

Poster Exhibition Topic: Microbicides

TUPEC009 - Feasibility and acceptability of cervical barriers among vulnerable youth: a pilot study in Zimbabwe

A. van der Straten<sup>1</sup>, N. Sahin-Hodoglugil<sup>2</sup>, S. Mtetwa<sup>3</sup>, K. Clouse<sup>1</sup>, T. Chirenje<sup>3</sup>, V. Nyambo<sup>3</sup>, Z. Chirenje<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of California San Francisco, OBGYN, San Francisco, United States, <sup>2</sup>University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, United States, <sup>3</sup>UZ-UCSF collaborative research programme, Harare, Zimbabwe

**Objectives:** In Africa, young women are at great HIV risk and female controlled methods (FCM) are urgently needed. We conducted an exploratory study of three cervical barriers (CB) (Ortho All Flex<sup>®</sup> diaphragm, FemCap cervical cap and SILCS<sup>®</sup> diaphragm) among 47 sexually experienced youth in Zimbabwe.

**Methods:** Female youth (16-21) participated in focus group discussions (FGD) to assess their HIV risk perception and attitude towards cervical barrier (CB) for HIV prevention. Two weeks later youth received an interview and practiced insertion of one of the three randomly assigned CB.

**Results:** Median age was 19, median age at first sex was 17, 55% had children, 70% had a husband/regular partner. While 84% and 71% were "very worried" about getting HIV and pregnant, respectively, 38% never used condoms and 32% used no contraception. None had used diaphragms. At follow-up, all were willing and able to insert/remove their assigned device. The majority reported "easy" insertion/removal and 93% "liked" the device they tried. All showed interest in participating in future studies: 58% favoured using SILCS<sup>®</sup>, 22% FemCap, and 20% Ortho All Flex<sup>®</sup>. Potential barriers towards CB use were low, e.g. only 13% agreed that "it feels awkward to touch your genitals to insert a CB"; 2% agreed that "CB are messy"; while 24% said the need for a pelvic exam would make them unable to use CB. These findings were confirmed by FGD, where some of the salient issues included high HIV risk environment mostly due to male partners, low female control, and high interest in a FCM for both HIV and pregnancy prevention.

**Conclusions:** CB were popular, and SILCS<sup>®</sup> was the preferred device by the majority of participants. Evaluating these methods in larger studies seems feasible as all youth were willing to practice insertion and stated their interest to participate in future studies. Presenting author email: [avdstraten@globalhealth.ucsf.edu](mailto:avdstraten@globalhealth.ucsf.edu)