

HARiS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2017 for Male Clients of Female Sex Workers

Background

HIV behavioural surveillance among at risk target populations is an essential tool in measuring HIV behavioural risk factors and providing information of the effectiveness of programmes and interventions in preventing HIV infection. To better understand the risk of HIV infection among the male clients of female sex workers (MCFSW) population, it was included as one of the five major at-risk populations in the HIV/AIDS Response Indicator Survey (HARiS) implemented since 2013. The survey was repeated in 2017 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 were 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.

Methods

Participants were recruited via centre-based HIV Voluntary, Counselling and Testing (VCT) services (by 4 NGOs) or during the outreach sessions (by 1 NGO) from April to June 2017. Any male who had patronized a female sex worker in the preceding one year was eligible to complete a self-administered questionnaire.

Results

A. Characteristics of the participants

A total of 327 participants (centre-based: 247; outreach: 80) were recruited from the supporting NGOs. A majority of them (94.5%) had stayed in Hong Kong for more than 3 months in the preceding 6 months. Nearly all of them (98.2%) were Chinese. Nearly one-third (30.6%) were married and 71.9% were younger than 40 years old.

B. Sexual behaviours with female sex workers

Among all 327 participants, 298(91.1%) had had vaginal sex with a female sex worker (FSW) within last 6 months. 78.3% and 18.3% had their last sex with FSW in Hong Kong and Mainland China (including Macao) respectively. The most commonly reported place where a FSW was last patronized were one-woman brothel (55.7%), massage parlor/foot massage (18.9%) and night clubs/Karaoke (10.4%). Overall, 84.1% had used a condom in their last vaginal sex with a female sex worker.

C. Sexual behaviours with regular and non-regular sex partners

52.6% had had vaginal sex with a regular sex partner (RSP) in the preceding 12 months. A majority of them (91.9%) had the last sex episode in Hong Kong. The condom use rate in last vaginal sex with an RSP was 61.0%.

In the past year, nearly half of the participants (45.3%) had had vaginal sex with a non-regular sex partner (NRSP). A majority (81.1%) had their last sex in Hong Kong and the condom use rate in last vaginal sex was 76.4%.

D. HIV testing behaviours

Of all 327 respondents, 203 (62.1%) had ever had a HIV test and 123 (37.6%) knew their last test results. However, only 142 (43.4%) had their last tests done in the past 12 months, and 91 (27.8%) knew the test results. The most popular place where they had their last tests done were NGO VCT sites (66.5%), followed by private clinics/hospitals (14.3%) and Social Hygiene Clinics (11.1%).

Discussions

1. The survey showed that around one-fifth of the respondents (18.3%) had patronized FSW in the Mainland in the past 6 months. Although the figure was smaller than those in HARiS 2014 (41.3%) and 2015 (34.4%), the situation should be closely monitored as cross-border sexual activity and HIV situation of major cities in Mainland China could affect the local HIV epidemiology.
2. MCFSW can serve as a potential bridge for HIV transmission between FSW and the general population. The condom use rate at last vaginal sex with female sex workers have slightly increased from 81.5% in 2015 to 84.1% in 2017. Furthermore, that last condom use rate with regular and non-regular sex partners remained low (61.0% and 76.4%, respectively), promotion of safer sex practice in all partner types has to be continued.
3. The overall HIV ever testing rate (62.1%) and HIV test in last 12 months (43.4%) showed some improvements when compared to figures from HARiS 2015 (53.1% and 36.5% respectively). However, they were still low when compared to corresponding figures of other at-risk populations. This suggested that HIV testing is not yet a norm among this target group and promotion of HIV testing should be strengthened.

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