Partner Violence May Reduce Female-Initiated HIV Prevention

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Women who suffer violence at the hands of their male partners are less inclined to use condoms or diaphragms, aidsmap reports. Publishing their findings in the online edition of the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes, a team of international researchers conducted a 24-month longitudinal study of 4,505 women in the Methods for Improving Reproductive Health in Africa (MIRA) study. The women were recruited in South Africa and Zimbabwe between 2003 and 2006.

The participants were randomly divided into three groups, receiving diaphragms, or condoms or lubricant and condoms. The investigators interviewed the women at the beginning of the study and at the 12- and 24-month marks.

A total of 55 percent of the women reported male partner violence during at least one of the follow-up interviews. Forty-one percent of the women reported fearing partner violence, 34 percent said they had suffered emotional abuse from their partner, 16 percent reported physical assault, and 15 percent reported forced sex.

The researchers found that partner violence increased the likelihood that women would not use condoms by 47 percent and increased the chances that they would not use diaphragms by 24 percent.

The study's authors fear that this apparent link between partner violence and reduced diaphragm use may spell trouble for the future effectiveness of female-centered HIV prevention techniques. For example, the international research community has put significant effort behind research to develop vaginal microbicides as a method for women—especially those in Africa—to protect themselves discretely against the virus without the fear of a male partner's objections or reprisals.

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