

Microbicide Acceptability: What We Know

**Elizabeth McGrory
Population Council**

May 12, 2002

50 YEARS
1952-2002
Population Council

Questions...

- **Would individuals use microbicides if they were available?**
- **Who would be the primary users of such a product?**
- **How would individual preferences and practices affect use?**
- **How could microbicides be positioned to minimize stigma and maximize use?**

Why is acceptability important?

User controlled method

**Effectiveness depends on active choice to use it
each time**

Healthy people

Prevention

Evidence from Market Surveys

- **Surveys among urban women in 11 countries: substantial interest in purchasing microbicides, sufficient to justify further product development**
 - **68% of Kenyan and 58% of Brazilian women were willing to pay twice as much for a microbicide than a condom**
- **Survey among sexually active women 15 – 44 in US: 21.3 million women interested in using a microbicide**

Who would use Microbicides?

Sex workers (prostitutes)?

Single women?

Steady partners?

Adolescents?

Gay men?

The Special Problem of Primary Partnerships

Globally, the majority of women contract HIV or STIs from a steady rather than a casual or paying partner

Consistent condom use difficult to achieve in stable relationships

few interventions have achieved consistent use in more than 25% of couples

Substantial Research Base on User Needs and Preferences

- **Formulation preferences: Zimbabwe, Thailand, Cote d'Ivoire, and New York City ***
- **Acceptability of candidate products: US, India, and South Africa***
- **Drug-involved women: 3 US states***
- **Low risk women: Belgium and UK***
- **Gay men in the US***
- **Rural women and men in Uganda**
- **Men in Mexico, US, and Zimbabwe**
- **Women in US: Birmingham, St. Louis, Paramus, Portland**

***included product use**

Findings from Acceptability Research and Clinical Trials

- **Overwhelming interest among women in wide range of settings**
- **Individual women within and between cultures express different preferences for product formulation and other characteristics**
- **Women's hypothetical preferences don't correlate well with preferences based on product use**

...Findings...

- **Safety and effectiveness are most important – excessive “messiness” a deterrent**
- **Concerns about long-term side effects, especially on fertility**
- **Effect on sexual pleasure important: implications for introduction, promotion, marketing**
- **For some women, contraceptive effect of condoms major deterrent to their use: important to develop both contraceptive and non-contraceptive microbicides**

Findings: Men

- **Generally supportive of concept**
- **Acknowledge need, BUT**
- **Few see need for “their” women to use such products**
- **Women should inform partners**

Covert Use

“Covert use” early premise of microbicide development

Research suggests that ability to use clandestinely may be less critical than we once thought

- Important for some women**
- May not be feasible with some products**

Most women would likely tell their partner

- afraid to risk (“what if he found out”)**
- want partners involved**

“Negotiating” Microbicides

“Passive acquiescence” vs. “active involvement”

- Doesn’t require active involvement of men**
- Could be “negotiated” once by informing partner**
- Could be inserted prior to sex**
- Allows skin to skin intimacy**
- Can enhance pleasure**

Cultural Practices: Assets or Barriers?

Concerns frequently raised about “cultural” practices

- “Women won’t touch themselves”**
- Preferences and practices for “dry sex”**

Often overly pessimistic

- Intra-vaginal practices and use of vaginal products common in many parts of the world**
- Preliminary response of women in “dry sex” regions has been positive**

Cultural Practices: Assets or Barriers?

Reinforces importance of treating other STDs and educating men and women about natural vaginal discharge

Important to test assumptions about what is “culturally acceptable” with actual product use

Positioning for Success

Avoid stigma of condom

Consider positioning as a product to:

- **enhance pleasure**
- **promote “vaginal health”**
- **protect fertility over the long term**

Key concepts

- ***Enhanced pleasure -- Added protection***
- ***Insert as part of your healthy routine***
- ***Freshness, Security, Fun***

Looking Ahead

Continue research on user perspectives, especially with actual product use

- Clinical trials**
- Acceptability studies**

Explore range of issues related to introduction, e.g.

- How to position**
- Where to distribute/sell and implications**
- Provider and other “gatekeeper” perspectives**
- How to describe key concepts to providers and users**