Even those four were charged with inciting, assisting, facilitating, or employing one another.

CRS has not found any accounts of lesbians, bisexuals or transsexuals being charged under any particular laws, however please see 4.1 and 4.2 which refer to arrests of members of such groups.

The State Emergency Law was extended in April 2008 for a further two years, though this is not to say there is any expectation it will be allowed to expire then.

4.1 ENFORCEMENT AND PUNISHMENT

For an account of well-documented examples of widespread enforcement and punishment prior to and including 2005 please refer to the 2005 CRS report, CX166241 and CISLIB 17379. The latter two documents include details of a series of

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arrests and deaths due to police brutality in the city of Tanta in 2002 and harsh treatment in various other locales.\(^8\)

Since that time, there seems to have been a reduction in the number of arrests. Two reasons are suggested by various observers. Some suggest the Queen Boat incident pushed gays toward greater secrecy.\(^9\) Others have suggested that the release of the major 2004 HRW report (CISLIB17379) seemed to have some impact on the situation.\(^10\)

However, round-ups have continued throughout the country. There have been incidents recorded in Damanhour, Tanta and Port Said as well as Cairo.\(^11\) In Cairo 11 men were picked up in July 2006 alone, in a central location called Tahrir Square,\(^12\) which has been noted as a favoured arrest point by police in previous years.

Another series of arrests began in October 2007. Human Rights Watch reported that at least twelve men had been arrested in Cairo on suspicion of being HIV positive. They were sent for forced HIV tests, beaten, forced to stand in painful positions, coerced into giving confessions and charged with “habitual debauchery” (see the 2005 CRS report for more on this law). Some claimed to have been handcuffed to a desk for four days, and deprived food and water. Those found HIV positive were chained to their hospital beds until public and international pressure saw them released on 25 February 2008. In April 2008 another twelve men were arrested in Alexandria and subjected to forced anal examinations (see CISLIB 17379 for more on this procedure), forced HIV tests and other abuse, and were convicted of habitual debauchery.\(^13\)

Amnesty International confirms both of these stories and reports that nine of the Cairo men were sentenced to between one and three years in prison, four of whom were later released after serving three quarters of their one year sentences. Eleven of the twelve arrested in Alexandria had their two year sentences upheld by an appeals court. Amnesty claims that the anal examinations conducted without consent “constitute torture.”\(^14\) One man faced additional charges of facilitating the practise of debauchery.\(^15\) In addition to the sentences, they were required to pay a fine.\(^16\)

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\(^9\) “Egypt’s fearful gays shy from HIV testing”, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (USA)*, 14 March 2005, CX221971.


\(^11\) This is not necessarily to say that there have not been incidents elsewhere, but these are the only ones that have been found to have been reported on.

\(^12\) Negar Azimi, “Prisoners of Sex”, *The New York Times*, 3 December 2006, CX166241.


\(^16\) “Egypt jails fine ‘homosexuals’ for three years”, *Agence France Press*, 10 April 2008, CX197682.
Much was written around the time of the Queen Boat case of the use of Internet entrapment. CRS has not found any recent, credible references to police use of the Internet for entrapment.

For more on the restrictions on the use of the internet in Egypt, including monitoring, see CX228277 and the US State Department 2008 Human Rights report.

Two lesbian women were reported by one source to have been arrested on the Queen Boat in 2001, but were later released when two men assisted them by claiming to be married to them.\textsuperscript{17} No confirmation of this story was located.

4.2 STATE PROTECTION

No mention has been found of State protection being provided to anyone who is considered or suspected of being gay. To the contrary, stories were located of cases where gay men have been robbed or attacked with police acting only as further tormentors or even blackmailing the complainant with threats of revealing their sexuality.\textsuperscript{18} HRW reported that:

\begin{quote}
In several cases Human Rights Watch has documented, authorities reacted to the murder of an allegedly gay man with indiscriminate mass arrests, picking up dozens or hundreds of people with no probable cause—on the basis not of a concrete suspicion but of their mere implication in homosexual conduct—holding them illegally, and torturing them. Finding the killer gives way to the goal of expanding police repression.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Once arrested, abuse of homosexuals by other prisoners, including bashing and even raping, is frequent and is in fact used by police as another method of harassment, as detailed in the 2004 HRW report (CISLIB 17379). No more recent references to this practise were located by CRS.

No mention has been found of lesbians making themselves known as such to anyone other than other lesbians. It is therefore unclear whether they can avail themselves of police protection.

Section 5.3 below details the case of one transsexual who was given government documents to confirm their new gender identity. Only one reference has been found, in a 2009 HRW report, to the arrest of transgender people despite the issuing of such papers. However, no cases are cited as examples.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Afdhere Jama, “A few good women”, \textit{Huriyah Magazine}, September 2003, CX126890.

\textsuperscript{18} “In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct”, \textit{Human Rights Watch}, 2004, CISLIB 17379, see pp94-96.

\textsuperscript{19} “In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice in Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct”, \textit{Human Rights Watch}, 2004, CISLIB 17379, see pp94-96.

5. SEXUAL MINORITIES

5.1 HOMOSEXUALS / GAY MEN

The category of homosexuality, while used throughout this paper, is problematic. It is discussed further in section 5.2 ‘Men who have sex with men (MSM)’, below.

5.2 MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM)

The NYT notes that “not all men who sleep with men in Egypt use the term ‘gay,’ much less identify themselves as such.” 21

The term ‘men who have sex with men’, often shortened to MSM, is defined by UNAIDS as describing a behaviour rather than a group. According to this definition the term includes “self-identified gay, bisexual, or heterosexual men, many of whom may not consider themselves gay or bisexual.” 22

This latter category is particularly relevant in the case of Egypt where it has been noted that the concepts of gay identity have only emerged relatively recently. Highlighting the lack of awareness of the concept of ‘gayness’, HRW cites the case of a young man who was at the Queen Boat:

Hossein—a young man from a desperately poor background, illiterate though gifted and creative—told Human Rights Watch how he came to be on the Queen Boat: a friend “told me that there is this disco which is a ‘gay disco.’ I didn’t know what ‘gay’ meant, because of my education. He told me what it meant, and because I thought I was ‘gay,’ I went.” 23

Some men who engage in sexual conduct with their own gender may also be married to the opposite sex while trying to keep the homosexual relationship secret from their spouse. While this phenomenon is not unique to Egypt, the social pressure to conform to heterosexual norms seems (on the basis of the prevalence of such cases cited amongst the source material found and referred to here) to lead to more such situations in Egypt (though no statistics have been found to back this up). See for example the cases of Madi and Hani in CX228516, as well as various examples in CX215821 and in HRW’s 2004 report (CISLIB 17379).

It is also noted that male-male sexual encounters may be encouraged by a lack of opportunity for heterosexual encounters, though such encounters are not necessarily considered by participants as signifying homosexuality.

As in other countries, people are not as young as they used to be when they wed. The marriage contract specifies that the prospective groom must provide

22 “Men who have sex with men”, UNAIDS, 2008, CX211251.
the bride with a suitable apartment, but even down payments are far out of reach for the average worker.

So some men in the Middle East, unwilling to wait for years before they can have sanctioned sex with their wives, have sex with other men -- but they don't consider themselves homosexual or bisexual.24

Furthermore, there is also a difference between the way the active and passive participants are perceived (by themselves or by others). However, once again, ambiguities blur these distinctions:

Men may see the sexual role they play—as penetrator or penetrated partner, “top” or “bottom”—as the constituent element in their identity, not the sex of the person they desire. Men may, however, also see themselves in multiple roles, which may offer multiple self-definitions not reducible to the straightjacket of a single adjective.25

See the 2005 CRS report for more on this issue.

5.3 TRANSGENDERS / TRANSEXUALS

There is relatively little information on this group in Egypt. However, one report on the frequently cited case of Sally Mursi, who underwent a sex change operation in the late 1980s after three years of psychiatric care and receiving hormone treatment, draws attention to a number of relevant issues. After the surgery, Sally was given documents from the government declaring her a female. However, she was expelled from the university she was enrolled in and despite court orders to readmit her, the university has steadfastly refused. The university, whose top religious official is also Egypt's senior Islamic legal authority, has also publicly attacked her by issuing an edict describing her as unfit “to live among men or women”, which was printed in newspapers along with photos of Sally.26

This report also claims that Egypt’s professional medical association (reportedly dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, a conservative and influential group pushing for Shariah law in Egypt) banned sex change operations in around 2003.27 However, Human Rights Watch claims:

In a few countries, doctors and lawmakers together have laid out a relatively liberal approach to transgender people: Iran and Egypt have allowed gender reassignment surgeries and change of identity for almost 20 years.28

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24 “Egypt's fearful gays shy from HIV testing”, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (USA), 14 March 2005, CX221971.
In January 2009 a new requirement was established for doctors to seek approval from a doctor’s syndicate before undertaking sex change operations. Prior to this, according to the syndicate, such consultations occurred informally. They also note that gender operations do not exceed two cases a year, suggesting that it has been occurring with some regularity.\(^{29}\)

On the issue of police treatment of this group, the 2009 HRW report notes, without providing examples:

in both countries [Egypt and Iran] police arrest and torture transgender people, even with medical papers.\(^{30}\)

5.4 LESBIANS

The situation of lesbians in Egypt is hard to gauge as so little information is available. This dearth of reporting may reflect their relative anonymity. As Reuters notes:

Lesbians are virtually invisible in Egypt. Activists said the concept of two women having sexual relations was incomprehensible to most Egyptians, adding they were not in contact with any lesbian groups.\(^{31}\)

On the issue of danger for lesbians, an article from The New York Times cites one perspective:

L., a lesbian originally from Alexandria, is seeing a Cairo psychiatrist. Women have not been subject to the same kind of attacks that men have been in Egypt, perhaps because of their relative invisibility.\(^{32}\)

See 6.1.1 below for more on this case.

See also CX126890, a 2003 article which details a group of lesbians who had been secretly meeting monthly in Cairo for 40 years.

5.5 BISEXUALS

No specific information has been located on anyone who identifies themselves as bisexual in Egypt. (See section 5.2 above for more on this).

\(^{29}\) “New committee to approve sex change operations”, Daily News Egypt, 26 January 2009, CX228286.


\(^{31}\) Cynthia Johnston, “Fear and loathing keeps Egypt's gays in the closet”, Reuters, 28 April 2002, CX126905.

6. OTHER ISSUES

6.1 PREVAILING SOCIAL ATTITUDES

6.1.1 FAMILIAL ATTITUDES

Many individuals refer to hiding their sexuality from their families for fear of rejection. *The New York Times* cites a lesbian interviewee whose story refers both to her family’s views and those of the psychiatrist she was taken to by them:

For L., the brunt of the problem is her family. “I’ve been to three psychiatrists, each time taken in by my parents,” she told me. “The first two prescribed antidepressants, they told me it was a phase, that I should ‘cheer up.’ The third prescribed electroshock therapy. I never went back.”

Another doctor who counsels homosexual couples confirms such attitudes towards homosexuals: “The first reaction on the part of the family is denial, and then incredible blame.” Treatments usually include counselling and anti-depressants, but electroshock therapy is not unheard of.

6.1.2 SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The issue of societal attitudes towards sexual minorities, and in particular attitudes towards those who engage in male-male sex, is complex.

It is frequently noted that heterosexual male relationships in Egypt are, relative to some Western cultures, more physically intimate. Men might hold hands, embrace and even kiss during greetings. As noted above in section 5.2, in some situations sexual activity between men does not lead to the perception of homosexuality or bisexuality.

Efforts to summarise a society’s attitude towards a particular groups are bound to be problematic. Some suggest that attitudes have changed towards homosexuality as it became defined in reference to Western ideas of ‘gayness’. Homosexuality is seen as part of a decadent Western influence or even of a hegemonic agenda. Western responses to the treatment of homosexuals particularly regarding the Queen Boat cases, helped to solidify that impression.

In this narrative, homosexuality is viewed not only as sinful but also stokes nationalist sentiments and cultural pride, the negative side of which are directed at those suspected of such behaviour. This was certainly a frequently voiced assessment at the

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time of the Queen Boat case.36 Similarly, one Reuters reporter claims, “[a]s long as gay life was discreet, it was long tolerated as an open secret.”37

It should be noted that there are a few more positive accounts of life for homosexuals in Egypt. One doctor, who counsels homosexuals, also notes that his patients generally manage to lead “normal quiet lives, despite society’s negative views about being gay.”38

Similarly, cases have been reported of gay men living in relative safety. One American gay traveller visiting Egypt interviewed an Egyptian gay man who claims to have never suffered any “incident of exposure or harassment regarding his sexuality.” The traveller-author further states that “physical gay bashing…is virtually unheard of except when in police custody.”39 However, the opposite view is expressed by a gay interviewee in the independent Daily News Egypt, who claims that homophobic violence and petty mugging are common.40

The media, while speaking with multiple voices, has helped entrench certain perceptions in regards to homosexuality. The Daily News Egypt in one 2008 report quotes various views on the best “cure” (marriage or therapy), the potential for sex education to “alter homosexual behaviour at an earlier age,” and also that “homosexuality is not necessarily a sexual disorder but could just be a whim.”41 Another article from 2006 in the same paper notes that homosexuality is still seen by many as a disease.42 Various papers have been noted to have demonised and indeed identified those charged with debauchery or other related crimes.43

Several Egyptian films have been made and released in Egypt that depict same-sex sexual relations. The ‘Yacoubian Building’ is a popular film about a gay newspaper editor. One parliamentarian introduced a bill to have some scenes censored, which was signed by around one quarter of the parliament, but failed to achieve its goal. However the film was successful despite this.44 Two films have been released more recently depicting encounters between two women, which similarly resulted in conservative backlash, but were also allowed to screen and achieved popularity at the box office.45

40 Liam Stack, “For gay Egyptians, life online is the only choice”, Daily News Egypt, 18 May 2007, CX227767.
42 Maram Mazen, “Psychologist claims to have ‘cure’ for homosexuality”, Daily News Egypt, 27 September, 2006 CX228549
RELIGION - ISLAM

As with other religions, Islamic views on homosexuality can vary. When reading the views of either Muslims who are gay or those who condemn it, the following observation holds true:

Ambiguities abound, and while there is no consensus on where Islam stands, popular and legalistic reinterpretations take liberties in selecting the bits that suit particular worldviews — whether they are liberal or intolerant.46

However in general, conservative views condemning homosexuality as sinful seem to be predominant. Furthermore, some argue that religiousness is on the rise in Egypt.47 The debate surrounding the Queen Boat trials was noted to have been heavily influenced by politicians vying for Islamic credibility. The NYT says that in the area of the regulation of public morality the government is in harmony with the Islamists.48 It is worth noting that the conservative Muslim Brotherhood holds 88 seats in the People’s Assembly, constituting around 20 per cent.49

RELIGION – CHRISTIANITY

Up to around ten per cent population is made up of Coptic Christians in Egypt (estimates are between 6-8 million of a population of around 76 million50). See the 2005 CRS report for information on the attitudes of Coptic Christians.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS HIV / AIDS

On attitudes to homosexuality and HIV, one US newspaper reports that:

In Egypt, the same conservative social norms that make gays so fearful also make it hard to preach HIV prevention methods. In this predominantly Muslim culture, both homosexuality and sex outside marriage are considered sinful, so any discussion of safe sex among unmarried partners or gays could amount to condoning forbidden behavior. 51

51 “Egypt’s fearful gays shy from HIV testing”, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (USA), 14 March 2005, CX221971.
Again, different views exist among Muslims, as demonstrated by the example of one man who gave a sermon in a small Cairo mosque on AIDS and the importance of not ostracizing those infected (though no mention is made in the article on the speaker’s views on homosexuality more generally). However, according to Reuters a 2004 study showed that most health workers in Egypt “believe those with HIV should be removed from society, while most university students think ‘lewd’ people, or those ‘who have neither values nor principles’ are likeliest to get AIDS.”

6.1.3 POLICE, JUDICIAL AND STATE ATTITUDES

Police, prosecutors and even judges are frequently noted to use derogative language in addition to harsh physical treatment in the case of police. Common views expressed include that alleged homosexuals are public health threats and sinners.

In 2008 a prosecutor reportedly told one of the men arrested due to his HIV positive status: “People like you should be burnt alive. You do not deserve to live.”

The NYT claims that “there has been complete impunity for perpetrators of attacks on gay men; individual officers responsible for attacks have been promoted or shuffled around.”

6.2 HIV / AIDS

UNAIDS estimates that in 2007 there were between 7 200 and 13 000 people living with HIV or AIDS in Egypt. They also estimate that just below 10 per cent of adults and children with advanced HIV infection in 2007 received antiretroviral therapy.

The health ministry made the necessary drugs free in 2005.

In 2005 the government opened free HIV Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centres (VCTCs) around the country, which, according to the government, provides an anonymous service. However, many gay people at least initially worried that their homosexuality might be exposed or that they might be imprisoned if they undertook such tests.

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55 While this virus does not discriminate, this topic is included here as men who have sex with men are identified as a high risk group for contracting this disease.
59 “Egypt's fearful gays shy from HIV testing”, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (USA), 14 March 2005, CX221971.
No media reports were located on the effectiveness or anonymity of these services. However, a blogger who elsewhere critiques the government recently offered the following appraisal of their experience with the free testing and counselling regime:

…the way I was received by the doctors prior to the actual testing was pretty welcoming. I found that they didn't ask for a name, but rather for a pseudonym and a birthdates to be my identity there. Then, I was sent to a counsellor whose job was to give simple information about AIDS and HIV. The guy didn't show any signs of disrespect for the fact that I'm going to check if I have HIV, […] after the counselling session they gave me a few condoms and lubricants, and three booklets with information about AIDS, and then I went to have the test.60

In 2007 and 2008, it was demonstrated that some authorities maintain a different approach. See ‘4.1 Enforcement and Punishment’ above for details of the multiple arrests of those with or suspected of having HIV. These cases were not involving people who went for voluntary anonymous testing, but they do suggest a certain attitude amongst authorities that might lead people to maintain such concerns about dealing with any government-run services..

One man living with HIV explains the lingering societal stigma and its effects:

…the stigma is very high in Egypt against people who are living with HIV. […] People avoid you. They don’t know how HIV is transferred.[…] You can be kicked out of your home. If it's not your property, if you are renting it, you would be kicked out. In your job, you cannot say that [you have HIV], because if you said it, you would be fired. They would find many other reasons to fire you. It would not be HIV.61

Similarly, a UNAIDS officer in Egypt explained in late 2008 that a lack of understanding of the disease leads to discrimination of those affected. According to the program director, this ignorance extends to the medical community: “AIDS is nonexistent in the syllabi at medical schools, it is just something ‘in the book’”.62

6.3 SUPPORT SERVICES / THE GAY MOVEMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS

It was noted at the time of the Queen Boat trials (in 2001-2003) that human rights activists and groups were either hesitant or loathe to support homosexuals, some on the grounds of their views on homosexuality. Some activists even attacked those who met with the defendants. One human rights activist who did speak out in their support lost his job.63

60 “My first HIV test at a government lab”, the Egypt blog, 23 June 2009, CX228778 [spelling as received].
62 “Egypt works at removing the stigma associated with AIDS”, Daily News Egypt, 30 November 2008, CX228776 [words in parentheses as received].
In 2006 *The New York Times* noted this hesitancy remained, citing one activist who explained that among all the problems in Egypt, the treatment of gays and lesbians is not a high priority.\(^{64}\)

Some AIDS support groups exist, though only three were reportedly active in 2006 with 10-15 participants in each.\(^{65}\)

7. AVOIDANCE MEASURES

There are a few references to clandestine meeting areas in Egypt for gays,\(^{66}\) but in general the consensus is that it is important to avoid being seen as openly gay.

See the 2005 report for more on this issue.

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\(^{65}\) Phoebe Sloane and Marwa Al-A’sar, “Denial to existence of Aids is an impediment in the Middle East”, *Daily News Egypt*, 2 December 2006, CX228777.

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