

Lessons Learned: Social Influences on the Decisions of Urban Women to Use Female Condoms

Principal Investigator: Margaret R. Weeks, PhD

Partners: Connecticut AIDS Education and Training Center

Project Staff: Margaret R. Weeks, PhD; Julia Dickson-Gomez, PhD; Maryann Abbott, MA; Evelyn Baez, BA; A. Michelle Corbett, MPH, CHES; Michelle Garner, MA; Helena Hilario, BA; JiangHong Li, PhD; Mary Prince; Jennifer Salonia, BA; Laurie Sylla, MHSA

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Study Location: Hartford, Connecticut

Female condoms can make a valuable contribution to reducing heterosexually transmitted HIV among women, yet they remain unpopular and underutilized in most U.S. communities.

The Institute for Community Research conducted a behavioral and attitudinal surveyⁱ of primarily African American and Latina women in Hartford Connecticut to measure a variety of factors influencing the use of female condoms (FC) among these women.

Key Findings

- Usage: While most women had seen FC, less than a third had ever used it. A majority had never thought about using it.
- Individual factors: FC use was associated with being HIV positive; having more education; having a greater sense of power in heterosexual relationships; being separated, widowed or divorced; and having a history of abuse.
- Peer factors: FC users had more people in their networks who talked to them about FC, more who talked about FC positively, and more positive peer FC norms.
- Cognitive factors: Greater FC knowledge, more positive FC attitudes, greater efficacy with primary partners and greater internal locus of control were associated with FC use.
- Community factors: There was limited availability of FC in the city, with little or no promotion by clinics, pharmacies, and health and social service organizations. The most common sources were clinics, community

outreach workers, drug treatment programs, and AIDS service organizations. Nearly all of the women who used FC recently got their FC for free. The greatest barrier to increased FC use is the lack of a supportive community environment for its promotion and use.

- Ethnicity: While ethnicity was not a strong predictor of FC use, different patterns of influences on FC attitudes and use among African American and Latina women suggest the need to tailor FC promotion messages among ethnic groups.

Lessons for Providers

How health and social service providers and agencies can help to increase the use of FC:

- Increase awareness of FC by educating colleagues, peers, and clients; distributing FC; presenting FC as part of a mix of protection methods; emphasizing FC as a dual protection method; and educating male partners.
- Increase women's capacity and effectiveness by demonstrating proper FC use, troubleshooting, and training clients in effective communication and negotiation skills.
- Increase access to female condoms by providing free or subsidized FC and advocating for wider distribution and availability.

ⁱ Weeks, M.R., Hilario, H., Li, J., Coman, E., Abbott, M., Sylla, L., Corbett, M. & Dickson-Gomez, J. (2010.) Multi-level Social Influences on Female Condom Use and Adoption Among Urban United States Women. *AIDS Patient Care and STDs*, 2010; 24: 297-309.