

Explore the Possibilities! Female Condoms: The Overlooked Alternative for Safer Sex in High Risk Couples Sustained Safer Behavior (Female Condom Use) in High-Risk Women to Prevent HIV

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Women and HIV Risk

- ❖ Rates of HIV infection are increasing rapidly among women worldwide
- ❖ Most women are being infected by their primary male partners
- ❖ Condoms are least likely to be used in primary relationships

HIV/AIDS in Hartford, CT

- ❖ As of December 31, 2006, women accounted for 39.4% of persons living with (PLW) HIV
- ❖ Heterosexual transmission accounts for 23.3% of PLW HIV; the second most frequent mode of transmission following injection drug use
- ❖ Hispanics account for 48.9 % of AIDS

Research Aims

- ❖ To explore factors that affect initial and sustained use of the female condom [FC] for HIV/STI prevention among high-risk women in an urban U.S. setting
- ❖ To explore personal, network and sexual relationship factors affecting initial and sustained FC use among high-risk women and men over time

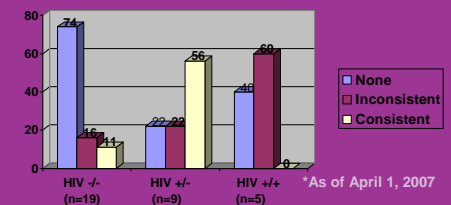
Research Methods: Couples Component

- ❖ In-depth interviews at baseline and 10-months exploring current and past relationships, decision-making, sexual behavior, HIV/STI risk and prevention, and FC experiences
- ❖ 2-week trial using the FC followed by a brief survey and in-depth interview

Pre-Trial Demographics & Results

- (n= 33 couples in primary relationships*)
- ❖ 39% African American, 46% Puerto Rican/Hispanic, 15% White. 40.6 years, Mean Age
 - ❖ 28.8% HIV+ (11 men, 8 women)

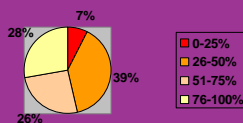
Couples Male Condom Use in Last 30 Days



2-Week Trial Results (n= 28 couples*)

- ❖ 6.66 (2-24) Average times vaginal sex with trial partner
- ❖ 3.68 (1-14) Average # FC used with trial partner
- ❖ 62.4% proportion of FC protected sex with trial partner
- ❖ 62.5% used only a FC during most recent sexual encounter, 8.9% used both FC and MC sequentially

Proportion of FC Protected Sex with Trial Partner



*As of April 1, 2007

Sexual Risk and Prevention Decision-Making in Primary Relationships

Two time periods were discussed concerning their relationships: a phase of defining the relationship and one of maintaining it. The following themes emerged from these discussions

Establishing the Relationship

- ❖ Taking a chance on love*
- ❖ Establishing trust*
- ❖ The use of characteristics-based theories (e.g. he looks clean, she's not from the streets)
- ❖ Negotiated safety*

*E: When did you decide not to use any protection?

P: Right after awhile I just decided not to, I mean she agreed with it. Why should we be using protection? "I can't get pregnant you know". We're not fooling around with nobody else so, if you're sick I'm gonna be sick... But we were tested for everything so we shouldn't be sick.

Hispanic male, age 32, HIV-/-

Maintaining the Relationship

❖ Negotiated safety
When 2 people of known seroconcordance consciously decide to have unprotected sex with each other. This would involve mutual testing and then monogamy, or at least condoms in outside relationships

- ❖ Maintaining the fantasy of fidelity
- ❖ Achieving greater intimacy through condomless sex
- ❖ The power of love*

*E: So once you did find out that he was positive, did you then say, "Okay, now we need to use condoms?"
P: ... I didn't want the sex or nothing for a while, because I was hurt. I was very betrayed... I was using more because I was in pain... Then we started back again and we didn't use condoms. Never used condoms because I said, "Damn, I love him and everything. If I love him, I shouldn't even use condoms with him" but I didn't know at the time, you know? Like I said, that's my man, I love him and so what. We'll die together. That's how I felt.

Hispanic Female, age 37, HIV-/-

Why Women Like the Female Condom

Interpersonal Facilitator: Positive Partner Response

"Oh yes I love it. I love it...Trust me he feels the warmth from my vagina, so that was my big concern cause when he used the male condom it's different. He says he doesn't feel anything he don't feel gum [vaginal muscle] none of that. So with this it's different, he say it's better"

Puerto Rican, age 38, HIV-/-

Intrapersonal Facilitator: Perceived Risk of HIV/STIs & Feeling in Control of One's Health

"I would prefer to use the female condom... I don't want to end up coming with a mistake about something tearing... can use it myself, I can insert it in myself, so I feel more protected."

African American, age 21, HIV-/-

Women's Barriers to Female Condom Use

Interpersonal Barrier: Greater Intimacy Through Condomless Sex

"It's not like oh I hate this thing... I didn't feel as close, you know, emotionally close in the lovemaking. I felt like there was a barrier because of this."

White, age 38, HIV-/-

Physical Barrier: Unsuccessful 1st Attempt at Insertion

"That ring thing is so slippery and for me it's hard to put it in, but then like when it's in, I don't know if it's in right or whatever, but I could feel it though, so I get mad and I just take it and have him put one on."

Puerto Rican, age 38, HIV+/-

Why Men Like the Female Condom

Intrapersonal Facilitator: Responsibility Shift

"...it's a lot better than the male condom. You don't have to worry about getting broken... I don't got to worry about taking it off or nothing so the job is on her so it's a lot better for me."

Puerto Rican, age 31, HIV-/-

Physical Facilitator: FC Durability

"...and, I could, you know, keep going and doing, you know, slamming or whatever and it's not going to break or anything so you know, that's what I kind of like about it also."

Puerto Rican, age 34, HIV-/-

Interpersonal Facilitator: Increased Intimacy

"...in a weird kind of way it adds like sensitivity... He just can't ram it up inside of her... He has to take attention, care, you got to put it in right and that might add to a relationship... if you can get something out of it like, you know, foreplay, maybe a better piece of mind, these things will add to a relationship."

African American, age 35, HIV-/-

Men's Barriers to Female Condom Use

Interpersonal Barrier: Trusting Partner's Fidelity

"with all the things that go on in society today this was new and I said we'll try this. I'm not saying every single time with just my regular partner because I do have to go back to my natural flesh on flesh because I, you know, I trust her, I trust my baby so..."

African American, age 48, HIV-/-

Structural Barrier: Prohibitive Cost, Limited Access

"I like a lot. The only thing is that I don't know where to find them and too expensive".

Puerto Rican, age 30, HIV+/-

Summary of Findings

- ❖ Factors such as substance use, self-efficacy, & violence appear to have little effect on the desire or ability to use and/or insist on the use of condoms
- ❖ The need for love, security, trust, belonging, & acceptance often outweigh concerns of personal health & safety
- ❖ There is a disconnect between public health and lay conceptualizations of sex. Prevention messages are not even in the same language

The female condom is NOT for everybody and it is NOT a cure all BUT...

The female condom IS an effective option that with community support can become a viable alternative for more women and men at risk.

Recommendations

- ❖ Explore qualitatively and longitudinally the process of negotiated safety among heterosexual couples as a potentially effective harm reduction strategy in the prevention of HIV
- ❖ Develop effective interventions that acknowledge the real needs the primary relationships satisfy without contradicting people's beliefs about their relationships to the point where they reject the interventions as irrelevant