

**Project Title:****Identifying sexual health behaviours and HIV risk amongst African refugees and asylum seekers (ASR) in Hong Kong (Project Code: MSS 200R)****Executive Summary:****Objectives**

This study aimed to identify the health practices, problems, and needs of asylum-seekers, refugees, and torture-claimants (ASRs) from Africa in Hong Kong, with a particular focus on their sexual health.

**Design**

Participant-observation, in-depth interviews and cross-sectional survey.

**Setting**

The study was conducted at non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that served the ASR, cafes and restaurants in Chungking Mansion, or homes of ASRs.

**Participants**

All participants selected were: (1) African above 18yrs; and, (2) who were able to read and write in English, French or Somali. In total, 30 interviews were conducted and 373 questionnaires were received.

**Main outcome measures**

The outcome measures were condom use and condom self-efficacy score (CSE) to but to identify, through the use of the semi-structured interviews, other socio-demographic and structural factors specific to Hong Kong faced by the African ASR population in regards to sexual health behaviours and condom self-efficacy. This, in turn, informed the development of the questionnaire aimed to quantitatively address how these factors affected CSE.

**Results**

The interviews showed that the interpersonal and institutional discrimination the African ASRs experienced in Hong Kong had exacerbated feelings of rejection, generating a climate of isolation and distrust. Symptoms of depression were common. For some ASRs, intimate and sexual relationships became important elements for seeking recognition, satisfaction, and sometimes material advancement. Some ASRs were thought to engage in sexual transactions for money and other forms of material and social support. Both ASR men and women had sexual relationships with other ASRs, expatriates, local Chinese, and migrant workers such as domestic workers from the Philippines and Indonesia. Some ASRs abstained from sex for health and/or religious reasons. There was general agreement that access to condoms, birth control, and relevant sexual health information was inadequate for ASRs. Our survey findings delineated the characteristics of ASRs, which mainly consisted of younger men, living alone without a family. Majority of ASRs (51.7%) reported no sex partners, including regular or casual partners. Among those who had sex, only a quarter (24.5%) of respondents reported consistent condom use, while 26% reported they had never used condoms. Higher percentages of inconsistent condom users were observed among female or young ASRs, who were married, and who had lower CSE. Logistic regression showed that married couples (adjusted odds ratio (AOR) 27.5; 95%

confidence interval (CI): 3.15- 240.34) ( $p < 0.005$ ) and ASRs with lower CSE (AOR 0.87; 95% CI: 0.81 to 0.97) ( $p < 0.01$ ) were more likely to have inconsistent condom use.

### **Conclusions**

Condoms should be made readily available through wider and gender indiscriminative distribution. Recommendations to improve sexual health of this population include having outreach workers who have established trust at personal level with ASRs to offer counselling and advice on safe sex and STI/HIV screening. Intervention programmes for this population should include elements that empower their CSE in order to improve condom usage. There is urgent need to evaluate the government policy on ASRs that maintains their economic and social vulnerabilities that, according to the findings of this report, exacerbate their sexual health risks and needs.

### **Pending Publications**

Wong WCW, Holroyd E, Chen J, Loper KA, Cheung S, Chong LT. Beginning of an End: Using Social Determinants of Health Framework to Understand the Health Status and Needs of African Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ASRs) in Hong Kong. *The Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. (Under review)

Wong WCW, Buechsel I, Cheung S, Chen J, Loper KA, Holroyd E. Identifying sexual health behaviours and HIV risk amongst African asylum seekers, refugees and torture claimants in Hong Kong. *AIDS*. (Submitted for publication)