

HARIS - HIV and AIDS Response Indicator Survey 2014 for Men who have Sex with Men

Background

Men who have sex with men (MSM) has continued to account for a significant proportion of newly acquired HIV infections in Hong Kong. The last community based survey "HIV Prevalence and Risk Behavioural Survey of Men who have sex with men in Hong Kong" (PRISM) was conducted in 2011. To keep on tracking the epidemic and inform intervention, MSM population has been included as one of the four major at-risk populations in the HIV/AIDS Response Indicator Survey (HARIS).

The aims of HARIS 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.

The first HARIS was conducted in 2013 and repeated again in 2014 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.

Methods

Participants were recruited via centre-based HIV Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) services (by 7 Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and outreach sessions (by 3 NGOs) from March to June 2014. Any man who had ever had oral or anal sex with another man was eligible in the survey and be invited to complete a self-administered questionnaire. An online version of the questionnaire was also developed and disseminated by 4 NGOs during internet outreach programmes. Apart from questionnaires, all participants were further invited to participate in voluntary HIV testing by providing urine specimen on-site (for centre-based and outreach recruited participants) or to the Community Collection Point (for online recruited participants).

Results

A. Characteristics of participants

A total of 1026 MSM (centre-based: 459; outreach: 188; online: 379) were recruited via the seven supporting NGOs. A vast majority was Chinese (98.6%), aged between 20 and 39 (77.6%) and have stayed in Hong Kong for more than 3 months in the preceding 6 months (86.0%).

B. Sexual behaviours with different kinds of sex partners

In the preceding 6 months, 51.5%, 40.7% and 48.3% of the respondents reported to have had anal sex with emotional relationship partners (ERP), regular sex partners (RSP) and non-regular sex partners (NRSP) respectively. The condom use rates in the last anal sex were 65.0%, 70.3% and 80.6% with ERP, RSP and NRSP respectively. Only 13.5% of the participants had had sex with commercial male sex partners (CSP), and the condom use rate in last anal sex was 89.1%.

C. HIV testing behaviours

Of all 1026 respondents, 805 (78.5%) had ever received HIV test and 747 (72.8%) knew their last test results. However, only 639 (62.3%) had their last test in the preceding 1 year and 601 (58.6%) knew their last HIV test results.

The most commonly reported venue for last HIV test was NGOs (71.1%), followed by public service sector (social hygiene clinics, public hospitals/clinics or DH Kowloon Bay Health Centre) (13.6%) and private sector (5.3%).

D. Substance abuse and alcohol use

Of all respondents, 22.6% and 11.1% reported to have taken alcohol or drugs respectively before or during sex in the last 6 months. Among drug users, 35% had used 2 or more drugs and poppers is the commonest one.

E. HIV prevalence

A total of 564 urine specimens were collected (centre-based 298; outreach 100; online 166) for HIV serology testing. Thirty three (33) were found to be HIV positive, giving an overall HIV prevalence of 5.85% (95% CI: 4.2-8.1). Further breakdown showed that the HIV prevalence was highest among the age group of 20-29 (7.76%), followed by 40-49 (4.26%), 30-39 (3.67%) and <20 (3.17%). HIV positive participants were found more likely to be involved in group sex, consumption of alcohol and drugs before and during sex in the preceding 6 months ($p < 0.05$).

Discussions

1. The HIV prevalence among MSM was 5.85%, which was higher than the findings from previous PRiSM in 2006, 2008 and 2011 of around 4%. Although possible contribution from methodological difference cannot be excluded, the figure was still worrying as it remained significantly higher than other at-risk populations. The high HIV prevalence of 7.76% among MSM aged 20-29 was of great concern.
2. The overall percentage of condom use in the last anal sex with ERP was only 65.0%, which was similar to the findings of 67.0% in HARiS 2013, but still not optimal. Health promotion on safer sex with consistent condom use with all partner types needs to be strengthened in the MSM community.
3. The percentage of condom use at last anal sex with commercial sex partners was 89.1%, which was higher than the 69.9% in 2013. This finding was encouraging and might suggest an increase in awareness of safer sex among MSM when they patronised sex workers.
4. After the intensive promotion of HIV testing in the MSM community in the previous years, both the overall ever HIV testing rate (78.5%) and HIV testing rate in past one year (62.3%) increased in this survey, as compared to findings of 73.7% and 60.0% in 2013 respectively. It might suggest an increased alertness to undergo HIV testing and even regular HIV test in the gay community.

FACTSHEET on HARiS for MSM 2014

Published by Special Preventive Programme

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March 2015