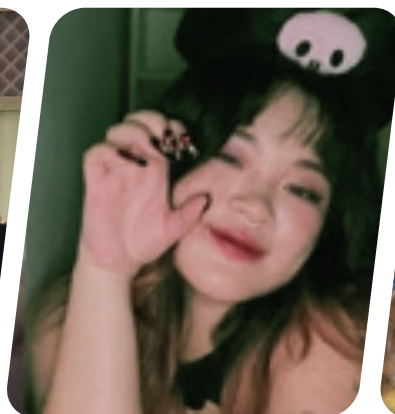
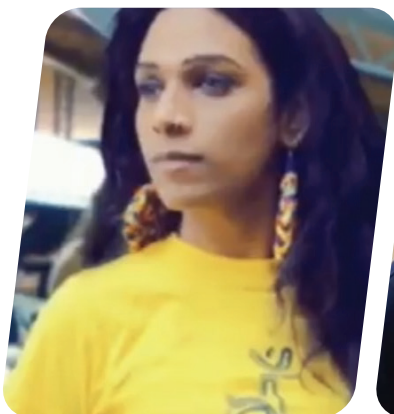


3rd Anniversary

APCOM's Special Series
on the COVID-19 Effect



Three Years On!





3rd Anniversary
APCOM's Special Series on the COVID-19 Effect:

Three Years On!

At APCOM, we launched our first ever Special Series on the COVID-19 Effect Newsletter on 3 April 2020 called '[Reflecting on the Current Realities Faced by the Communities We Serve](#)'.

On 9 April 2021 we released the 1st Anniversary of [APCOM's Special Series on the COVID-19 Effect: LGBTQI and HIV community Reflect, Reorganise & Rebuild](#). The Special Series featured the UN Independent Expert on SOGI, our APCOM Ambassadors and presented an analysis from stories submitted by our communities on the pandemic's impact on SOGIESC communities, HIV services and Key Populations across the Asia Pacific region.

For the Second Anniversary of the pandemic, the [29th issue of the APCOM Special Series on the COVID-19 Effect Newsletter](#) proudly shares some tips and experiences from our staff on what they have done during the pandemic to maintain a good mental health and steps for you to take if you'd like to try similar activities.

As more and more countries have opened up for international travel, it is unbelievable that it has already been three years since the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020. For the Third Anniversary of the pandemic our staff share their stories, ranging from discovering their new hobbies, reconnecting with old friends, to a 'kind of' love story and how they cope as an individual as well as working for the community, and providing leadership in a very fast changing environment.



Design and layout: Vaness Silpakhon Kongsakul

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APCOM's
The COVID Effect
Series:



“We need a community-led and community-owned funding mechanism for communities working on LGBTQI and HIV issues in Asia Pacific, and COVID-19 really amplified the need for such mechanism for emergencies like COVID-19 but also to ensure the resilience and sustainability of activists and organizations to continue to do their important work in the region.”

Midnight, Executive Director APCOM



MY COVID-19 INFECTION STORY AS A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV



BY:
A (WATTANA KEIANGPA)



Hello! My name is Wattana or you can call me by my nickname 'A', an Operations and Programmes Support Officer at APCOM Foundation. I have encountered the COVID-19 that is severely affecting the whole world, causing many people to die. Its effects include an economic impact, causing many businesses to close down and many people having to be laid off. As everyone has experienced its impacts in different ways, I also want to share my own story as a person living with HIV who got infected by COVID-19.

It was said that people living with HIV have higher risk of developing severe symptoms compared to other groups. Therefore, I tried my level best to prevent myself from the risks of infection with COVID-19 in the public and the workplace according to the measures announced by the government. However, I could not fight it and eventually tested positive for COVID-19. First, I was so afraid to die as I am already having HIV and if I got one more disease, it would be double trouble. So being conscious was the key to get through this miserable time. After getting myself together, I contacted my colleagues and peers who had stayed close to me during 3-5 days earlier as they potentially risked of having COVID-19 and to make that they could test themselves and prepare for it. After that, I called the hospital where I registered through the social security system to ask for information about admitting and treatment. I believed that contacting the hospital was a good option as I would have some personal advice according to my symptoms and related health status.

As soon as I arrived at the hospital, I walked through the hallway into the COVID-19 center, where a lot of people were queuing. Some people looked confused about what to do next from one section to another section since the systems were new and not stable. The center was separated outside of the main building, so the weather was so hot. While more and more patients arrived at the center, it was a pity that some of them had to wait under the sun because there was no space inside of the center's shelters.





When it was my turn, I rushed to ask a nurse questions regarding the admission's policy but she was not so friendly and her answers were not very clear. I understood that this was also new for her and she might have been through the same questions all day. As there was lack of space in the hospital, she suggested to choose the Hospital system instead (Hospital + Hotel service for COVID-19 patients during the peak time of the pandemic provided by the government together with the private sector). However, I didn't feel like staying away from home for a long time and I believed that my symptoms were quite okay. Therefore, I decided to go back home to do Home Isolation instead.

Fortunately, my network friends suggested that I should receive the free packages of medicine delivery from the non-profit organization, so I decided to register with it online and got a response very quickly. I finally received some medicine, such as cough and fever reducers, including cough lozenges, Favipiravir, fever kits and oxygen until Day 10. I believed that if the government provided this kind of service, it would be good to reduce the number of patients at the hospital. It was not easy when being infected with COVID-19 and still having to

go out to the hospital, which inevitably brought one in contact with other people around. This could be the reason why the pandemic in Thailand was spreading quickly and was difficult to control.

One good thing happened when I isolated myself at home. My close friend called me on Day 2 that he also got infected by COVID-19 and had nowhere to go, so I invited him to do home isolation with me. Instead of being alone for 10 days, I had a friend to share home isolation experience. We looked for some kill-the-time activities every day, such as cooking (my favorite activity) and planting at my little garden. It must have been quite depressing for those who got COVID-19 and had to stay alone without doing anything, so I was lucky that I had many things to do during my home isolation.

Regarding food and personal stuff during the home isolation, it was not any issue because my neighboring friends also helped me out. On top of that, APCOM also provided a relief package together with a little cheering-up card to the staff who got COVID-19. I got one kind card from APCOM which I highly appreciated.

In summary, my 10 days of home isolation went well thanks to all the above-mentioned factors: medicine delivery, friends, activities and the kind attention from colleagues and peers.

Regardless of HIV status, I want to encourage people who just tested positive from COVID-19 or who are afraid to get infected that you may not have to find the same factors as mine to overcome the situation. You had better find your own. However, being too alarmed will not help. If you already got vaccines, it would help reduce the severity of the disease a lot, so make sure you get them.



THE TIKTOK QUEEN

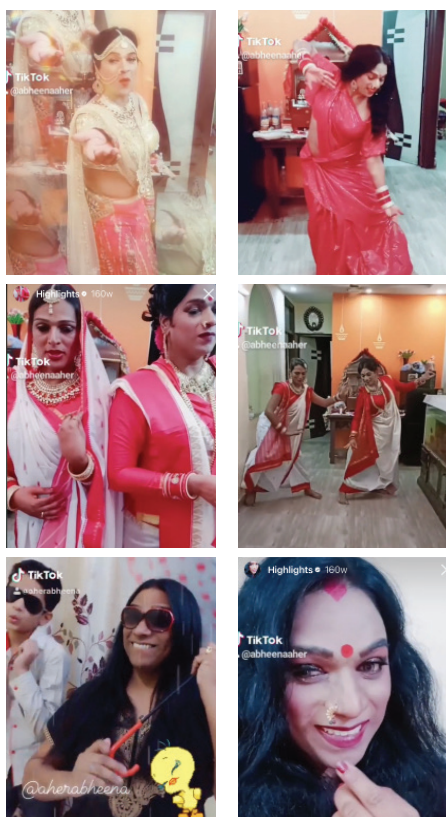


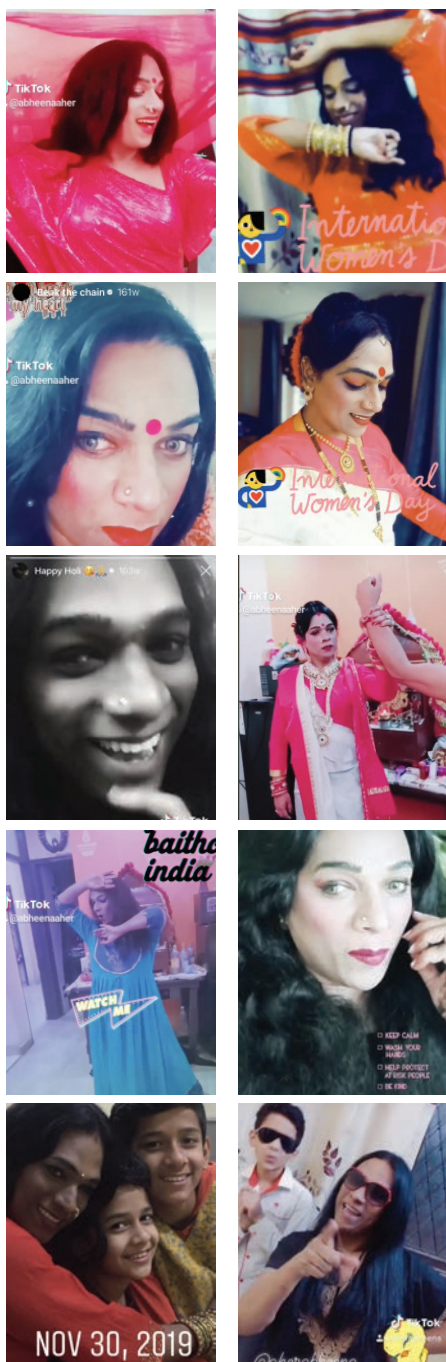
BY:
ABHINA AHER

COVID-19 came unexpectedly and did not give time to any of us to plan anything. I remember when I was travelling back from the UK for the Global Fund Advocacy meeting two years back, suddenly Delhi Airport in India was flooded with the inspection centers. Each of us was asked where we travelled back and trace of our contacts during our meeting. I went through the test for COVID-19, thankfully I was clean and they allowed me to go home. However, I could see a few passengers were detained in the glass enclosure. I was confused and was not able to understand the depth of the issue aroused due to COVID-19 infections.

We started reading about COVID-19 and like any other disease in the beginning the misleading information for everywhere rather than accurate information on COVID-19 protection. We were house arrested and were looking at every neighbor with suspect for COVID-19. We saw people helpless, the health systems overwhelmed and struggling to cope up with the everyday increasing patients for the COVID-19. In the beginning we were just counting on deaths in the country and everyone thought, this is it! We should offer prayers to our gods and be prepared for the worst case. The businesses were down, people lost their jobs, people wanted to go to their native places. Millions of people on the street travelled without any transportation and without hope from the metro cities. Small children and women were struggling to cope up with the domestic violence since everyone was house arrested and it was taking a huge toll on their mental health. Situation was getting difficult every day, people were dying without oxygen, we were also hearing that the dead bodies were not handed to their relatives and none of the priests was ready to perform last rites to the bodies that died of COVID-19. Stigma was at its highest peak and everyone was looking for a miracle! Fortunately, WHO started talking about prevention and our government in India introduced a vaccine for COVID-19. As a health worker I got prioritized for the vaccination.

However, during COVID-19 for me the focus was on reaching to our LGBTI community, providing mental health support through phone counselling, reaching out to the government for the financial & dry ration help work. We were also working towards providing the crucial ARV drugs for the transgender & MSM people living with HIV and not being able to access the health centers. Community based organizations were ensuring that they work very closely with the government to reach the marginalized people who have been impacted due to the COVID-19 outburst. However, COVID-19 house arrest also provided me with a huge opportunity to connect with my aspirations and fun elements. I am a disastrous cook and I can barely cook for myself. However, through our 'internet god' I was learning new dishes to cook and trying to make hilarious cooking disasters. When I realized cooking is not my thing, I got hooked on the 'magic mania of dance' - TikTok! I remember spending nights and days surfing on the internet watching amazing TikTok reels created in India and across the world. It was a huge time pass and slowly I realized I was already hooked on to the same. I started getting pressure from the 'followers' through countless surfing of the 'influencers' on the internet. I was really liking this new format, short videos that can have dialogues, music, philosophy, dance and many more. It took some time for me to understand the filter (not to forget filters on the internet is our life now lol), video editing, mixing music and making it more presentable. My fever for TikTok was not restricted to me only but already took a storm at my house. My adopted sons, maid, and community daughters all of us were really loyal customers of 'TikTok'. I was not bothered about my image in public or how much likes I will get through my TikTok video. It was my crazy 'creativity' ride and I was enjoying it the most.





Spent several days just surfing on the internet, saving right music, understanding the right approach for TikTok making and following liked influencers who were creating magic on the internet. My favorite was old Bollywood music, I could dig out all my costumes from my previous dance performances and spend countless hours in front of the mirror just to get that 45 second video right and as per my quality standards. Our home has already become 'TikTok home'. We used to sleep till late in the morning because the entire night was spent tirelessly till, we dropped dead making videos. Some of the things I learned during my TikTok experience;

- don't run behind likes, you will get additionally stressed and it will hamper your creativity
- do what you like, nobody cares, don't think about what world will think as far as you are enjoying everything what you create
- you can put emotional blackmail to your close friends liking your videos or get agreement liking each other's videos
- Filters are gods, learn them well use them well my dears
- Make your video life larger than life, there is nothing like being real on internet, I guess no one cares I guess
- be inspirational to yourself and others as well, a message through your videos can help several people
- If you don't get great followers don't run behind them, just chill; they might like to play hard to get lol

Just have fun in what you do and enjoy every moment of your creativity! As the wise people say, it does not matter how long your life is, what matters is how you are spending each moment of your life. Be happy and make others smile more! COVID-19 has taught us 'difficult lessons' of our lives. Some of them I learned would like to quote below so that it can also help others,

- Your happiness is in your hand; so, smile more because a smile is the most expensive gift that you can give to anyone which is FREE of cost!
- Resilience and patience are the key, the hardship will not be there always and you will find courage to cope with the problems. Don't give up!
- Sometimes it is important to look inside your heart, if you want to go a long way. We spend so many hours in front of our mirror and ignore our beautiful heart capable of healing others.
- Health is wealth! Prevention is better than cure.
- Show your loved ones how much you love them, because sometimes we don't get time to express the way we feel.

During COVID19 despite having the vaccine, I got infected two times with the COVID-19 infection. What gave me strength to cope up is the amazing videos I created on TikTok which brought a smile to my face. I am TikTok Queen!

SECRET CHEF IN COVID-19



BY:
ARM (SIRIPONG SRICHAU)



Even though we are now in the post-COVID-19 era and a lot of time has passed since the COVID-19 time period, some of the heritage from back then is still around. As for me, because I was living in such a small apartment at the time, I hardly ever did any cooking. However, advertisements for air fryers could be found everywhere, and people were happy to share their recipes with air fryers wherever they may be. I was convinced to get one through a promotional campaign, and after doing so, I concluded that it is the most useful equipment for assisting you with cooking at the moment.

As a result of COVID-19, you were unable to go anywhere, some people were forced to stay at home for a month or for many months, restaurants were forced to close, and it was difficult to obtain food on the street since people were unable to go to the market and buy the supplies needed to make food. Airflyer must have been the most popular item on the market at that time. It allowed you to cook even if you were limited to a tiny space and it could make any kind of food you desired, including boiling, and frying. You only needed one thing to make it, which was an air fryer.

I hate cooking, but not the action of cooking itself; instead, I dislike the steps involved in the process, such as the following: preparing the ingredients, seasoning, and washing. There were a lot of activities to be done, but during that period it was challenging to find a restaurant. Some of it is up to me to handle on my own. Even the preparation of quick noodles was simplified, which was a pleasant meal for me; nevertheless, consuming only instant noodles was not beneficial to someone's health due to the high levels of sodium it contained.

Because, as I've already mentioned, I find cooking as a challenging activity, and because I'm the type of person who is happy to eat anything, the meal consisted of a salad with the option of selecting any vegetable that I was able to find at that moment. Meat that may be pork, chicken, fish, and even beef and the method I cook it is by just washing it, putting some salt on it, and throwing it into an air fryer while setting the timer for thirty minutes. Next, soup I made it as the large portion that could eat for many days, the best menu that I could do is Kimchi Soup which is just putting the kimchi, pork, and water with Korean seasonings such as chili powder and Ko-Chu-Jung into the airflyer and spinning the timer to 60 minutes. Next, soup I made it as the large portion that could eat for many days Next, soup I made it as the large portion that could eat for many days Next, soup When I'm in need of some protein, I'll sometimes scramble an egg in a silicone mold and cook it in an air fryer. This helps me get the protein I need without adding too much fat.

What did I learn from this, air fryer and my recipe at the time, when it is difficult to spend life normally, cannot find food or restaurants as before, you may want more skill to survive but if the way to acquire that skill is not what you are into. Seek assistance and find the tool that will make your life easier. You might be surprised to discover that you have a wonderful potential, like I was when the air fryer unlocked my secret chef ability during covid-19.

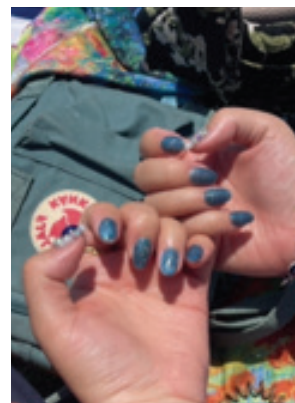
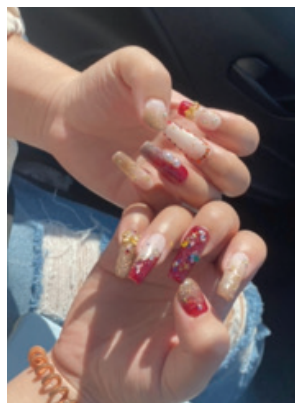
MAKE YOUR OWN SALON; KEEP YOUR NAILS PRETTY!



BY:
**MILL (NATTHAKORN
CHATSAKULSRI)**

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, I was a second-year student. It was the time my teenage life just began and everything was just getting into the right place after the transition to my university life. It was also the first time for me that I can express myself with my very own preference without any prohibition unlike in high school where I have to always wear a uniform and cannot even have long nails. So, since I graduated from high school, going to the nail salon is my new routine; I love to get my nails done! Nevertheless, I can enjoy that freedom for only about 2 years, then the pandemic hit so badly. I have to adjust to such a sudden big change.

During the peak of Covid-19, I had to be away from my family and friends but more importantly, it was heartbreaking for me when I saw the news declaring the salon as a high-risk area. I know it is so weird to want my nails done during curfew that my friends asked 'why would you worry about that? You are not going out anyway because of the pandemic.' The thing is that even before the pandemic I was not an outgoing person either. I enjoy my boring life so much. My routine is just going to classes and getting back to my dormitory immediately. Doing nails is just a way for me to feel pretty while showing off my nails is a by-product (and I enjoy it). I lost that happiness because of the pandemic and I spiraled deeply into boredom. Many weeks in pajamas doing nothing and not having my nails done made me feel like something was missing. I was scrolling through social media and stopped on the nail kit advertisement. Eventually, my new hobby began. I was stuck in a room with nail polishes and UV/LED lamp for months. It took quite a long time to get used to it, but it was not that I had anything else to do at the time. I was so happy that I decided to start doing it by myself. I could customize designs as I liked at a cheaper price.



Later, when the situation was getting better and students were allowed to study in the campus, I invited my friends to get their nails done as well! I invited some new friends to spend time doing nails together in my room. I was so proud when they told me they liked them or told me that they got compliments!

Finally, I would say that keeping my nails pretty during the pandemic cured me from boredom and gave me something to focus on. Although it can take hours to finish complicated designs, I like it as it is some kind of meditation. Now I am so proud of my new skills. This activity taught me that it is great to try new things stepping out from my safe zone and I would never know what I am capable of until I put an effort into it. If you happen to be interested in doing your own nails, don't be shy to mess them up on your first try. Practice makes perfect!

FAMILY TIME TOGETHER



BY:
SELVAN ANTONY

I last visited my family in Mumbai, India, on 20th December 2019 for a Christmas celebration. When I left for Bangkok from India, I planned to revisit them for Christmas in 2020. However, COVID-19 ruined my plan and kept me away from my family for almost 2 years, which affected my Christmas celebration with my family in Mumbai in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Since I was in Bangkok amid COVID-19 pandemic, my mom and sisters back in Mumbai were worried about me and made daily phone calls to check on my health and well-being status.

After the opening of regular international flights, I planned to visit my Mom and sisters in Mumbai and booked an air ticket for 31 Jan 2022. Before my travel journey, I purchased some gifts and souvenirs for my family members. Unfortunately, the flight I booked for 31 Jan was canceled by the airlines (reason unknown), which made me rebook my air ticket for 1st February 2022. I was excited to visit my family, but at the same time, I was worried about possible COVID-19 travel restrictions. Nevertheless, my travel journey and immigration checks at airports in Bangkok and India were smooth.

Finally, when I saw my mom and sisters in person from a distance after almost 2.3 years it was a very emotional and heart-thumping moment. Since I was an international traveler, I practiced physical distancing and self-quarantine (staying in a separate room) for 7 days back in my home in Mumbai. During the self-quarantine days, my daily schedule involved waking up early morning, doing some meditations, playing with my mobile phone, eating, and sleeping. At the same time, I was also monitoring my symptoms of COVID-19 – doing self-testing for COVID-19 on alternate days and found it negative every time I tested for COVID-19.

My mom and my sisters had arranged for a small family gathering with some food and drinks to celebrate my visit back home and for completing the quarantine days. It was a fun and happy gathering with loved ones together after disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. My mom cooked for me every day mouthwatering meals, South Indian cuisines – Rice and Dal, Chicken Briyani, Payasam (sweet porridge), etc. Also, I met with my other friends to party together, attended some family functions and completed some personal errands back in India. To thank my mom and sister for their moral support, I took them to a lavish restaurant in Mumbai to dine together, followed by a church visit and they immensely enjoyed this trip. I spent as much time as possible with my family and friends and also had a fun and relaxing time.

Finally, when the day came to go back to Bangkok for work it was not easy for me to say “Bye” to my family members. Staying away and not being able to meet friends and family is not easy - I think most expats have the same opinion. Based on my experience, I think having a ‘self-care plan’ may help expats’ emotional success while they are abroad, especially during the pandemic time. Close communication with family members and loved ones is good, particularly in tough times, as it will boost your energy. So, stay connected with family members and loved ones, Stay strong and happy. Thank you.



HOW I COPE WITH MY FIRST TIME WITH COVID-19



BY:
SHAN (TANET VONGVISITSIN)



At the onset of the pandemic in Thailand in 2020, people were scared of infection and stigmatization. People suppressed the symptoms in order to avoid being discriminated. Until now in 2022 after so many people were infected, it seems to be more common for people to get infected by COVID-19 as they are more familiar with it and have more understanding about it too. Today, I also would like to tell a story about my time when I first got infected by COVID-19 in March 2022.

I was so surprised to get infected by COVID-19 because I believed that two doses of COVID-19 vaccines would help me prevent from infection already. It was the day when I went to a restaurant for Takumi's farewell (one of my ex-colleagues at APCOM). Things seemed to be normal but soon after I drank one shot which contained milk and alcohol, I felt itchy on my body and my throat was dry. I felt unwell all night. Morning after, I did an ATK test and found that I got COVID-19. I assumed it was because of that glass shot. Maybe the bartender didn't wash it properly?

I decided to use the medical service from the government and do the home isolation treatment process for 10 days. I strictly followed the doctor's instructions, also drank a lot of water and got enough sleep. During the first five days, I got the flu and a severe sore throat. I also lost all sense of taste when having food. After that, from day 6-10, I felt better and my throat did not hurt any longer but I still couldn't taste any food. By the way, one of the good things during my hard time was receiving a care package from APCOM. I really appreciated it.

Finally, on day 10 I did another ATK test and it was negative. Although I thought I recovered, some symptoms remained. I felt like I had less energy. When doing things, I felt tired easily. One important concern was my taste. I was afraid that I would not to eat happily ever like before, and that I would never fully recover because of the side-effect from COVID-19. This kind of thinking effected both my mental health and physical health a lot. I didn't know what would happen in the future actually. In the end, I got better day by day and I felt more relieved until I got infected again in September 2022. But this time I felt less worried and the symptom were also less severe. This could be because my body got used to it. This story will confirm that when we experience something new or we don't know, we usually have more concerns and panic. Like COVID-19, it is not that scary like we thought in the beginning phase. If we have consciousness and knowledge about any issues or problems, we will be able to get through them.



A HONG KONG STUDENT'S LIFE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN AND A NEW JOURNEY AS AN INTERN IN THAILAND



BY:
TRAMMY HAU



After waking up at nine twenty, I brush my teeth and wash my face in five minutes. Then, I put a capsule in the coffee machine, and quickly turn on my laptop, log in to Zoom and attend my nine-thirty lesson. Yes, this was my daily routine for almost my entire university life. Since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2019, schools were forced to shut down and quickly adopt the mode of online teaching. Particularly in my city Hong Kong, the strict lockdown measures and social-distancing rules have drastically affected my life poorly.

At first, I liked having online classes as I could wake up just ten minutes before the class started and save transportation time and cost to the school, but the cons outweighed the pros. The pandemic caused me to be so lazy and demotivated that I had become the living embodiment of a sloth. Especially, when all sorts of public facilities like sports grounds, swimming pools, cinemas, and museums were closed, this gave me a valid reason to stay home and chill. I also could not hang out with my friends due to the strict social-distancing measures, not even having dinner together as we were not allowed to dine in after six. The pandemic undoubtedly worsened my social life and made my university life dull. Before entering university, I always imagined meeting new friends, joining clubs, and mingling with others on the beautiful campus. Thanks to the pandemic, all my fantasies about my vibrant university life were gone.

It was such a horrible experience to be stuck at home. Fortunately, I have found a new hobby during this pandemic - baking. I love eating, especially desserts, so why not bake for myself? Almost every week, I tried to bake something new, ranging from breads to Russian Napoleon cake to French desserts like creme brulee, macarons, and Portuguese egg tarts. I enjoy the process and, of course, eating them all! I am glad my family and friends enjoy it as much as I do too.



FINDING AN OVERSEAS INTERNSHIP AMID THE PANDEMIC

With the harsh border restriction in Hong Kong, I was worried about my overseas placement - one of the most important graduate requirements for my degree. Due to the pandemic, the school allowed us to work in local organizations. However, I did not consider interning locally or remotely as I have long longed to experience living and working in a foreign country. Initially, my university matched me with a social impact organization in the US. Yet it, unfortunately, decided not to take interns at last. With my school continuously trying to source new placement opportunities, I also tried to find internship opportunities by myself. I spent much time and effort looking into many websites, writing cover letters, and sending applications to different organizations. Some replied they could not assist with my visa application, some asked me to intern remotely (which I 200% do not want to), and some didn't provide any updates. With tight deadline, I began to panic because I feared I would not find an overseas internship and have to do my placement locally or virtually. I even thought of the worst scenario where I could not get any internship offer and would have to defer my studies.

Ding, an email notification popped up. It was an interview invitation with APCOM, a week later. I immediately stopped browsing for other internship opportunities and started preparing for my interview. The interview went well, and I gained more understanding of the work APCOM has been doing and its goals. Eventually, I have been offered a six-months full-time placement position in Bangkok.

Working at APCOM for four months so far, I have been bringing over my leadership and experience to the team. As a student intern, I mainly assist with HIV prevention projects while preparing communication material and helping my colleagues at different events. I am glad to be part of a diverse and dynamic group of like-minded individuals, as I love meeting people from different backgrounds and exploring new cultures. I believe that this six-months journey will be a lifetime experience for me.



RECONNECTING WHAT WAS LOST DURING THE PANDEMIC



BY:
NICKY SUWANDI

The city of Bangkok is progressively getting back its energetic beat. I started to see people flocking at airports, restaurants, concert halls and clubs – it seems like the city has danced again. It is such a contrast to the details outlined in [my previous article written during pandemic times](#), where I poured out how the city is not like the one I used to know. I joined APCOM and relocated to this city during the height of the pandemic, and it was really challenging in many aspects.

From the near end of the first half of 2022, I can really feel the difference as my calendar gets filled up quickly with scheduled visits from friends and colleagues. As it is well-known, Bangkok has a long reputation as a hub for various events, meetings and workshops related to HIV response in the Asia Pacific region, thanks to its strategic geographic location, and anyways, most people are just generally excited to visit the Thai capital, which has ranked as the most visited city in the world from 2016 to 2021 (with exception of COVID time in 2020).

Let me tell you how it is truly a different kind of experience to physically meet people you regularly see on screen during pandemic times. Also, the euphoric feeling when you get the chance to reconnect with old friends after some time. Allow me to share some of my memorable moments below, particularly with those who visited Bangkok in 2022, and who are related with my past and present work at APCOM. They are listed by countries in alphabetical order.



INDONESIA: Wawa Reswana is my former colleague at [GWL-INA](#), my previous organization before APCOM. At the time I was the Project Manager of [testJKT](#), a city-based campaign specifically-tailored for men who have sex with men (MSM) community in Jakarta capital. The initiative is currently still running and it is part of APCOM's flagship campaign [testXXX](#). As APCOM, I work

together with Wawa on an [advocacy letter for the current Global Fund strategy](#), in which he represented GWL-INA as one of the twelve signatory organizations. We also produced [country-specific advocacy letters](#) as a follow-up of the initiative. In addition, Wawa also participated in one of the sessions during the [APCOM Community Summit 2020](#). He currently works at [Indonesia Positive Network \(JIP\)](#) and visited Bangkok last September to attend an event organized by APCOM.



INDONESIA: Rully Mallay – that's Ibu Rully or Madame Rully to me – is a senior transgender activist in her native Yogyakarta or Jogja, a special Indonesian city in Java island, often dubbed as city of students. I met her during my time at [GWL-INA](#), where I frequently visited the city to provide technical assistance on the implementation of the [testJOG](#) campaign. It was a copy of its sister-campaign in Jakarta and the project concluded with a [regional dialogue](#) and [evaluation report](#) released in early 2020. Ibu Rully came to Bangkok last November to attend the [APCOM HERO Awards 2022](#), where she received the [Transgender Hero award](#).



LAO PDR: I work closely with Lattavanh “Kai” Sengdala on [testVTE](#) campaign, APCOM’s [testXXX](#) branch for MSM and transwomen communities in Vientiane capital, which culminates with the [grand launch of the campaign](#). She came to Bangkok as a representative of [CHIAs](#), to be in the same event with Wawa in September.



MALAYSIA: I have been friends with Jeremy Tan Fok Jun on Facebook for a few years. I remember he meaningfully participated as one of the panellists in [APCOM’s webinar on access to HIV services for young MSM](#). He is the award recipient for the [Young Achiever](#) category and traveled to Bangkok last November to attend the APCOM [HERO Awards 2022](#) ceremony. In addition, Jeremy and I recently shared a trip to Cape Town, South Africa, to attend the [International Workshop on HIV & Adolescence 2022](#), in which I served as Organizing Committee Member.

MONGOLIA: I work closely with Nyampurev “Nyamka” Galsanjams on [test4UB](#) campaign as part of the demand generation component under The Global Fund’s [SKPA-1](#) project. The campaign got its [grand launching during the pandemic era](#) and was the first-of-its-kind initiative specifically dedicated to the MSM community in capital Ulaanbaatar. Nyamka visited Bangkok last June, coinciding with Bangkok’s Pride Parade festivities, as well as its birthday celebration. Not to mention, I have had the pleasure meeting Dr Byambaa and Dr Setsen who came to visit Bangkok in August to attend the [Kick-off Workshop](#) of The Global Fund’s [SKPA-2](#). These are the lovely people from [Youth for Health Center Mongolia](#), and I am looking forward to continuing fruitful collaboration with them under the grant.



NEPAL: I was in contact with Manisha Dhakal and Sanjay Sharma, both from [Blue Diamond Society](#), on several collaborative efforts. Together with five other organizations across Asia, we work on [advocacy letters for the current Global AIDS Strategy](#). As a next step from this initiative, we received a [response letter from UNAIDS Executive Director](#). We also collaborate on a collective [video](#) in commemoration of the 2021 International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. Most recently we worked on a [Regional PrEP Survey](#), exploring the values and preferences of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) products MSM and trans women in 16 countries across



Asia and Australasia. Manisha is fully committed to help promote the survey. The number of trans women respondents for the survey in Nepal is the highest compared to other countries. Manisha and Sanjay visited Bangkok in September and November respectively, on two separate occasions organized by APCOM.

PAKISTAN: Yasir Ali Khan and I are both active advocates for chemsex issues and part of the [Asia Chemsex Platform](#). Among several engagements with APCOM, he meaningfully participated as one of the panellists in [APCOM's webinar on new PrEP products](#), where he shared perspective of the MSM communities who use drugs. Yasir traveled to Bangkok in November to attend the [APCOM HERO Awards 2022](#), where he was awarded as [HIV Hero](#).



PAPUA NEW GUINEA: I was leading the demand generation component under The Global Fund's [SKPA-1](#) grant, for which Papua New Guinea was one of the implementing countries. Lesley Bola provided a lot of support and we managed to conduct focus group discussions with four populations-at-risk, the most important activity during the inception phase. I finally met Lesley during his visit to Bangkok for the [UNAIDS/DFAT Indo-Pacific HIV Prevention Programme 2021-2023](#), where APCOM and the organization led by Lesley, [Key Populations Advocacy Consortium \(KPAC\) of Papua New Guinea](#), continues its partnership for a small initiative on HIV prevention. It is ready to be implemented in Port Moresby city in the beginning of 2023.

PHILIPPINES: Demand generation was a considerable component under The Global Fund's [SKPA-1](#) grant, where I work closely with John Oliver "JO" Corciega and his team at the [LoveYourself, Inc.](#) on their series of campaign titled [#SaferNowPH](#). They also provided a lot of support for the translation of [APCOM's PrEP Demand Generation Toolkit](#), which has been translated into 14 languages from 9 countries (including 4 widely spoken local languages in the Philippines). JO visited Bangkok last May for an event related to the SKPA-1 grant.



VIETNAM: There are many collaborations between APCOM and the organization led by Doan Thanh Tung, the [Lighthouse Social Enterprise](#). Among others, Tung participated as a speaker at [APCOM's webinar on chemsex](#). Tung visited Bangkok last November to join APCOM Community Summit 2022, and at that time he and his team also visited APCOM office for a cross-learning on chemsex issues. Walking down memory lane, I first met Tung back in 2019 (I was not yet part of APCOM back then), where we were both participants for [PrEP Demand Generation Training](#) organized by MPact and ITPC in Siem Reap, Cambodia. We also recently shared a session on chemsex at the Global Village main stage, as part of the [International AIDS Conference #AIDS2022](#) in Montreal, Canada.

It is worth to note that some of the activities mentioned above may be intertwined among organizations, however I just picked a handful of joyous moments with these wonderful people, especially after such restrained conditions during the pandemic. In reality, there are too many great moments to be shared as I literally get to work with a lot of fantastic people and have the privilege to be acquainted with them.

There are more friends and colleagues which I shared unique moments with and many more great stories to tell if not limited by the length of this small article. I am still waiting to meet them in person – some would be for the first time in person and some would be reconnecting moments between old friends – hopefully in 2023, where possibilities are endless. I hope there will be many good surprises in the new year, not only for me but for everyone as we gradually return to the bliss-filled universe that we've known and started to rebuild what we've lost, physically. It will be better than ever before.

A COVID LOVE STORY



BY:
PUKAR BISTA

I remember the day I swiped right on James' Tinder profile. His impish good looks and infectious smile drew me in and sparked the first blaze. We engaged in conversation for hours, discussing our love for cinema and books, and our discussions soon grew beyond the constraints of the app. We quickly swapped phone numbers and spent hours on video conversations, building an intimate and fascinating bond.

Our virtual dates unfolded in slow motion as if time itself had been slowed down to embrace the moment. I recall how his voice soothed me and how his grin could light up a room. We sought solace in one another's presence despite the confines of the pandemic that kept us secluded in our own homes. Our virtual rendezvous overflowed with laughter and flirtation, and it felt as if we had discovered a ray of hope in a world filled with gloom.

While the world outside was ripping apart under the wrath of the pandemic, our bond deepened. The connection we built felt as rare as a rose blossoming in a harsh and cruel landscape.

James and I ordered *The Inheritance of Loss*, a book by Kiran Desai. I had read the book many moons ago when I was still a teenager, and he had always wanted to read it. Many times, we read the book aloud to one another. I absolutely loved it when he read the lines out loud to me.

We discussed each chapter of the book, sometimes line by line, and even argued about our interpretations of each chapter, the metaphors in it, and the feelings of each character. I remember hotly discussing the line, "Could fulfillment ever be felt as deeply as loss?" James said that it could be and gave me his reasons why it could be. I disagreed and shunned him by saying he was too optimistic and his opinion cloying.



When we finished the book, we talked about how, just like the characters in the book, the two of us were two souls who were caught in a maelstrom of love and desire, attempting to find our way through a world that was lurching forward toward an unknown.

Another of my favorite James memories was our first virtual date. We dressed up, cooked supper in our own homes, and then sat down to eat together through video conference. We laughed and talked for hours, and I felt as if I had known him for eons. It was magical. Really!

As our virtual encounters continued, we became more at ease with each other, talking about anything from our favorite childhood memories to the future we wanted to forge. It was as if we had discovered a means to span the physical distance that separated us.

However, as time went on, the weight of our long-distance relationship began to bear down upon us. I longed for the warmth of his touch and the comfort of his presence, but we seemed so far away while living in the same city. Our interactions became more strained, and misunderstandings became commonplace. Despite our best attempts, we both acknowledged that our love story had to come to an end. We made peace with the fact that our love, fostered in an unexpected realm, had been snatched away by equally unexpected realities of the world reeling under the pandemic.

Even though our love story had ended, we both knew we would always cherish the memories we had shared. In a world that had been plunged into darkness, James taught me that love could grow in unexpected places and that it is okay to be willfully bullish. Alas, I can optimistically say that, yes, fulfillment can be felt as deeply as loss.

Missed stories from
our Special Series on
the COVID-19
Effect?

You can access all of
them here!

Issue 1: Reflecting the current realities faced by the communities we serve

Workplace safety is paramount [APCOM Covid-19 Protocol](#) was developed
and shared with our partners

[A collective call for immediate response amid COVID-19
outbreak and government lockdowns](#)

[Community clinics in Thailand strives to provide HIV services amid COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 and its effects on diverse SOGIESC communities.
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[Our Executive Director, Midnight on the ASHM Regional Advisory Group on BBVs, Sexual Health and COVID-19 in an inaugural webinar discussion on Covid-19, HIV, Sexual Health and Viral Hepatitis. What's the new normal for the Asia Pacific?,](#)
attended by prominent leaders in Asia Pacific Region.

[Lessons about COVID-19 and standard preventive practices from the virtual learning session](#)

[To Kill Two Birds with One Stone: Resourcefulness among Trans Women in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in the Time of Corona](#) - transwomen in Yogyakarta established a small start-up in the challenging time of the pandemic.

Calling on Compassion:
[Update on our fundraising efforts for LGBTQI and HIV community](#)

[APCOM building better Mental Health for its staff](#) - through a virtual mental health session facilitated by the founder of Brave Movement, Cheryl Tan.

Issue 5: Working together for a more resilient future

[Virtual Powwow with Thai LGBTQI and HIV community on the effects of COVID-19.](#)
A collective discussion attended by nearly 40 participants from Civic Society, Government and Technical Agencies on the significant effects of Covid-19 in the Thai LGBTQI and HIV community.

The Language of Art:
[Part 1 Charcoal Cleansing by APCOM staff Inad Rendon](#)

[#CoronaAPCOMpassion making compassion felt in Indonesia and Pakistan](#)

[Looking good, feeling great: HIV prevention during lockdown.](#)
One of the most recognized underwear brands, Andrew Christian supports APCOM's online HIV campaign.

Issue 6:

How are our staff coping?

Collection of self-reflections by APCOM leadership and staff

[AIDS and COVID-19: A reflection from APCOM's HIV/AIDS Ambassador.](#)

An inspiring reflection from the former United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoys for HIV/AIDS in Asia Pacific, J.V.R. Prasada Rao

[Crisis, Opportunity, Transition...](#)

by Dédé Oetomo, Chair of APCOM's Regional Advisory Group

[Equipping for uncertainties: adaptive leadership in times of coronavirus](#)

[First, I listen to fear. Then, I defeat it in detail.](#)

[Of Project Plans and COVID-19](#)

[My experience on accessing ARV during lockdown in Bangkok](#)

[A Complaint Letter to COVID-19](#)

[So Far yet so Near](#)

[Me, myself and PrEP during the lockdown](#)

[Jam and her housemate on COVID-19](#)

[Coronavirus Can't Tear Us Apart](#)

[We remain](#)

[Bringing Progressive Faith Voices toward Diverse Genders and Sexualities](#)

[IDAHOTB 2020: Bridging the LGBTI Inclusion Data Gap](#)

A panel recording to commemorate the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) 2020, organised by the Asian Development Bank, with APCOM's SOGIESC Rights Officer, Ramil Andag on the panel.

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it only requires gut and willingness to change them

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Advocating for a national legislation for LGBTQI Filipinos

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Distributing 'social guidelines for human dignity and equality'
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We are united in advocating for issues around HIV and those that advance the rights, health and well being of people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

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