

Checking In: High Risk Women (Re) Discovering the Female Condom in Hartford, CT

Sustained Female Condom Use in High-Risk Women to Prevent HIV

Margaret Weeks,* Helena Hilario,* Jianghong Li,* Maryann Abbott,* Michelle Corbett,* Evelyn Baez,* Mary Prince,* Jennifer Salonia,* Laurie Sylla,† Elsie Vasquez,* Michelle Garner,* Julia Dickson-Gomez**

* The Institute for Community Research, Hartford, CT

† Yale University, New Haven, CT

** Wisconsin Medical College, Madison, WI

Women and HIV Risk: The Need for Female Initiated Prevention

- Increasing numbers of women are infected with HIV through heterosexual contact.
- Women need access to effective and acceptable methods of protection that are in their control.

The Female Condom (FC)

- The FC is the only female initiated prevention tool currently available on the market.
- The FC has proven as effective as the male condom in preventing pregnancy and STIs when used consistently and correctly.
- Studies show high FC acceptability in various populations globally. However, FC use remains low.

Research Aims

- To examine personal, network and sexual relationship factors that affect initial and sustained use of the FC for HIV/STI prevention among high-risk women in an urban U.S. context
- To examine initial and sustained FC use after removing the immediate barriers of FC knowledge, skills, and access

Research Methods

- Longitudinal cohort study** of sustained FC use among 500 high risk women exploring sexual behavior, drug use, HIV risk, locus of control, self-efficacy, relationship dynamics, FC knowledge, attitudes, and use
- Partners' FC trial** with 35 couples exploring current and past relationships, decision-making, sexual behavior, and FC experiences through in-depth interviews at baseline and 10-months and a 2-week trial using the FC
- Repeated community assessment** at 6 month intervals exploring community FC availability and changes over time
- Clinical health care providers' supplement:** Exploration of clinical support for and promotion of FC with patients in public and private clinical settings, and health care provider attitudes regarding FC



Cohort Study Sample Characteristics at Baseline

(n = 401 as of September, 2007)

- Mean age 39.5
- 11.4% HIV+
- 56.9%, African American
- 8.7% HIV+ partner
- 29.2% Hispanic/Latino
- 20.5% Hepatitis C
- 14.0% White/Other
- 35.9% Crack user
- 56.9% Single
- 7.2% IDU
- 87.3% Unemployed
- 9.5% IDU partner
- 26.7% Homeless
- 6.2% Sex worker

Male Condom (MC) Use in Last 30 Days

	With: Primary Partners (n=359)	Casual Partners (n=68)	Paying Partners (n=25)
No MC use	50.7%	27.9%	16%
Inconsistent MC use	19.8%	5.9%	24%
Consistent MC use	29.5%	66.2%	60%

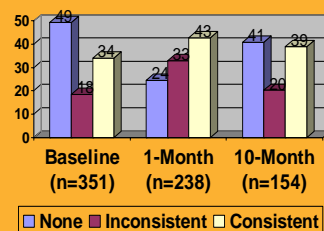
FC Awareness and Stage of Use at Baseline

- 76.8% had seen FC prior to baseline
- 39% had ever used FC during sex
- 62.3% had never thought about using FC
- 19.2% thought about or got FC but didn't use it
- 4.5% tried FC but decided not to use it again
- 7.5% used FC occasionally as a back up
- 2.7% used FC regularly
- 3.7% used FC as a primary prevention method

FC Users at Baseline

- Compared with non-users, FC users were more likely to have or suspect having an IDU primary partner (7.3% vs. 20.8%, p<.01) and be separated or divorced (13.0% vs. 26.8%, p<.05)
- FC users were less likely to be single (58.6% vs. 46.4%) or married/living together (25.8% vs. 19.6%)
- There were no statistical differences in age, race/ethnicity, income, employment, education, homelessness, substance use, or partner HIV status among FC users and non-users

Changes in Protected Sex with Primary Partner in Last 30 Days*



* Total sample at each time point.

Study Results

(Women who completed 3 time point surveys, n=189)

Increased FC Knowledge

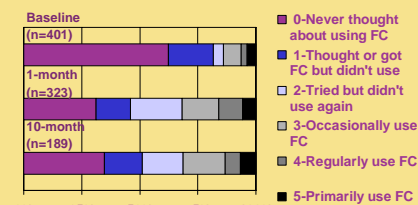
- Participant's FC knowledge scores increased from .766 at baseline to .867 at 1-month and .858 at 10-month surveys (p>.001).

Self Efficacy*

- Overall perceived FC efficacy increased with primary partners from baseline to 1-month (p>.001) and even further by 10-months (p>.001).
- Confidence in remembering to use FC with primary partner when high increased from baseline to 10-months (p>.05).
- Confidence in using FC with casual partners decreased from baseline to 10-month, though not significantly.

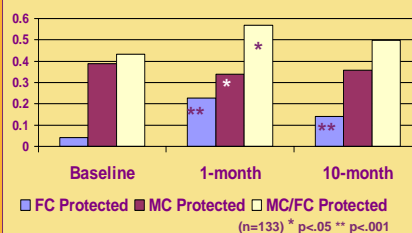
* Confidence she could: talk to partner about FC, refuse sex without FC, talk partner into using FC, when high talk partner into using FC, when high remember to use FC, when really turned on put on FC before sex.

Changes in Stage of FC Use



- Mean stage of FC use score increased from .96 at baseline to 1.71 at 1-month and 1.72 at 10-months (p<.01), indicating increased FC adoption in the study population

Changes in FC and MC use with Primary Partner



- FC protected sex with primary partners increased from .042 at baseline to .228 at 1-month (p<.05) and was still high at .140 at 10-month (p<.001).
- MC use decreased significantly at 1-month (p<.05), but total protected sex increased from .432 at baseline to .569 at 1-month (p<.05) resulting from increased FC use.
- Total protected sex at 10-month was higher than at baseline, though the difference was not significant.

FC Availability in Hartford, CT

- Repeated assessments were conducted in 49 Hartford locations: 16 pharmacies, 14 health/service orgs, 6 clinics, 5 HIV program/ service orgs and 3 adult retail outlets. All sites either had MC or it was available upon request.
- 25.6% of locations visited carried FC at least during one visit, including:
 - 6 health/service organizations
 - 2 HIV service organizations
 - 1 clinic
 - 2 pharmacies
 - 2 adult entertainment retailers
- FC are nearly unavailable for purchase in Hartford and difficult to find for free.
- Service organizations have FC and staff able to instruct on proper use, but staff hours and availability are limited.
- FC became increasingly less evident and available over the study period both for purchase and for free.

Summary of Findings

Female condom is NOT for everybody BUT...

- With access and knowledge, some women quickly adopt them.
- Some couples prefer FC over MC.
- Support from clinicians and providers is the greatest barrier to access, information, and support for FC use for women in need of it.

The FC is an effective option and with community support can become a viable alternative for more women and men at risk.

Recommendations

- Increase Female Condom Awareness**
 - Educate colleagues and peers
 - Discuss personal HIV vulnerability/risk
 - Distribute or leave out FC and brochures
 - Emphasize FC as dual protection method
 - Present FC as part of "method mix"
 - involve men!!
- Increase Female Condom Ability**
 - Become skilled in FC use and promotion
 - Know how to troubleshoot
 - Demonstrate proper FC use
 - Include instructions for use with FC
 - Emphasize practice and patience
 - Train clients in effective communication and negotiation skills
- Increase Female Condom Access**
 - Provide free or subsidized FC
 - Advocate for wider public & private sector distribution

We Need Everyone On Board!