

## **PC39 Managing male partners: women's dilemmas about overt & covert use of new barrier methods for HIV prevention**

**Catherine MacPhail, Fern Terris-Prestholt, Lilani Kumaranayake, Prudence Ngoako, Helen Rees, Charlotte Watts**

### **ABSTRACT TEXT**

#### **Background:**

Internationally there has been a drive to develop HIV barrier methods that women can initiate and use without their partners' consent. Despite this, participants in microbicide and diaphragm studies have usually informed their partners of their participation and use of such methods. Qualitative work has indicated that women are more interested in a discrete method, than the ability to use methods covertly. We conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with urban South African women to explore their dilemmas around using women's barrier methods for HIV prevention with or without informing their partners.

#### **Methodology:**

Four topics around preferences for barrier methods and their distribution were discussed by younger (18-29 years) and older (30-50 years) women in Eastern Johannesburg. The FGDs each had 10-15 participants and were held in participants' home languages. Participants were recruited from townships with varying sociodemographic characteristics. Analysis of FGD transcripts was conducted in Atlas.TI using framework analysis.

#### **Results:**

Women discussed strategies for using condoms in different relationships, access to barrier methods, attitudes towards new barrier methods and messages for promoting them. The covert use of barrier methods was raised by women in all discussion groups. Attitudes towards covert use ranged through complete secrecy; providing men with inaccurate or incomplete information; disclosure of use after the fact; and full disclosure of barrier method use. In most instances women indicated that if their partner refused to use barrier methods or was the type of person with whom such a discussion was impossible, they would continue to use barrier methods secretly. However, they acknowledged that women who are discovered having covertly used barrier methods are likely to face serious consequences from her partner including physical violence.

#### **Conclusion:**

Many women had experienced difficulties with using HIV and pregnancy prevention methods with their partners. The ability to covertly use these methods was seen as a great advantage and a strategy that women would pursue if their partners were not amenable to barrier method use. However, the consequences of either not using a barrier method or being discovered using one places women in a serious dilemma.

**Dr Catherine MacPhail:** Reproductive Health And HIV Research Unit, c.mcphail@rhru.jhb.co.za, tel +27 11 989 9204, fax +27 11 989 9224 / 9294, PO Bertsham 2013, JOHANNESBURG, 2013, SOUTH AFRICA