

# HARiS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2019 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 2019 via commissioning to the Department of Sociology, the 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) from June to August 2019. 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 398 participants (centre-based: 329; online: 32) were recruited from the supporting NGOs. A majority of them (95.5%) had stayed in Hong Kong for more than 3 months in the preceding 6 months. Nearly all of them (96.3%) were Chinese. Nearly one-fourth (24.6%) were married and 82.1% were younger than 40 years old.

### B. Sexual behaviours with female sex workers

Among all 398 participants, 346(87.0%) had had vaginal sex with a female sex worker (FSW) within last 6 months. 85.7% and 7.6% 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 (50.8%), massage parlor/foot massage (13.6%) and night clubs/Karaoke (4.5%). Overall, 79.4% had used a condom in their last vaginal sex with a commercial sex workers.

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

51.8% had had vaginal sex with a regular sex partner (RSP) in the preceding 12 months. A majority of them (91.3%) had the last sex episode in Hong Kong. The condom use rate in last vaginal sex with an RSP was 62.1%. In the past year,

around one-fourth of the participants (23.0%) had had vaginal sex with a non-regular sex partner (NRSP). A majority (86.4%) had their last sex in Hong Kong and the condom use rate in last vaginal sex was 75.0%.

#### **D. HIV testing behaviours**

Of all 398 respondents, 216 (54.3%) had ever had a HIV test and 195 (49.0%) knew their last test results. However, only 137 (34.4%) had their last tests done in the past 12 months, and 118 (29.4%) knew the test results. The most popular place where they had their last tests done were NGO VCT sites (66.2%), followed by Social Hygiene Clinics (13.4%) and private clinics/hospitals (13.0%).

#### **Discussions**

1. The survey showed that less than one-tenth of the respondents (7.6%) had patronized FSW in the Mainland in the past 6 months. Although the percentage was much lower than those in HARiS 2015 (34.4%) and 2017 (18.3%), the situation should be continually 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 decreased from 84.1% in 2017 to 79.4% in 2019. Furthermore, that last condom use rate with regular and non-regular sex partners remained low (62.1% and 75.0%, respectively), promotion of safer sex practice in all partner types has to be continued.
3. The overall HIV ever testing rate (54.3%) and HIV test in last 12 months (34.4%) had much decreased when compared to figures from HARiS 2017 (62.1% and 43.4% respectively). Furthermore, they were also 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 further strengthened.

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**FACTSHEET on HARiS for MCFSW 2019**

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