Reviewer’s report

Title: Protocol for a systematic review: understanding the motivations and barriers to uptake and use of female-initiated, primary biomedical HIV prevention technologies in sub-Saharan Africa.

Version: 1  Date: 11 June 2015

Reviewer: Rivet Rivet Amico

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Protocol for a systematic review: Understanding the motivations and barriers to uptake and use of female-initiated, primary biomedical HIV prevention technologies in sub-Saharan Africa

This well written protocol describes a timely and comprehensive project to forward a nuanced understanding of factors identified in the literature and across literature that influence biomedical prevention in sub-Saharan Africa. Hypotheses are not specified, however the objectives are clearly stated and the team’s ability to synthesize findings appropriately are similarly clear. The plan is articulated, steps identified, and methods to analyze and synthesize based on demonstrated approaches. Moreover, the planned project takes advantage of a growing qualitative literature focused on experiences in clinical trials of biomedical agents. The results of this project will provide valuable insights that will be of high interest to research, practice and policy communities.

Minor comments are included below. The only major concern from this reviewer’s perspective is the potential confounding of the meaning and experiences of women with biomedical agents provided in the context of placebo-controlled or safety trials (e.g., placebo controlled or open-label with messaging on lack of known efficacy) and those that would characterize actual, known to be effective, open-label biomedical prevention use. The targeted tools for the review include both known effective and technically available strategies (PEP, diaphragms, female condoms) and strategies not yet approved as available for the general public in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., microbicides, PrEP). I and others have written on the need to remain aware of differences between one’s uptake and use of a research-product and a product that is available and effective in the community, which is increasingly borne out in the emerging literature, as noted by the authors in the background. However, the recognition does not filter into the objectives or strategies. The research team should prepare for speaking to both phenomenon. They are exceptionally well positioned to do so given their expertise and methodology for analyzing the literature. Consider positioning the objectives in terms of being able to speak to factors that would likely influence real world and in-research uptake and use, and those would be considered unique to each context.

Minor Comments:
Background- typo- “...it difficult for them to [do] so covertly.”
Background- Update citation 19 now that it is available from CROI 2015.
Anticipated limitations and Bias- Consider adding in the model from which the team operates. For example, what is guiding ‘deciding what is relevant’.

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no competing interests