

## Findings/Outcomes for Sustained Safer Behavior (Female Condom Use) in High-Risk Women to Prevent HIV

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**Dates of Study:** 2004-2007

**Study Location:** Hartford, Connecticut

All study participants in the survey or partner interviews were provided with up to four free female condoms each time they were interviewed and research staff instructed them on the proper way to use it, common problems, and how to solve them. We also gave participants information about where they could find more female condoms if they wanted to buy them or get more for free.

### Longitudinal Cohort Study

A total of 461 women completed a baseline survey (55.5% African American, 30.4% Hispanic/other Latino; 11.8% HIV+; mean age 39.2 years); of these, 396 completed 1-month surveys and 225 completed 10-month surveys.

- Among women who completed both baseline and 1-month surveys, those who used the female condom at least occasionally increased from 13.4% to 29.8% ( $p < .001$ ). This number increased from 17.3% to 34.2% ( $p < .001$ ) among women who completed both baseline and 10 month surveys.
- Total protected sex (male condom + female condom) with primary partners increased from .407 at baseline to .542 at 1-month ( $p < .001$ ); the increase was sustained at 10-months (.471) ( $n=169$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

These findings suggest that once free female condoms are accessible, demonstration of proper use is provided, and trouble-shooting support is available, women can quickly adopt female condom use, and this adoption can be sustained 10 months later.

### Partners' Female Condom Trial

Findings from the thirty-two couples in primary partnerships who completed the 2-week female condom trial (42.2% African American; 40.6% Hispanic/other Latino; 28.1% in HIV sero-discordant and 9.4% in concordant HIV+ relationships; mean age=39.4) indicated:

- Although many women found aspects of using female condoms inconvenient and experienced initial difficulty inserting them, 90.6% ( $n=29$ ) reported that they were somewhat or very likely to use female condoms in the future with their partner; among those women, 75.9% were not consistent male condom users and 41.4% were in HIV affected relationships.
- Even among the 15 women who had neutral or mostly negative female condom attitudes, 13 still intended to use the female condom again with their trial partner.
- Overall men had less favorable female condom attitudes. Although 46.9% reported negative attitudes, 60% of those men reported that they were still likely to use the female condom again with their trial partner.

### Summary of Findings from Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

- 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.
- Prevention messages fail to acknowledge interpersonal factors that influence condom use decision making.

### **Repeated Community Assessment of Female Condom Availability**

- Repeated community assessments indicated that the female condom was largely unavailable for purchase in Hartford and difficult to find for free. Further, it became increasingly difficult for service organizations to obtain supplies of the female condom from the State because of limited and diminishing allocations, though no such limit affected male condom availability during the study period. Thus, over time the female condom became less available even to service organizations in Hartford.

### **Supplement to Study Clinical Barriers**

- We also conducted interviews with clinical health care providers (CHCP) providing care to men and women involved in high-risk behavior, in order to evaluate organizational and other barriers impeding female condom distribution and promotion.
- From 32 surveys and 7 in-depth interviews with CHCP from 15 of 39 identified primary healthcare and HIV-related service organizations in Hartford, 90% of CHCP indicated they were familiar with the female condom, but only 78% knew how to use it properly, 75% had discussed it with female patients, and 41% with male patients.
- Also, 34% recommended it to female patients for pregnancy, 53% recommended it for STI prevention, and 66% recommended it for HIV prevention; even fewer recommended it to male patients for the same.
- Only 53% of CHCP had a favorable impression of the female condom. For those with favorable impressions, we found that female CHCP were more favorably disposed than males.