

Strategies and methods of HIV prevention among Malaysian women: a literature review

ABSTRACT

Background: The scale and intensity of HIV epidemic among women worldwide and in Malaysia is increasing at an alarming rate. Their difference in vulnerability, coupled with the heightened risk of heterosexual transmission demands specific preventive strategies for controlling HIV epidemic among women. This article reviews the strategies and methods of HIV prevention which may be used for women, specifically within the Malaysian context.

Materials and Methods: A literature search in the Medline database through Ovid SP and ProQuest Central was undertaken with the aim to identify published articles on HIV prevention among women. Additional information was gathered from published and unpublished reports, government policy documents and surveillance data from the Ministry of Health, Malaysia.

Result: Various strategies of HIV prevention have been researched and applied within a range of female populations worldwide. These strategies can be divided broadly into behavioural changes and biomedical strategies. While the most available, affordable and accessible method remains the male condom, the application of condoms is technically not under women's control. An alternative to this in the form of female-controlled methods are currently being researched. While their practical application has not reached women in general, the potential of female-controlled methods as alternative methods for empowering women and putting women in control of their risk of being exposed to the HIV virus is overwhelming.

Conclusion: The biological and contextual factors that pose a great challenge in preventing HIV among women demands a broad array of preventive strategies to halt the increasing epidemic in this vulnerable group. It is hoped that some of the female-controlled methods will be available for use among high-risk women in Malaysia in the near future.

Keyword: HIV prevention; Women; Malaysia; Female-controlled methods