

Trust Is Principal Barrier to Condom Use

KEY WORDS: HIV/AIDS; condoms; social marketing; determinants

WASHINGTON, DC — Population Services International researchers have found that trust in one's partner is the main reason for not using condoms with a marital or regular partner in Africa, and dislike of condoms is the most important reason for not using them with a casual partner, in what is apparently the first multi-country study of barriers to condom use.

Price and lack of availability of condoms historically have been barriers to condom use. However, condom promotion, including through social marketing, appears to have overcome these barriers according to the survey entitled "Reasons for Non-Use of Condoms in Eight Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa" by Sohail Agha, Thankian Kusanthan, Kim Longfield, Megan Klein and John Berman.

The objective of the survey was to determine the barriers to condom use by sexually experienced males and females. PSI used data from sample surveys conducted in Luanda, Angola; urban Cameroon; Eritrea; Kenya; urban Mozambique; Butare, Rwanda; urban Zambia and Zimbabwe between 1999 and 2001.

Introduction

Despite levels of HIV prevalence as high as 40% in certain African countries, condom use is much less than the level needed to reverse the epidemic. For example, only 6-9 billion condoms were actually used in sub-Saharan Africa in 1999 instead of the estimated 24 billion that were needed to protect all sexually active people.

There are various explanations for this "condom gap" ranging from lack of supply or access to condoms to lack of demand due to psychological factors and the stigma attached to condom use. Although numerous studies have looked at determinants of condom use in individual countries, PSI is not aware of any multi-country studies that have quantified the reasons for not using condoms.

Background

The perceived risk of getting infected with HIV is an important factor in deciding whether or not to use a condom. Individuals judge their risk of getting HIV from a partner and, based on their assessment, decide whether or not to use a condom.

Stigma are frequently attached to condom use because condoms are often associated with casual sex and multiple partners. Furthermore, they can imply lack of commitment and emotional distance.

Unequal power between partners may enable one partner to reject the desire of the other partner to use condoms. Many women in developing countries depend on the economic support provided by men. Moreover, sex for money or favors can become important at times in the life of a woman. The ability of a woman to negotiate condom use in such circumstances can be limited. It is also important to note that women themselves sometimes oppose condom use for a variety of reasons.

Other negative associations can also create barriers to condom use — dislike of condoms because they reduce sensation and spontaneity affect an individual's disposition to condom use.

Finally, condom availability and access can influence whether a person uses condoms. During the last 10 years, social marketing organizations and the public sector have increased substantially the availability of condoms in developing countries largely as a response to the AIDS epidemic.

Data and Methods

The survey instruments used in this study were based on a model questionnaire developed by the Research Department of PSI. An earlier version of the questionnaire was based on the

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instrument used for the World Health Organization Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Behavior Survey (1995). The survey gathered data on socio-demographic characteristics, sexual behavior, condom use and AIDS awareness in each of the countries between 1999 and 2001. In all countries the sample included both men and women. In four countries the sample ranged in age from 15-49, in three countries the sample ranged from 15-24 and in one (Eritrea) from 17-50.

Results

1. With marital partners

Both males and females reported low levels of condom use in last marital sex act, ranging from 1-3% (Eritrea) to 18-21% (Angola) and 11-22% (Cameroon).

For females, the two most frequently reported reasons for not using a condom were trust of their partner (Eritrea, Rwanda and Zimbabwe) and dislike of condoms (Angola, Cameroon and Zambia). The third most frequently cited reason was partner objection in all countries except Rwanda.

For males, trusting one's partner was the most commonly cited reason for not using a condom in all countries (between 47% and 73%). Not liking condoms was the second most important reason in all countries. The third most frequently cited reason was not having a condom on hand at the time of sex (Angola and Cameroon) and partner objection (Zambia and Zimbabwe).

2. With regular (non-marital) partners

For both males and females, condom use with a regular (non-marital) partner was much higher than condom use with a marital partner, and varied between 26% and 59% for women and 35% and 74% for men.

In the majority of countries, females were most likely to report trusting one's partner as the reason for not using a condom with a regular partner. Between 20% and 77% of females reported trust as a reason for not using a condom. Dislike of condoms was the most frequently cited reason for not using a condom by females in Angola (37%) and Zambia (29%).

With the exception of Angola, males most frequently cited trust in their partner as a reason for not using a condom (between 29% and 74%). Dislike of condoms was the most important reason for not using a condom in Angola. Dislike of condoms was the second most important reason in Cameroon, Eritrea and Kenya. Not having a condom on hand at the time of sex was important in Rwanda (25%) and Angola (18%).

3. With casual partners

About 28% to 49% of females and about 41% to 60% of males reported condom use in last sex with a casual partner.

Females in Angola (38%) and Cameroon (28%) were most likely to cite not liking condoms as a reason for not using condoms with casual partners. Females in Mozambique cited trusting their casual partner as the top reason for not using a condom (43%) and dislike of condoms (25%) as the second most important reason. In Angola and Cameroon, the second most frequently cited reason was not having a condom at hand at the time of sex.

Males in Angola, Cameroon and Kenya most frequently cited their dislike of condoms as the reason for not using a condom in last sex with a casual partner (between 28% and 33%). Trust of one's partner was the most frequently cited reason in Mozambique (34%) and was cited by 18% to 24% of respondents in other countries. Dislike of condoms was the second most frequently cited reason (27%) in Mozambique. Not having a condom at hand was the second most commonly cited reason in Angola (23%) and Cameroon (21%).

Conclusion

This multi-country study confirmed what had already been found in individual country studies — that demand factors are now more significant in determining whether an individual will use a condom than supply factors. However, this study shed new light on the degree to which various reasons given for not using condoms create barriers to condom use.

In most countries, respondents most frequently reported trusting their partner as the reason they did not use a condom with a marital or regular partner. In Mozambique, this was even true with casual partners. These findings show how important personal risk perceptions are in determining condom use in stable relationships.

This study confirmed previous studies that have shown that perceived condom attributes — the belief that condoms reduce pleasure, increase dryness and result in a loss of spontaneity — create important barriers to condom use.

The spontaneous nature of non-marital sexual encounters appears to be another important barrier to condom use. However, the lack of availability of condoms was not seen as a significant barrier to condom use.

The study concludes: "The lack of perceived risk of acquiring HIV appears to be one of the most important barriers to the use of condoms. The survey concluded that behavior change campaigns that encourage personal risk assessment should be complemented with marketing campaigns that emphasize the positive attributes of condoms."

A full copy of Working Paper No. 49 entitled "Reasons for Non-Use of Condoms in Eight Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa" can be ordered from PSI by mail or through the PSI web site at www.psi.org. Click on "Resources," then "PSI Research."