

HARiS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2013 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 HIV risk in the male clients of female sex workers (MCFSW) population, it was included as one of the four major at-risk populations in the HIV/AIDS Response Indicator Survey (HARiS) implemented since 2013. The first survey was conducted in 2013, 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 by four non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in 2013 through centre-based voluntary counseling and testing services (VCT) from April to July and outreach programme at construction sites in March. 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 608 participants (centre-based: 306; outreach: 302) were recruited from the supporting NGOs. Nearly all of them (95.2%) had stayed in Hong Kong for more than 3 months in the preceding 6 months and were Chinese (97.5%). Nearly half (45.7%) were 40 years old or above. 50.5% were married and 30.3% were new clients of the recruiting NGO.

B. Sexual behaviours with female sex workers

Among all 608 participants, 547 (90.0%) had had vaginal sex with a female sex worker (FSW) within last 6 months. 51.6% had last sex with FSW in Hong Kong, followed by 41.6% in Mainland China. The most common reported type of FSW last patronized were one-woman brothel (31.6%), night clubs/Karaoke (22.4%), massage parlor (including body/foot massage and feet bathing) (14.5%), and sauna (10.0%). Overall, 89.0% had used condom in their last vaginal sex with a female sex worker.

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

66.8% had had vaginal sex with a regular sex partner (RSP) in the preceding 12 months. A majority of them (81.8%) had the last sex episode in Hong Kong, followed by Mainland China (17.5%). Condom use rate in last vaginal sex with an RSP was 54.9%.

In the past year, about one-fifth of the participants (22.7%) had had vaginal sex with a non-regular sex partner (NRSP). Over half of them (67.4%) had their last sex in Hong Kong, and less than one third (30.4%) in Mainland China. The condom use rate with NRSP in last vaginal sex was 70.3%.

D. HIV testing behaviours

Less than half (45.9%) of the participants had ever had a HIV test and among the ever-testers, 64.5% had their last test in the preceding 12 months. Most of them had their last test in private clinics/hospitals (33.3%), followed by at NGO (27.6%) or public service sectors (social hygiene clinics or public hospital/clinics) (25.1%). Nearly 90% (247/279; 88.5%) were able to recall the result of their last test.

Discussions

1. The survey showed that more than two-fifths (41.6%) of the respondents had patronized FSW in the Mainland, which was comparable to previous similar studies. The situation should be closely monitored as cross-border sexual activity and also the HIV situation of neighbouring Mainland cities are important factors influencing the local HIV epidemiology.
2. The relatively low ever HIV testing rate (45.9%) observed in the MCFSW subpopulations, when compared to other at-risk populations, is of great concern. This suggested that HIV testing was not a norm among the target group and promotion of HIV testing should be strengthened in the future prevention programme.
3. MCFSW can serve as a potential bridge population for HIV transmission between FSW and the general population. Given that the last condom use rate with regular and non-regular sex partners (54.9% and 70.3%, respectively) are relatively low among MCFSW from the survey, HIV preventive interventions promoting safer sex in all partner types are crucial in the future HIV prevention programmes.
4. This is the first survey conducted by DH targeting the MCFSW population and it demonstrated that collection and compilation of brief but essential information on the personal profile and HIV-related risk behaviours of clients reached by different organizations were feasible. The survey should be repeated regularly in order to track the change of risky behaviours timely.

FACTSHEET on HARiS for MCFSW 2013

Published by Special Preventive Programme

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April 2014