

## Acceptability and use of female condoms among young people in South Africa

Nomsa Mahlalela and Pranitha Maharaj

A growing body of literature indicates that South Africa has a high HIV prevalence and continues to have the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world. High levels of unwanted pregnancy also remain a huge public health concern among young women in South Africa. The study aimed to explore the factors facilitating and inhibiting female condom use among female university students in South Africa. This qualitative study drew on 15 individual, in-depth interviews with female university students in Durban, South Africa. The results of the study highlight several factors that facilitate and inhibit female condom use. Protection from sexually transmitted infections (including HIV/AIDS) and prevention of pregnancy facilitated use of the device among female students. In addition, students expressed positive attitudes towards the female condom and preferred it to hormonal contraceptives because it offered them dual protection. Absence of side effects and greater power and autonomy to initiate safer sex were other factors that facilitated use. Inadequate availability, partner objection, stigma, insertion difficulties and lack of awareness served as significant barriers to consistent female condom use. Although the female condom can protect female students from infections and pregnancy, there are several barriers to its use. Interventions should aim to increase availability of the female condom, and male involvement should be increased to facilitate consistent use of the method.