

# Female Condom Use among Female Sex Workers in Iran in 2015

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## Background

Female sex workers (FSWs) are one of the key populations affected by sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS (1, 2). Female condom (FC) is an alternative female-initiated method for FSWs to reduce the transmission of HIV and STIs when their partners refuse to use a male condom. The fact that uptake of this device could be initiated by women and that can be inserted hours before sexual intercourse could reduce sexual spontaneity to a large extent (3, 4). FC uptake among FSWs in Iran has been understudied. We aimed to evaluate the prevalence and reasons of female condom use in a national survey of FSWs conducted in 2015.

## Methods

In 2015, a sample of 1337 (1185 from facility and another 152 from venues by outreach) FSWs who aged  $\geq 18$  years and reported selling sex to more than one male client in the past 12 months were recruited from 21 sites in 13 cities.

Behavioral data was collected through face-to-face interviews and FSWs were asked about their interest in and practices of female condoms. Data was analyzed through survey analysis.

## Results

The median age of participants was 35.0 years (IQR: 29.0, 41.0).

### Female condom use

Overall, 69.20% (95%CI: 58.9, 77.9) had ever heard about female condoms and only 15.60% (95%CI: 12.4, 19.5) had ever used one. Also only 5.00% (95%CI: 3.7, 6.8) reported using a female condom in the past month (Figure 1).

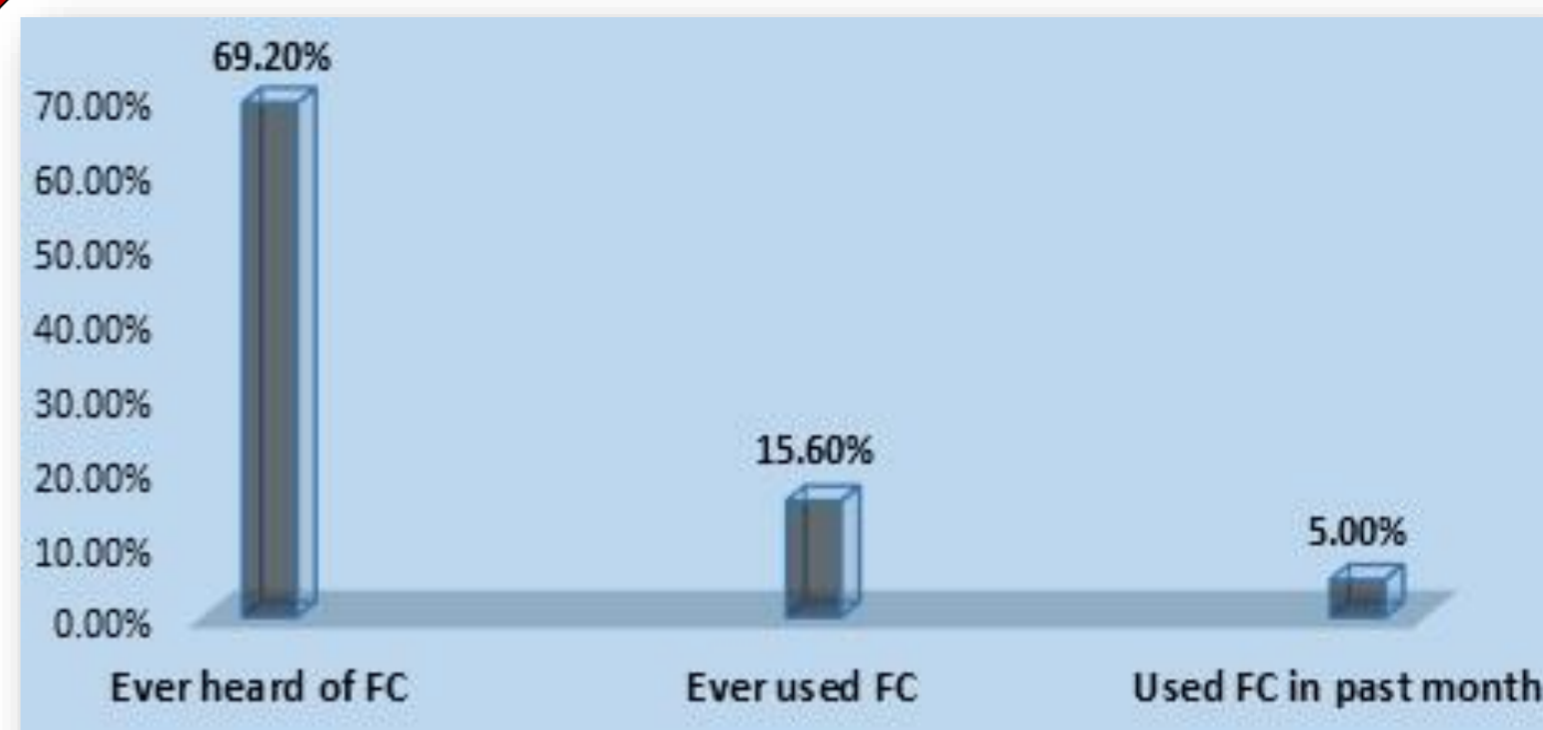


Figure 1. Ever used FC, Ever heard FC and FC use in past Month among FSWs in 2015

Of those who reported no male condom use in their last sex with clients, only 2.40% (95%CI: 1.2, 4.7) reported occasional female condom use in the past month. This was slightly higher 3.40% (95%CI: 1.8, 6.6) for non-paying partners. (Figure 2)

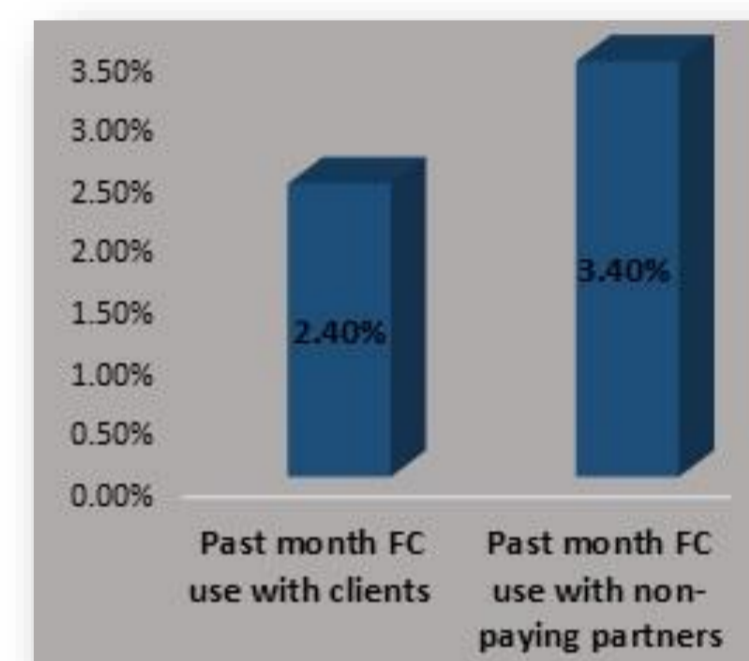


Figure 2. Past Month FC use among FSWs who reported no male condom use in their last sex in 2015

### Reasons for liking or not liking female condoms

Out of those who had ever used a female condom, 49.8% (95%CI: 41.5, 58.0) mentioned that they liked it because it can be used regardless of partners' desire (58.0%); is more lubricative than male condoms (30.0%); and is less likely to break or slip (29.0%).

Those who did not like female condom reported difficulty to insert (81.4%), discomfort (25.5%), and clients' disinterest (20.6%) as main reasons.

## Conclusions

While a considerable number of FSWs are aware of female condom use as an option, the proportion of those ever used one remains low. Since half of FSWs who have used a female condom expressed their interest in it, increasing their skills to use female condom in occasions where male condom is not negotiable, could reduce the risk of HIV/STIs among this key population.

## References

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