Young, educated and indulging in risky sex

Leslie Kay Lim

They are young, educated – and putting themselves at risk of catching sexually transmitted diseases.

Men who have casual sex with women they meet online or in clubs are less likely to use protection than older customers who go to brothels, a survey has revealed.

They also tend to be younger and better-educated.

The survey sampled 1,219 heterosexual Singaporean men aged 21 to 70. All of them either had casual sex or paid for sex with prostitutes.

Those who met women at entertainment establishments or on Internet sex forums had an average age of 34, and most could boast more than 10 years of education.

By contrast, men who went to brothels or used streetwalkers were 43 years old on average and were likely to have had less than 10 years of schooling.

But despite their comparatively high levels of education, the younger group tended to behave more recklessly.

For example, 32 per cent of the club-goers said they had unprotected sex with a prostitute in the past year, compared to 27 per cent of their older equivalents.

The 11-month study, which ended last month, was led by Associate Professor Wong Mee Lian of the National University of Singapore’s Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

She said the men who met women online or at entertainment venues may be putting themselves at greater risk due to their spontaneous and alcohol-fuelled behaviour.

By contrast, the brothel-based sex workers “already have a programme in place”. For example, the fact that the venues were licensed meant they were more likely to insist that condoms were worn.

Prof Wong added that although it used only a short questionnaire, the survey had strengths, including its coverage of the online community and its large sample size.

She said that strategies to promote safer sex among men had to be tailored to their different socio-demographics and behavioural needs.

EASIER FOR HIV SUFFERERS TO GET TREATMENT: AMY KHOR

Treatment for HIV is becoming more accessible in Singapore, Minister of State for Health Amy Khor said yesterday.

The number of patients using their Medisave accounts to obtain drugs for the virus at the Communicable Disease Centre has more than doubled, she added. More than 700 patients used this method last year, up from an average of 300 a year before 2010, Dr Khor said at the opening of the 8th Singapore Aids Conference.

The cost of these drugs dropped by about two-thirds at the centre in 2010.

More than 1,300 of its patients have benefited since Medifund, which helps those with low incomes, was extended to HIV sufferers two years ago.

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