



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 27 Nov 2006

World AIDS Day: *The Lancet* explores the link between sexual pleasure, condoms and HIV

Evidence that 'sexing up' condoms could slow the spread of disease

LONDON – The 2 Dec issue of *The Lancet* will explore evidence that a sexier, more pleasure-focused approach to promoting male and female condoms could increase safer sex practices and lower rates of sexually transmitted infections worldwide.

As World AIDS Day is commemorated on 1 Dec, “Promoting protection and pleasure: amplifying the effectiveness of barriers against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy” will expose how pleasure – and even sex itself – has been conspicuously absent from much of the dialogue surrounding the spread of HIV. The authors will argue that, since pursuit of pleasure is one of the main reasons that people have sex, pleasure must be addressed when trying to motivate people to use condoms and to participate in safer sexual behaviour.

Among the evidence that will be cited is a study from Kenya, in which researchers concluded that men who pay for sex do so mainly because they enjoy sex, and many men do not find the male condom pleasurable. The authors state that, “Since demand for condoms is low, partly because they are thought to diminish sexual pleasure, then exclusive emphasis on negative messages such as disease control in condom promotion ... is likely to have limited success.” This view is supported by findings of a study of men from Bangladesh, which concludes that “aspects of masculine sexuality, pleasure, eroticism, and emotion must be addressed if condoms are to be promoted effectively.”

The authors – Anne Philpott of The Pleasure Project and the UK Department for International Development, Dermot Maher of the World Health Organization, and Wendy Knerr of The Pleasure Project – say that eroticising male and female condoms, and avoiding fear-based safer sex messaging, is key to making safer sex more attractive and therefore more widely practiced. This is being done in isolated instances throughout the world, particularly in places with very high rates of HIV infection. For example, the authors cite a successful condom promotion campaign in Cambodia, where male condoms were packaged with water-based sexual lubricant, and the combination promoted as a way to increase pleasure and make sex safer. The authors also cite numerous examples of how the female condom has been promoted as an erotic accessory to positive effect.

“Sexworkers reported charging more money for sex with the female condom than without it,” report the authors. “In an acceptability study, more than 90% of condom users claimed to like the female condom very much, with nearly 60% saying that their clients liked it and were excited to watch its insertion.” In Madagascar, the article states,

women using the female condom became aroused and, as a result, had an increase in vaginal lubrication – sometimes for the first time in their lives. And in Andhra Pradesh, India, the noise made by the female condom during sexual intercourse was eroticised when female sexworkers told clients that it only made that sound when they were “doing it right”.

The authors argue that resources are urgently needed for research into the effectiveness of public-health campaigns that market the positive, pleasure-related benefits of male and female condom use.

Read the article online starting 2 Dec 2006 at www.thelancet.com, or contact The Pleasure Project (info@the-pleasure-project.org) for more information.

Press release ends

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Notes to editors:

The Pleasure Project (TPP) is an educational organisation that promotes pleasurable safer sex and builds bridges between the pleasure/sex industry and the safer sex world. TPP provides sexual health training and materials, helping sexual health educators to become more comfortable talking about sex and pleasure, particularly in resource-poor areas in Africa and Asia. TPP also promotes erotica and porn that depict safer sex. www.thepleasureproject.org