

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CHEMIST SHOPS  
ON THE LAND TRANSPORTATION ROUTES  
FROM NAUBISE TO JANAKPUR AND BIRGUNJ**

(WITH REFERENCE TO STD HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF STD CLIENTS)



Submitted to:

AIDS Control and Prevention Project (AIDSCAP)  
Family Health International  
Ramshah Path  
Kathmandu, Nepal

Submitted by:

New ERA  
P.O. Box 722  
Maharajgunj, Kathmandu  
Nepal

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*New ERA Study Team*

## STUDY TEAM

- |     |                             |                                    |
|-----|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Mr. Shibesh Chandra Regmi   | Project Director/Rural Sociologist |
| 2.  | Mr. Ashoke Shrestha         | Project Associate/Demographer      |
| 3.  | Dr. Aruna Uprety            | Resource Person (Physician)        |
| 4.  | Mr. Pushpa Lal Moktan       | Research Officer                   |
| 5.  | Mr. Sita Ram Neupane        | Sr. Research Assistant             |
| 6.  | Mr. Ajit Thapa              | Field Supervisor                   |
| 7.  | Ms. Sharita Vaidya          | Sr. Computer Operator              |
| 9.  | Mr. Sanu Raja Shakya        | Word Processor                     |
| 10. | Mr. Rajendra Kumar Shrestha | Office Assistant                   |

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## 1. Introduction

Although AIDS was first recognized internationally in 1981, it was first identified in 1988 in Nepal. At present the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Nepal is believed to be at a relatively early stage as compared to many other countries. In this context, the Chief of the National Center for AIDS and STD Control Project (Nepal) states, "The situation offers, therefore, a unique opportunity to support and undertake preventive activities before the disease reaches an epidemic stage in the country" (Baker, Devkota and Gurubaracharya 1993). WHO/GPA estimated that between 1000 and 5000 persons were infected with HIV in Nepal in 1992. It is encouraging to note that many agencies, including HMG/N, international NGOs and national NGOs are actively participating to tackle this terrifying public health menace in Nepal. Various epidemiological evidences suggest that the principal mode of HIV/AIDS transmission in Nepal is via heterosexual contacts with commercial sex workers followed by intravenous drug use (Suvedi, Shrestha and Gurubacharya 1992). A recent research assessment (Cox and Subedi 1994) examined the relationship between commercial sex and the potential spread of HIV/AIDS in five urban areas in the Tarai of Nepal. This formative research study has helped AIDSCAP to design appropriate HIV/AIDS prevention activities targeted at commercial sex workers and their clients. In this context, the AIDSCAP Program intends to launch selected interventions in more important settlements along the highways linking Janakpur and Birgunj to Kathmandu<sup>1</sup>. The three major interventions planned are:

1. increasing the quality and accessibility of STD treatment,
2. providing outreach communication programs to commercial sex workers and their clients, and
3. making condoms accessible through retail and non-traditional outlets and promoting their use through mass media campaigns.

The AIDSCAP/Nepal strategy, to improve the accessibility and quality of STD service delivery, will work to ensure access to effective STD services at the first point of encounter with service providers. The AIDSCAP project is collaborating with Nepal Medical Association to develop and deliver STD Case Management training for private physicians. AIDSCAP also plans to work with Nepal Chemists and Druggists Association to strengthen the role of chemists and alternative health care providers as prevention educators and condom promoters in the prevention and control of STD/HIV/AIDS to customers at risk.

In many areas in Nepal there is an inadequate supply of government-managed services providing STD care. As a result, the majority of information on STD care and service delivery is disbursed through the private sector through both private clinics and pharmacies. In some communities, chemist shops provide services as both medical stores and private clinics. Chemist shops are usually accessible and offer quick services to customers.

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- 1 *It is important to note that this land route forms part of the East West Highway and therefore receives much higher traffic.*

To assist AIDSCAP in the final design of the chemist intervention it was necessary to conduct a qualitative survey of chemist shops located along the primary transport routes from Naubise to Janakpur and Birgunj to learn more about the quantity and quality of services provided by chemist shops and chemists to STD customers. The broad objective of this study was to assess the magnitude and types of STD patients seeking services from chemist shops, the counselling and dispensing practices of chemists, and the quantity of condoms sold to STD clients. The study will serve as baseline data and a base for planning, implementing and evaluating AIDSCAP interventions to improve the quality of STD services, and information and educational messages provided by chemist shops.

## **2. Methodology**

As stated in the terms-of-reference, a total of 21 chemist shops from 17 small towns or municipalities on the routes from Naubise to Janakpur and Birgunj were selected for the study (Figure 2.1). The chemist shops were selected during the reconnaissance survey using the following criteria:

- a. one of the large stores in the area;
- b. a large proportion of the clients visit the store in the area; and
- c. willingness to participate in the project related to AIDS.

From each chemist shop, maximum two staff members, who were the primary dispensers of medications were interviewed. Out of the two staff members, interviewers were asked to select the one who had received medical or paramedical training and the other, who works in the chemist shop when the former is away from the pharmacy.

Altogether 34 chemists were interviewed from the 21 chemist shops of the 17 selected small towns or municipalities on the routes from Naubise to Janakpur and Birgunj (see Annex, Table 1).

## **3. Characteristics of the Chemist Shops**

On the basis of the health training received by the respondents they were grouped into three categories: trained health personnel which included medical officer/doctor, health assistant, auxiliary health assistant, and auxiliary nurse midwife; semi-trained health personnel that included paramedical personnel or quacks<sup>2</sup>, medical lab technician; and untrained store clerks. Out of the 34 respondents, 13 were trained health personnel, eight semi-trained and 13 untrained personnel (see Table 3.1).

As regards the sex of the respondents, all but two were males. Of the two females one was auxiliary nurse midwife, and the other was a store clerk.

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<sup>2</sup> *Most of the paramedical personnel or quacks had their certificates or diplomas from commercial medical institutes of India. The recognition of these certificates are oftenly questionable.*

Figure 2.1 :

Table 3.1 : Types of the Persons Operating the Chemist Shops

Types of Person	Number of Chemists
<b>A. Trained Health Personnel</b>	
1. Medical Officer/Doctor	4
2. Health Assistant	1
3. Auxiliary Health Worker (AHW)	7
4. Auxiliary Nurse Mid-wife	1
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<b>B. Semi-trained Health Personnel</b>	13
1. Paramedical Personnel/Quack	7
2. Medical Lab Technician	1
	---
<b>C. Untrained Persons</b>	8
1. Store Clerk	13
<b>Total:</b>	<b>34</b>

Thirteen out of the 21 chemist shops were members of the Nepal Chemist and Druggist Association (NCDA). Twenty personnel were interviewed from those 13 shops, of whom nine reported that they themselves had taken the 21 days NCDA orientation course, and seven said that some one else in the shop had taken that course. Among the nine respondents within NCDA orientation, three persons each represented the three categories, trained, semi-trained, and untrained ones (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 : Types of the Persons Operating the Chemist Shops by Twenty-one Days Basic Orientation Course

Types of the Persons Operating the Chemist Shops	Twenty one Days Basic Orientation Course Taken		
	Yes	No	Other Person has Taken
Trained health personnel	3	1	3
Semi-trained health personnel	3	1	2
Untrained persons	3	2	2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>

A physical examination was possible at 12 chemist shops of which 10 shops were operated by at least one trained health person. The detail breakdown of the types of the persons operating the chemist shops who reported that the physical examination facility was available in their shop has been presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Types of the Persons Operating the Chemist Shops Reporting the Availability of Physical Examination Facility to Examine the Visiting Patients

Types of the Persons Operating the Chemist Shops	Number of Chemist Shops with Physical Examination Facility to Examine the Visiting Patients
Trained health personnel only	3
Trained + semi-trained health personnel	3
Trained + untrained personnel	4
Untrained persons only	2
Total:	12

The chemists were enquired about the opening hours of their store which varied from summer to winter. In the summer, most of the chemist shops (19) served 12-15 hours every day as they open their stores between 6 am and 7 am and close it (16) between 7 pm and 9 pm. However, in the winter, the service hours of the chemist shops may decrease to 10-12 hours. As regards their weekly service, all but one chemist shop remain open throughout the week. The exceptional one closes its store on Saturdays.

#### 4. Volume of STD Customers Visiting the Chemist Shops

An average of 10 STD clients were served by a chemist in the last month, ranging from two to 70. The majority of them (65%) served one to 10 STD clients (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 : Number of STD Clients Served per Respondent in the Last Month

Number of STD Clients Served	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	2	5.9
1 - 10	22	64.7
11 - 20	8	23.5
More than 20	2	5.9

Total = 327 Average = 9.62 Range = 2-70	34	100.0
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Among the 327 STD clients served by the 21 chemist shops in the last month, 40 percent were women (see Annex, Table 2). The number of STD clients served by a chemist was four on average, ranging from 0-44. The majority of them (56%) served one to five women STD clients, while 27 percent served none (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Number of Women STD Clients Served per Respondent in the Last Month

Number of Women STD Clients Served by a Chemist	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	9	26.5
1 - 5	19	55.9
6 - 10	5	14.7
More than 10	1	2.9
Total = 134 Average = 4.00 Range = 0-44	34	100.0

When asked about the number of STD clients who visited the chemist shops with doctor's prescription in the last month, the majority of the respondents (68%) said none, while six of them (18%) mentioned two (see Annex, Table 3). The most of the chemists (77%) also mentioned that they did not serve any STD clients who asked for a specific drug or injection in the last month (see Annex, Table 4).

## 5. Types of STDs, Their Treatments, and Counselling to STD Patients

Because of the sensitivity involved in the discussion of STDs and the socio-cultural setting of the country, the STD patients hesitate to tell their problems openly to anyone including medical personnel. In most cases, the STD patients visit the chemist shops or clinics only when they realize that the disease cannot be treated by themselves without consulting medical personnel. A chemist served nine clients with STD symptoms on average in the last month. The number of such clients ranged from 0 to 60 (see Annex, Table 5).

Altogether, 295 clients visited the chemist shops with complaints of genital discharge and genital sores in the last month. While 67 percent of the clients complained of genital discharge, the remaining 33 percent complained of genital sores (see Annex, Tables 6 and 7).

A variety of quinolones and penicillins were dispensed for STD treatment. Forty-one percent of the chemists dispensed norfloxacin, 35 percent dispensed alkalizing agents and 11 percent dispensed penicillin injection to the clients that complained of genital discharge (Table 5.1). On the other hand, the drugs often dispensed to clients that complained of genital sores were antiseptic ointment (44%), penicillin injection (21%), norfloxacin (18%), ampicillin (18%), and ciprofloxacin (15%) (Table 5.2).

Table 5.1 : Drugs Often Dispensed to Clients That Complain of Genital Discharge

Drugs Often Dispensed to Clients That Complain of Genital Discharge	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents*
norfloxacin	14	41.2
alkalizing agents	12	35.3
penicillin injection	11	32.4
ampicillin	5	14.7
ciprofloxacin	4	11.8
amoxicillin	4	11.8
dryxocycline	3	8.8
ethromycin	2	5.9
tetracycline	2	5.9

\* The total percentage adds up to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 5.2 : Drugs Often Dispensed to Clients That Complain of Genital Sores

Drugs Often Dispensed to Clients That Complain of Genital Sores	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents*
antiseptic ointment	15	44.1
penicillin injection	7	20.6
norfloxacin	6	17.6
ampicillin	6	17.6
ciprofloxacin	5	14.7
tetracycline	3	8.8
soframycine	2	5.9

\* The total percentage adds up to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

When asked about the bases followed to recommend drugs to STD clients, the vast

majority of the chemists (94%) said that they decided on the basis of complaints reported by STD clients. The other bases were inspection of the signs (50%) and clients' ability to pay (32%) (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 : Bases Followed to Recommend Drugs to STD Clients

Bases Followed to Recommend Drugs to STD Clients	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents*
Complaints reported by the STD clients	32	94.1
Inspection of the signs	17	50.0
Clients' ability to pay	11	32.4

\* The total percentage adds up to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

It is believed that people are increasingly being aware of STD, and hence, before or after they have a sexual contact with commercial sex workers they look for prevention (prophylaxis). An average of three clients, requesting pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis were served by a chemist in the last month, which ranged from 0 to 30. The majority of the chemists (59%) served one to 10 clients in question (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 : Number of Clients Requesting Pre and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis in the Last Month

Number of Clients Requesting Pre and Post Exposure Prophylaxis in the Last Month	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	12	35.3
1 - 10	20	58.8
More than 10	2	5.9
Total = 106 Average = 3.12 Range = 0 - 30	34	100.0

The majority of the chemists (71%) recommended the use of condom for the pre-exposure (before contact) prophylaxis while 24 percent of them reported that they did not know what to prescribe for it (see Annex, Table 8). On the other hand, 44 percent of the chemists said that they did not know about the post-exposure (after contact) prophylaxis while 21 percent advised to wash genitals with Dettol or soap, and about the same proportion of chemists recommended penicillin injection (see Annex, Table 9).

Thirty-five percent of the chemists reported that less than 50 percent of their STD clients bought the full treatment regimen recommended. The proportion of the chemists who reported that more than half of their STD clients and about half of their STD clients bought the full treatment regimen recommended was about one-third in each case (see Annex, Table 10).

The majority of the chemists (71%) informed that the most common reason for not buying the full treatment was the poor economic condition of the STD clients. Similarly, about 41 percent of them cited lack of cash with the STD clients at that time and 32 percent of them said that the STD clients thought the full treatment was not necessary as the other major reasons for not buying the full treatment recommended (see Annex, Table 11).

A little less than three-fifths (59%) of the STD clients spent between Rs. 100 and 200 and about one-third (32%) spent less than Rs. 100 for drugs at each episode of STD. The amount spent by all STD clients at such occasions was Rs. 152 on average (see Annex, Table 12).

Almost the half of the chemists said that they always advised the STD clients along with dispensing of drugs. The proportion of the chemists providing occasional advice and only when the clients asked for it was equal (21% in each case) (see Annex, Table 13). The advice basically included; use of condom (77%), not to visit CSWs (55%), information about the danger of AIDS (52%), taking all medicines as instructed (48%), necessity of treating the STD clients' partners, and not to have sex until the disease is completely cured (26%) (see Annex, Table 14).

## 6. Sales of Condoms

The average number of condoms sold by a chemist shop was 129 per week. Two brands of condom, Dhaal and Panther were sold by the chemist shops. On average, each chemist shop sold 95 Dhaal brand of condoms per week, and the number ranges from 0 to 264. Nearly one-third (33%) each of the chemist shops sold 0 to 50 and 51 to 100 Dhaal brand of condom per week and about 29 percent sold more than 150 Dhaal brand of condoms per week (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 : Number of Dhaal Brand of Condom Sold by a Chemist Shop in the Last Week

Number of Dhaal Brand of Condom	Number of	Percentage of
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Sold by a Respondent in the Last Week	Respondents	Respondents
0 - 50	7	33.3
51 - 100	7	33.3
101 - 150	1	4.8
More than 150	6	28.6
Average = 95.0 Range = 0-264	21	100.0

The average number of Panther brand of condoms sold by a chemist shop was 34 per week, and the number ranges from 0 to 123. The majority of the chemist shops (57%) reported of selling 0 to 30 panther brand of condoms per week while 23 percent reported of selling 61 to 90 panther brand of condoms per week (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Number of Panther Brand of Condoms Sold by a Chemist Shop in the Last Week

Number of Panther Brand of Condoms Sold by a Chemist Shop in the Last Week	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 - 30	12	57.1
31 - 60	3	14.3
61 - 90	5	23.3
More than 90	1	4.8
Average = 34.0 Range = 0-123	21	100.0

When asked about the percentage of STD clients who purchased STD drugs along with condoms, the majority of the chemists (77%) reported that the percentage of such STD clients was zero and 12 percent said that the percentage of such STD clients ranged from one to 10 percent in the last month (see Annex, Table 15).

As regards the number of women who purchased condoms, the great majority of chemists (77%) mentioned that their number was zero in the last month while about 21 percent of the chemists said that they served one to five such women in the last month (see Annex, Table 16).

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# **ANNEX**

## **Supplementary Tables**

Table 1 : Number of Chemists Interviewed from Various Chemist Shops by Location

Locations	Number of Chemist Shops	No. of Chemists Interviewed
1. Mahadev Beshi	1	2
2. Baireni	1	1
3. Adamghat	1	1
4. Gajuri	1	1
5. Malekhu	1	1
6. Benighat	1	1
7. Mugling	1	2
8. Ratna Nagar (Tandi)	1	2
9. Parsa (Khaireni)	1	2
10. Lothar	1	2
11. Manahari	1	2
12. Hetauda	3	6
13. Nijgadh	2	3
14. Chandra Nigahapur	1	2
15. Lalbandi	1	2
16. Bardibas	1	1
17. Dhalkebar	2	3
Total	21	34

Table 2 : Proportion of Women STD Clients Served by a Chemist Shop

Total Number of STD Clients Served by a Chemist Shop	Women STD Customers Served by a Chemist Shop	
	Number	Percentage
70	44	62.9
35	9	25.7
34	5	14.7
23	18	78.3
22	12	54.5
16	2	12.5
15	5	33.3
14	3	21.4
13	6	53.8
13	1	7.7
12	4	33.3
10	7	70.0
10	5	50.0
10	4	40.0
9	2	22.2
6	2	33.3
4	2	50.0
4	0	0.0
3	2	66.7
2	1	50.0
2	0	0.0
<b>Total = 327</b>	<b>Total = 134</b>	<b>40.1</b>

Table 3 : Number of STD Clients Who Visited the Chemist Shops with Doctor's Prescription in the Last Month

Number of the STD Clients Who Visited with Doctor's Prescription in the Last Month	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	23	67.6
1	3	8.8
2	6	17.7
4	2	5.9
Total = 23 Average = 0.68 Range = 0-4	34	100.0

Table 4 : Number of STD Clients Who Asked for a Specific Drug or Injection in the Last Month

Number of the STD Clients Who Asked for a Specific Drug or Injection in the Last Month	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	26	76.5
1 - 5	7	20.6
More than 5	1	2.9
Total = 26 Average = 0.76 Range = 0 - 10	34	100.0

Table 5: Number of STD Clients Who Said about Their Complaints to the Chemist in the Last Month

Number of the STD Clients Who Said about Their Complaints to the Chemists in the Last Month	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	2	5.9
1 - 10	25	73.5
11 - 20	6	17.6
More than 20	1	2.9
Total = 297 Average = 8.74 Range = 0 - 60	34	100.0

Table 6 : Number of STD Clients Who Complained of Genital Discharge in the Last Month

Number of the STD Clients Who Complained of Genital Discharge in the Last Month	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	3	8.8
1 - 10	25	73.5
11 - 20	5	14.7
More than 20	1	2.9
Total = 197 Average = 5.79 Range = 0-30	34	100.0

Table 7 : Number of STD Clients Who Complained of Genital Sores in the Last Month

Number of the STD Clients Who Complained of Genital Sore in the Last Month	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 (None)	11	32.4
1 - 10	22	64.7

More than 10	1	2.9
Total = 98 Average = 2.88 Range = 0-17	34	100.0

Table 8 : Most Popular Pre-Exposure (Before Contact) Prophylaxis

Most Popular Pre-Exposure (Before Contact) Prophylaxis	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents*
Use condoms	22	70.6
tetracycline	2	5.9
tentox forth	1	2.9
penicillin	1	2.9
Do not know	8	23.5

\* The total percentage adds up to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 9 : Most Popular Post-Exposure (After Contact) Prophylaxis

Most Popular Post-Exposure (After Contact) Prophylaxis	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents*
Wash genitals with Dettol or soap	7	20.6
penicillin injection	7	20.6
norfloxacin	3	8.8
tetracycline	3	8.8
ampicillin	1	2.9
antiseptic ointment	1	2.9
Do not know	15	44.1

\* The total percentage adds up to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 10 : Proportion of STD Clients Who Buy Full Treatment Regimen Recommended

Proportion of STD Clients Who Buy Full	Number of	Percentage of
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Treatment Regimen Recommended	Respondents	Respondents
More than 50%	11	32.4
50%	11	32.4
Less than 50%	12	35.3
Total:	34	100.0

Table 11 : Most Common Reasons for Not Buying the Full Treatment for STDs

Most Common Reasons for not Buying the Full Treatment	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents*
They cannot afford it	24	70.6
They do not have enough cash that time	14	41.2
They think full treatment is not necessary	11	32.4
They want to see if it works first	2	5.9
All of them buy full treatment	2	5.9

\* The total percentage adds up to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 12 : Amount Spent by STD Clients for Drugs at Each Episode of STD

Amount Spent by STD Clients for Drugs at Each Episode of STD	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Less than NRs. 100	11	32.4
NRs. 100 - 200	20	58.8
More than NRs.200	3	8.8
Average = NRs. 152.50	34	100.0

Range = 20-1000		
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Table 13 : Frequency of Advice Given by the Chemists to STD Clients in Addition to the Drugs

Frequency of Advice Given to the STD Clients by the Respondent in Addition to the Drugs	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Always	17	50.0
Sometimes	7	20.6
Never	3	8.8
Only when the clients ask	7	20.6
Total:	34	100.0

Table 14 : Types of Advice Given to STD Clients

Types of Advice Given to the STD Clients	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents*
Use condoms	26	76.5
Do not visit CSWs	17	54.8
Informed about the danger of AIDS	16	51.6
Take all medicines as instructed	15	48.4
STD clients' partners should also get treated	11	35.5
Do not have sex until client is cured	8	25.8

\* The total percentage adds up to more than 100 due to multiple responses.

Table 15 : Percentage of STD Clients Who Purchased Condoms Along with STD Drugs in

the Last Month

Percentage of STD Clients Who Purchase STD Drugs Simultaneously Purchase Condoms	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0	26	76.5
1 - 10%	4	11.7
11 - 20%	2	5.9
More than 20%	2	5.9
Total:	34	100.0

Table 16: Number of Women Who Purchased Condoms in the Last Month

Number of Women Who Purchased Condoms in the Last Month	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0	26	76.5
1 - 5	7	20.6
More than 5	1	2.9
Total = 25 Average = 0.74 Range = 0-10	34	100.0

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