

# HARiS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2014 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. It was subsequently repeated in 2014 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 (3 NGOs) from June to August 2014. 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 and English versions of questionnaires were available.

## Results

### (A) Characteristics of participants

A total of 407 respondents were recruited (centre-based : 208; outreach : 199). Nearly half (47.9%) had ever worked in one woman brothel; 19.7% in karaoke/night clubs, 20.6% had worked in street, 8.8% in bars/pubs, and 6.6% in massage parlors/sauna. A vast majority was Chinese (89.9%) and in the age group 20-39 (52.1%). Most of them (82.1%) had stayed in Hong Kong for more than 3 months in the preceding 6 months.

### (B) Sexual behaviours

Condom use rate was 93.6% in the last sexual intercourse with regular clients and 98.1% with casual clients. 85% reported to perceive using condom as 'quite effective' or 'very effective' for HIV prevention.

### (C) HIV testing behaviours

Among all 407 respondents, 345 (84.8%) had ever received HIV test and 312 (76.7%) knew their last test results. However, only 304 (74.7%) had their last test in the preceding 1 year and 274 (67.3%) 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 28 (6.9%) respondents who were aged 24 or below. Most of them correctly answered the following questions: 60.7% understood having STI would increase the risk of HIV infection; 82.1% and 75% correctly pointed out that HIV can be transmitted via transfusion of contaminated blood and sharing needles respectively; 64.3% knew that STI might lead to infertility if left untreated. However, 75.0% wrongly pointed out that STI will always develop symptoms/signs.

**(E) Health seeking behaviour for sexually transmitted infections**

Among all respondents, 66 (16.2%) had suspected themselves having STI in the past 12 months. The most commonly reported medical care sought was public Social Hygiene Clinics (19.7%), followed by private doctors (18.2%), or government doctors (10.6%); while 28.8% sought medical services from NGOs. However, self-medication was also common (24.2%) 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 appeared to be lower in this round (93.6% and 98.1% respectively), as compared to HARiS 2013 (97.2% and 99.0% respectively). Health promotion on safer sex behaviours with all partner types needed to be strengthened in the community.
2. 84.8% of the respondents had ever been tested for HIV infection, which was higher than those of the previous rounds of CRiSP (54% in 2006 and 64.2% in 2009) and HARiS (78% in 2013). Testing rate in the past one year also increased from 61.7% in 2013 to 74.7% in this round. These findings suggested that undergoing regular HIV testing are consistently becoming more popular in the FSW community.
3. 75.0% of young FSW were not aware that STI could be asymptomatic; and 24.2% FSW only self-medicated themselves for STI. 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.

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**FACTSHEET on HARiS for FSW 2014**

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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](mailto:aids@dh.gov.hk)

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