

HARiS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2020 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 eighth round of survey was conducted in 2020 via commissioning to the Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong.

The aims of the 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 mainly from community outreach (98.4%, mainly in the vicinity of methadone clinics) from June to October 2020. The inclusion criteria was "any person who had ever injected drugs". 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 setting, "any person who had ever used opiate or recreational drugs" was also recruited, but only those who ever had history of injecting drug use would be included in the analysis.

Results

A. Characteristics of participants

A total of 793 participants (12 centre-based, and 780 from street-outreach) were recruited. The majority were male (92.4%). Chinese ethnicity accounted for 84.8%, followed by Nepalese (10.1%) and Vietnamese (2.6%). Age group over 50 years (49.9%) was the commonest age group, followed by 40-49 (29.6%), 30-39 (17.0%) and 20-29 (3.5%).

B. Drug injection behaviours

Among all, 74.1% had injected drug in the past 1 month, of which 20.1% had shared injection equipment with other people and 3.9% had shared outside usual network.

C. Sexual behaviours

In the past 6 months, 47.0%, 30.5% and 17.9% 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 82.6%, 95.0% and 99.3% respectively.

D. HIV testing behaviours

Overall, 93.9% of the participants had ever been tested for HIV, 78.0% had their last test within 12 months, and 66.8% 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 (95.7%) and NGOs (2.8%).

Discussions

1. The HIV testing rate in the past 12 months (78.0%) was decreased when compared to 2019 (82.2%). 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 ongoing to further increase the testing rate among drug users.

2. The share needle rate in the past one month decreased from 17.6% in 2017 to 11.6% in 2018 and further dropped to 11.1% in 2019. However the rate increased sharply to 20.1% in 2020. The rise of sharing needles may be attributed to the rising drug cost of heroin in the time of COVID-19 and IDU found it more difficult to buy new needles as some pharmacies were shut down. The potential risk of rapid upsurge of HIV and hepatitis C infection or outbreak among this population has to be closely monitored.

3. The last condom use rate with commercial sex partners (99.3%) had increased significantly compared to last year's finding (88.3%) and last condom use rate with regular sex partners (82.6%) was also increased as compared to last year (79.3%). The last condom use rate with casual sex partners slightly decreased from 97.3% in 2019 to 95.0% in 2020. Health promotion effort on safer sex about consistent condom use with all partner types should be further maintained.

FACTSHEET on HARiS for IDU 2020

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