

**Editorial Board**

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~ Calendar ~

114<sup>th</sup> ACA Meeting  
9 April 2021

# Results of the HIV/AIDS Response Indicator Survey (HARiS) 2020

## Background

The HARiS survey has been conducted every year since 2013. The aim is to establish a mechanism for a regular community-based survey where AIDS non-governmental organisations (NGOs) would help collect information on HIV-related behaviours for the at-risk populations by using the same indicators.

Five major at-risk populations comprising men who have sex with men (MSM), male-to-female transgender (TG), female sex workers (FSW), male clients of female sex workers (MCFSW) and people who inject drugs (PWID) are covered by HARiS. Participants were interviewed by AIDS NGOs with a structured, self- or interviewer-administered questionnaire. Each questionnaire contains a standard set of core indicators as recommended by Dr. Tim Brown, Senior Fellow of the East-West Centre of the University of Hawaii. Each set of core indicators was designed specifically for a population to monitor their HIV-related behaviours. As the same indicators are in use, behaviours of the at-risk populations and the effectiveness of HIV programmes could be compared over time and across the NGOs.

## Methodology

The HARiS 2020 survey was conducted from May to October 2020 for MSM, FSW, MCFSW and PWID. Eight NGOs joined the survey. Participants were recruited via centre-based voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) services, venue outreach and internet outreach. As there was interruption of NGOs' services under COVID-19 pandemic, the survey could not recruit enough sample of FSW and MCFSW to draw meaningful conclusion. Only the results of MSM and PWID are presented below.

## Results

Please refer to **Table** for the summary of results from 2015 to 2020.

## Key observations

Condom use rates generally decreased compared to 2018 among MSM across all four types of sexual partners, but the rates were fairly similar to that of 2018 if pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) was included as an additional option of HIV prevention. In HARiS 2020, it was found that the use of PrEP (in the past one year) among MSM increased markedly from 1.1% in 2018 to 6.3% in 2020. The use of condoms was generally less among those taking PrEP. Health promotion on safer sex encouraging consistent condom use with all partner types should be reinforced. Emphasis should also be made that PrEP could not replace the role of condoms in offering additional protection against other sexually transmitted infections. In contrast, the condom use rates among PWID had maintained at a relatively high level.

HIV testing rates among MSM and PWID had decreased when compared to the last survey. HIV testing rate within past 12 months dropped from 64.5% to 61.3% in MSM and from 82.2% to 78.0% in PWID. HIV testing has still not yet become the norm among these target groups and promotion of regular HIV testing should be strengthened.

The needle sharing rate in IDU (20.1%) which was much higher than that in 2019 (11.1%) warranted attention. This could be attributed to the rising cost of heroin and increasing difficulties in buying new needles due to shut down of pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the relatively low number of newly reported HIV infections among IDU in recent years, the potential risk of local outbreak of HIV infection among this population should not be neglected. Effort to promote HIV prevention and education on the risk of needle sharing remains crucial and should be sustained.

The AIDS services provided by NGOs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to a different extent. Suspension of outreach programmes and HIV testing services provided by NGOs has made recruitment of participants difficult. The impact of COVID-19 on the overall testing coverage and other community HIV prevention activities has to be monitored.

**Table. Comparison of response indicators of HARiS 2015 - 2020**

	HARiS 2015	HARiS 2016	HARiS 2017	HARiS 2018	HARiS 2019	HARiS 2020
<b>Men who have sex with men (MSM)</b>	<b>N=1,091</b>	<b>N=1,989</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>N=2,051</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>N=1,574</b>
Condom use in last vaginal sex in past 6 months						
● Emotional relationship partner (ERP)	65.7%	59.9%	NA	60.2%	NA	52.2%
● Regular sex partner (RSP)	73.6%	70.5%	NA	67.4%	NA	62.2%
● Non-regular sex partner (NRSP)	81.1%	79.9%	NA	78.8%	NA	69.8%
● Commercial sex partner (CSP)	96.1%	89.1%	NA	78.6%	NA	74.2%
HIV test within past 12 months	60.8%	58.5%	NA	64.5%	NA	61.3%
● Knew the result	59.4%	57.5%	NA	64.0%	NA	60.0%
Having accessed at least one item of HIV combination prevention services* in the past one year	91.8%	83.1%	NA	86.3%	NA	86.2%
Received free condoms in the past 1 year	57.8%	42.1%	NA	55.5%	NA	40.6%
<b>People who inject drugs (PWID)</b>	<b>N=781</b>	<b>N=713</b>	<b>N=791</b>	<b>N=741</b>	<b>N=808</b>	<b>N=793</b>
Condom use in last sex in past 6 months						
● Regular sex partner (RSP)	69.9%	77.3%	80.8%	90.8%	79.3%	82.6%
● Non-regular sex partner (NRSP)	96.4%	77.1%	92.8%	95.5%	97.3%	95.0%
● Commercial sex worker (CSW)	99.5%	96.4%	99.5%	100%	88.3%	99.3%
Drug use before/during sex	50.6%	41.3%	45.7%	43.9%	50.2%	30.3% <sup>#</sup>
HIV test within past 12 months	72.2%	61.6%	73.7%	82.6%	82.2%	78.0%
● Knew the result	63.0%	55.8%	67.1%	74.8%	75.4%	66.8%
Drug injection in past 1 month	89.1%	91.0%	90.5%	89.2%	78.2%	82.0%
Sharing injection equipment in past 1 month	13.9%	15.9%	17.6%	11.6%	11.1%	20.1%
Sharing injection equipment with people outside usual network in the past 1 month	4.1%	6.2%	6.3%	2.7%	3.3%	3.9%

\* Such services may include free condoms, HIV testing, free new syringes, HIV prevention messages, or PrEP

# Revised set of questions asking drug use for / outside sex in HARiS 2020

Remarks: HARiS 2017 and HARiS 2019 did not cover MSM