A Network Intervention Is Feasible To Implement and Promote the Female Condom among Ethnically-Diverse U.S. Women

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Background: HIV among Women

• Globally, women account for almost half of 33 million people now living with HIV.
• In the United States, women represented 27% of the estimated 544,749 adults and adolescents living with HIV/AIDS at the end of 2007.

Background: Female Condom

• The female condom is the only female-controlled barrier method currently available to protect women from HIV.
• The original female condom, FC1, is made of polyurethane.
• FC2 is a new second generation female condom made of synthetic nitrile.
• FC2 has the same design and instructions for use as FC1.
• FC2 is cheaper to produce than FC1.

Background: Network-based Interventions

• Network-based interventions have been successful in modifying HIV-related risk behaviors.
• However, few HIV prevention approaches have targeted women’s social networks to promote the female condom.

Research Objectives

• To design a condom promotion network intervention
• To test the feasibility of implementing and assessing this intervention with U.S. women and their social networks.

Methods: Recruitment

• We recruited, as Female Condom Advocates, 13 women (6 African American, 3 Asian, 1 Latina, 3 Caucasian) in San Francisco during October - November 2007 who were:
  - at least 18 years old
  - willing to promote female condoms to their social network members over three months, and
  - willing to recruit these members for assessment.
• These 13 Advocates were asked to recruit women within their social networks (up to 7 per Advocate).
Methods: Assessments

- Outcome evaluation: Female Condom Advocates’ Recruits completed questionnaires at baseline and three months.
- Process evaluation: Female Condom Advocates completed three monthly check-in calls for their intervention implementation activities.

Methods: Female Condom Advocate Training

- Attended a three-hour individual training session on:
  - Female condoms
  - Effective communication skills
  - How to promote female condoms to social network members
- Instructed to promote female condoms over three months by:
  - Having an initial Female Condom Education (FCE) session in either an individual or group format
  - Having 3 subsequent monthly follow-up sessions
  - Distributing male and female condom supplies

Methods: Monetary Incentives

- Female Condom Advocates:
  - $10 for each Recruit (Max = $70 for 7 Recruits)
  - $50 for attending a 3-hour training session
  - $50 for implementing an initial FCE session
  - $10 for each follow-up conversation with Recruits ($30 per Recruit; Max = $210 for 7 Recruits)
- Female Condom Advocates’ Recruits:
  - $30 for baseline assessments
  - $50 for follow-up assessments

Results: Recruitment & Retention

- The 13 Female Condom Advocates recruited 59 eligible women from their social networks (4.5 per Advocate).
- Of 59 Recruits, 54 (92%) returned for follow-up assessments.

Results: Sample Characteristics

- Study participants were ethnically diverse.
- The mean age of participants was 28 years.
- They were mostly never married.
- A majority were college educated.

Results: Network Intervention Implementation (1)

- Female Condom Advocates held an initial Female Condom Education (FCE) session with 48 (81%) of the 59 Recruits.
  - an average of 66 minutes per FCE session
  - 29% individually and 71% in groups
- The Advocates reported having a total of 195 follow-up conversations with their Recruits
  - 56% of 59 Recruits in Month 1
  - 67% of 59 Recruits in Month 2
  - 83% of 59 Recruits in Month 3
Results: Network Intervention Implementation (2)

- Almost all of the Female Condom Advocates (92%) reported being “very” or “extremely” confident with the level of training received during the Female Condom Advocate Training.
- A majority of the Advocates reported little (58%) or moderate (25%) difficulty in scheduling the FCE sessions with their Recruits; only two (17%) had a “very” or “extremely” difficult scheduling problem.
- No Advocates reported any difficulties in conducting the FCE sessions.

Results: Recruits’ Satisfaction with the Intervention

- Four out of five Recruits (80%) rated the FEC session as “extremely” or “very” useful.
- An overwhelming majority of Recruits (86%) rated their Advocate to be “extremely” or “very” effective in encouraging them to use the female condom.
- More than four out of five Recruits (83%) reported that they would be interested in working as a Female Condom Advocate if the opportunity presented itself in the future.

Results: Female and Male Condom Use and Unprotected Sex Acts

Conclusions

- Our pilot study found that:
  - Implementing the female condom education network intervention was feasible among women.
  - This network intervention increased female condom use.
  - It also reduced unprotected sex acts without lowering male condom use.
  - Female condoms supplemented (not replaced) male condom use, so that higher levels of protected sex were obtained.
- Future randomized clinical trials should evaluate the efficacy of this intervention with a larger sample of women who are at risk for HIV.