

HARiS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2014 for Injecting Drug User

Background

In Hong Kong, the number of HIV cases transmitted through injecting drug use (IDU) has remained low up till now and contributed to less than 5% of all reported cases cumulatively. However, the potential risk of cluster outbreak and rapid upsurge of infection among the IDU population is always a concern. To monitor HIV-related risk behaviours and access to HIV testing services among IDU, this population has been included as one of the four at-risk populations in the HIV/AIDS Response Indicator Survey (HARiS) implemented since 2013. The survey was repeated in 2014 via commissioning to the Stanley Ho Centre for Emerging Infectious Disease, School of Public Health and Primary Care of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

The aims of HARiS survey was to establish a community-based behavioural survey with collection of standardized strategic information; to provide data of a pre-defined set of core indicators among the major at-risk subpopulations for surveillance of HIV-related risk behaviours and HIV testing patterns; and to enable the indicators to be tracked and compared over time for evaluation of the coverage and effectiveness of health-promotion and surveillance programmes in Hong Kong.

Method

Participants were recruited from NGO drop-in centre (one NGO) and outreach service (one NGO) from June to August 2014. The inclusion criteria was "any person who had ever injected drugs (IDU)". Any person who fulfilled the inclusion criteria was invited to complete an interviewer-administered questionnaire. However, due to some technical difficulties for only recruiting only IDU in the above two settings, "any person who had ever used opiate or recreational drugs" was also recruited, but only those who ever had history of injecting drug use will be included in the final analysis.

Results

A. Characteristics of participants

A total of 713 participants (53 centre-based and 660 from street-outreach) were recruited. The majority were male (91.6%). Chinese ethnicity accounted for 87.8%, followed by Nepalese (6.9%) and Vietnamese (3.8%). Age group over 50 years (46.4%) was the commonest age group, followed by 40-49 (29.6%), 30-39 (20.2%) and 20-29 (3.8%).

B. Drug injection behaviours

Among all, 88.9% had injected drug in the past 1 month, of which 24.3% had shared injection equipment with other people.

C. Sexual behaviours

In the past 6 months, 61.6%, 35.2% and 32.1% of the participants had had sex with a regular sex partner (RSP), non-regular sex partner (NRSP) and commercial sex worker (CSW) respectively. The condom use rates in the last sex were 70.6%, 88.4% and 98.7% respectively.

D. HIV testing behaviours

Overall, 94.0% of the participants had ever been tested for HIV, 77.4% had their last test within 12 months, and 58.9% had their last test within 12 months and knew the results. The most commonly reported places of having the last HIV test were Methadone Clinics (92.4%) and NGOs (3.7%). Another 16.5% had their last HIV test conducted more than one year ago, and 6% had never received HIV test before.

Discussions

1. Although the overall HIV testing rate in past one year was nearly 80%, there was still more than one fifth who either did not receive regular HIV test or had never been tested before. The methadone clinics in Hong Kong had implemented universal HIV urine testing programme (MUT) to all drug user attendees in a yearly cycle since 2004, enhancement of publicity and promotion of the testing programme is needed in order to further increase the testing rate among drug users.

2. The survey found that there was still nearly one fourth of participants (24.3%) had shared needles in the past one month. Although the finding was comparable to previous similar surveys, the potential risk of local cluster outbreak and sudden upsurge of HIV infection among injecting drug users cannot be neglected. HIV prevention efforts and education on the risk of needle sharing among the population is crucial and should be strengthened.

3. The last condom use rate with regular sex partners (70.6%) was still much lower than that with casual (88.4%) and commercial sex partners (98.7%). Moreover, the rate has dropped for around 10% when compared with previous similar surveys, reflecting that the risk perception of getting HIV infection from regular partners or vice versa is low. Health promotion on safer sex about consistent condom use with all partner types needs to be strengthened.

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Centre for Health Protection, Department of Health

Telephone: 3143 7225 Fax: 2780 9580

Website: <http://www.aids.gov.hk> Email: aids@dh.gov.hk

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