

INTRODUCTION

HPTN 071 (PopART) is a 3-arm, community-randomized trial of a combination HIV prevention package within 21 communities in Zambia and South Africa. Since condom use is one of the most effective HIV/STI prevention strategies, an integral part of the prevention package is to provide condoms to households in the communities.

In sub-Saharan Africa, standard condoms are available at health facilities for no cost, but uptake is low and community members perceive them to be of inferior quality compared to branded condoms.

Our objective was to understand condom preferences of participants in 8 intervention study communities within Zambia.



Photo: Flavoured and textured condoms and gel-based lubricant

METHODS

Participants were offered condoms at all household visits from December 2013. Those who accepted were given a package that contained a mix of mostly standard government male condoms (Giulin Zizhu Latex Co Ltd) and a few female condoms (fc2®). Beginning in June 2015, this package additionally included lubricant packets (Optilube®) and a variety of alternative, branded male condoms of different flavours, textures, and scents (Moods®). We collected data on individual condom preferences from all participants living in the 8 intervention communities from July 2016-November 2017, and recorded which participants accepted condoms during household visits. Data from participants aged 15 years and older were analysed using STATA 13.1.



Photo: A Community HIV Prevention Provider (CHIP) distributes condoms to a community in Zambia

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in 60 participants aged 15 years and older per community to find reasons for individuals' preferred type of condom.

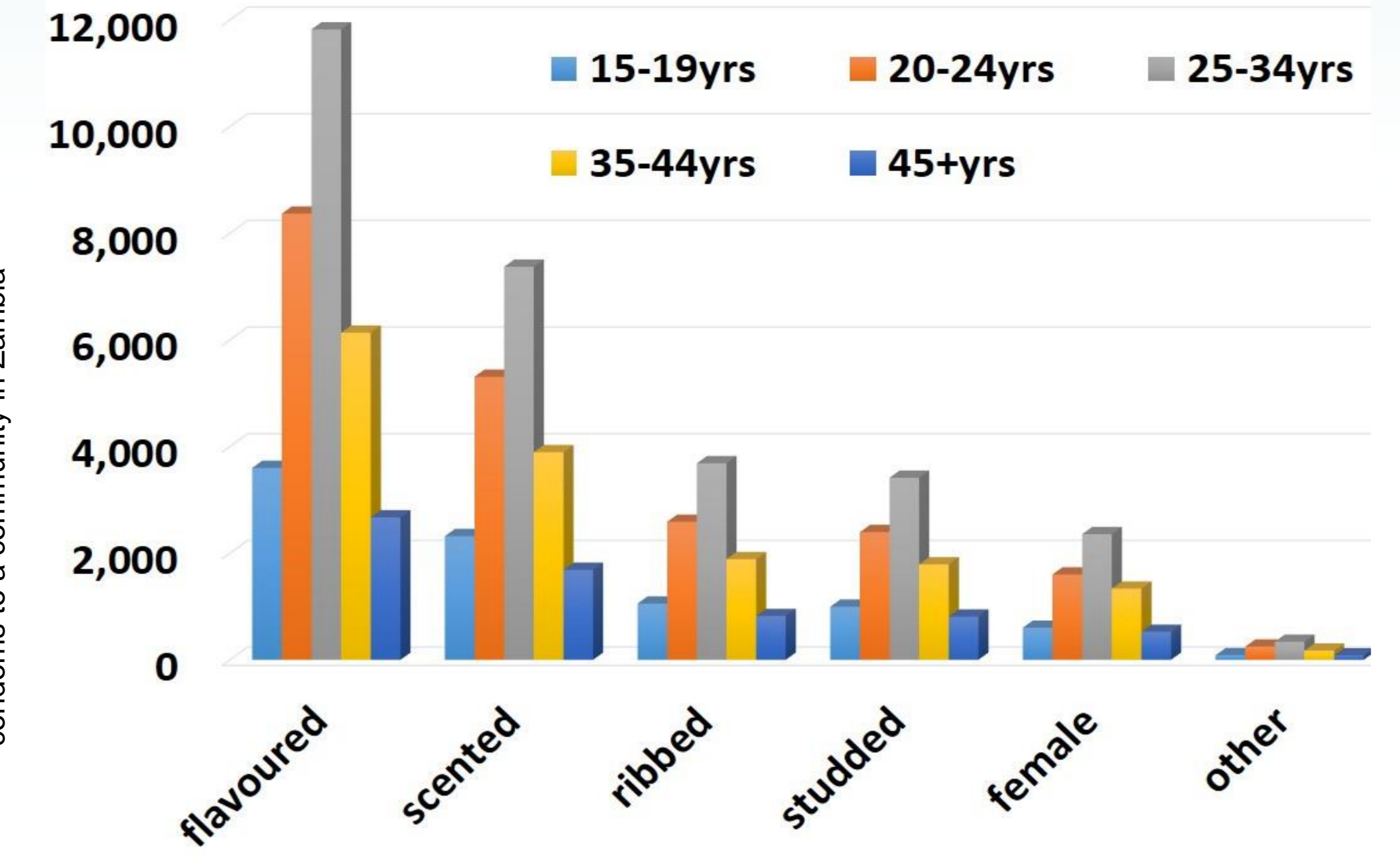
RESULTS

- Overall, 24% of participants accepted a condom package.
- More participants who tested HIV+ (35%) or self-reported HIV+ (38%) accepted male condoms compared to those who tested HIV negative (23%) or refused to test (14%) [Data not shown].
- Flavoured and scented condoms preferred, especially by younger people (15-34 yrs) [Figure 1].
- More women (12.8%) expressed a preference for female condoms compared to men (2%), among those accepting condoms.
- Providing alternative condoms might have increased condom acceptance by 61% in young women (15-19yrs) [Table 1].
- Branded male condoms "felt like skin to skin" were "light and strong" and "had a good smell" vs standard government male condoms.

TABLE 1. Alternative condoms and acceptance (N=191,226)

Age (years)	Total (N %)	Accepted standard male condoms (row%) [A]	Did not accept standard male condoms but would have accepted alternate condoms (row%) [B]	Accepted standard condoms + would have accepted alternate condoms (row%) [B + C]	%Difference providing alternative condoms might have made in condom acceptance [B]/[A] *100
Men					
15-19	14,450 (19.0)	3,082 (21.3)	1,220 (8.4)	4,302 (29.8)	39.6
20-24	16,018 (8.4)	6,227 (38.9)	2,390 (14.9)	8,617 (53.8)	38.4
25-34	20,822 (27.4)	7,552 (36.3)	3,285 (15.8)	10,837 (52.0)	43.5
35-44	12,718 (16.8)	4,048 (31.8)	1,898 (14.9)	5,946 (46.8)	46.9
>45	11,904 (15.7)	2,262 (19.0)	1,004 (8.4)	3,266 (27.4)	44.4
Subtotal men	75,913				
Women					
15-19	20,084 (17.4)	1,833 (9.1)	1,126 (5.6)	2,959 (14.7)	61.4
20-24	25,823 (22.4)	5,253 (20.3)	2,616 (10.1)	7,869 (30.4)	49.8
25-34	34,033 (29.5)	8,349 (24.5)	3,995 (11.7)	12,344 (36.3)	47.9
35-44	18,188 (15.8)	4,328 (23.8)	1,867 (10.3)	6,195 (34.1)	43.1
>45	17,186 (14.9)	1,388 (8.1)	637 (3.7)	2,025 (11.8)	45.9
Subtotal women	115,314				

FIGURE 1: Preferences for alternative condoms among age groups (N=48,804)



CONCLUSION

Future programs and governments should consider providing free flavoured, scented, and female condoms to encourage condom use. Research should be conducted on whether receiving branded male condoms and lubricant has an impact on condom usage among community members.

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