

HARiS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2015 for Female Sex Worker

Background

Female sex workers (FSW) is one of the at-risk populations of HIV infection. In order to keep track the HIV prevalence and the related risky behaviours among this population, the first Community Based Risk Behavioural and Seroprevalence Survey for Female Sex Worker in Hong Kong (CRISP) was launched in 2006 and repeated in 2009. Both surveys showed low HIV prevalence with the results of 0.19% and 0.05% respectively.

Despite the low HIV prevalence, a regular public health surveillance programme should be in place to closely monitor the situation of HIV infection among FSW. A similar integrated biobehavioural survey for FSW was therefore developed in 2013 by incorporating into the newly launched HIV/AIDS Response Indicator Survey (HARiS) programme. The HARiS was conducted 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 third round of it was conducted in 2015 and the results were shown below.

Methods

Participants were recruited via centre-based HIV Voluntary, Counselling and Testing (VCT) services (by 5 NGOs) and during the outreach sessions (5 NGOs) from June to August 2015. Any female who had ever had sex with someone for money, drugs or other goods in the past 1 year was eligible and be invited to complete an interviewer-administered structured questionnaire. Chinese, English, Thai and Tagalong (Philippine) versions of questionnaires were available.

Results

(A) Characteristics of participants

A total of 494 respondents were recruited (centre-based : 255; outreach : 239). Nearly half (45.3%) had ever worked in one woman brothel; 23.5% in karaoke/night clubs, 25.7% had worked in street, 5.1% in bars/pubs, and 7.1% in massage parlors/sauna. A vast majority was Chinese (90.5%) and less than 40 years old (51.8%). More than half (69.0%) had stayed in Hong Kong for more than 3 months in the preceding 6 months.

(B) Sexual behaviours

Condom use rate was 97.4% in the last sexual intercourse with regular clients and 99.1% with casual clients. 89.9% reported to perceive using condom as 'quite effective' or 'very effective' for HIV prevention.

(C) HIV testing behaviours

Among all 494 respondents, 418 (84.6%) had ever received HIV test and 372 (75.3%) knew their last test results. However, only 361 (73.1%) had their last test in the preceding 1 year and 322 (65.2%) knew their last HIV test results.

(D) STI knowledge and attitudes (only for FSW aged 24 or below)

Knowledge and attitudes on sexually transmitted infections (STI) were assessed among the 33 (6.7%) respondents who were aged 24 or below. Most of them correctly answered the following questions: 57.6% understood having STI would increase the risk of HIV infection; 78.8% and 81.8% correctly pointed out that HIV can be transmitted via transfusion of contaminated blood products and sharing needles respectively; 54.5% knew that STI might lead to infertility if left untreated. However, 54.5% wrongly pointed out that STI will always develop symptoms/signs.

(E) Health seeking behaviour for sexually transmitted infections

Among all respondents, 85 (17.2%) had suspected themselves having STI in the past 12 months. More than half (62.4%) sought proper medical care. The most commonly reported medical care sought was private doctors (25; 29.4%), followed by Social Hygiene Clinics (15; 17.6%), or public doctors (11; 12.9%); while 23.5% sought medical services from NGOs. Self-medication was not uncommon (12; 14.1%) including buying over-the-counter medication or irrigation of vagina with cleaning solution or alcohol.

Discussions

1. The condom use rate in last sex with regular clients and causal clients was the highest among 3 rounds of HARiS (97.4% and 99.1% respectively), as compared to HARiS2014 (93.6% and 98.1% respectively) and HARiS 2013 (97.2% and 99.0% respectively).
2. 84.6% of the respondents had ever been tested for HIV infection, which was similar to HARiS 2014 (84.8%). Testing rate in the past one year were also similar with 74.7% in 2014 to 73.1% in this round. These findings suggested that undergoing regular HIV testing are consistently becoming more popular in the FSW community.
3. 54.5% of young FSW were not aware that STI could be asymptomatic; and 14.1% FSW only self-medicated themselves for STI which was improved compared with figure in HARiS 2014 but still suboptimal. It indicated the needs to strengthen their STI/HIV knowledge and to ensure FSW are fully informed of the various STI/HIV medical care available in Hong Kong.

FACTSHEET on HARiS for FSW 2015

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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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