

Leveraging Technology to Assess Pharmacy Professionals' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Related to HIV/STI and Potential to Improve Coverage of Key Populations in Southeast Asia

Authors: Candice Taguibao, Josselyn Neukom, Jaca Maison Lailo



Background

Pharmacies are one of the most accessible sources of health products and advice given their convenient opening hours, geographic proximity, simple walk-in procedures, and range of products stocked¹. As a result, pharmacies serve clients from a diverse range of demographic and socio-economic profiles, including key populations at risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (HIV/STI). In this context, SwipeRx², the largest digital network of pharmacy professionals in Southeast Asia, was used to understand knowledge, attitudes and practices related to HIV/STI among pharmacy professionals in Viet Nam and Thailand.

Methods

In 2020, with support from USAID Linkages and USAID SHIFT, SwipeRx mobile app was used to collect cross-sectional data from pharmacy professionals in Viet Nam and Thailand related to HIV/STI knowledge, attitudes and practices. Using convenience sampling, pharmacy professionals were encouraged to complete the digital survey through in-app messaging, SMS and email. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze survey data from both countries.

Results

- Total respondents: 282 Vietnam, 268 Thailand
- # weeks required for data collection : 3.5 weeks Vietnam, 6 weeks Thailand
- % pharmacists: 59% Vietnam, 74% Thailand
- % women: 59% Vietnam, 69% Thailand
- Median age of respondents: 30 years for both Vietnam and Thailand



Insight 1: Pharmacies are an important source of HIV/STI preventive and curative products in Southeast Asia. Among an average of 139 total clients visiting pharmacies in Viet Nam each day, on average, this includes:

- 19 clients purchasing condoms daily
- 13 clients purchasing STI medication daily



Insight 2: Pharmacy professionals have general knowledge about HIV/STI but are less knowledgeable about HIV transmission, PrEP prevention and oral swab rapid HIV tests. According to 2020 SwipeRx surveys:

- 88% of pharmacy professionals sampled in Thailand and 81% in Vietnam knew that HIV is curable.
- 59% of pharmacy professionals sampled in Viet Nam and 74% in Thailand were able to correctly identify the following HIV transmission modes: vaginal/anal intercourse, mother-child transmission, sharing injecting equipment.

- 18% of respondents in Thailand and 32% in Viet Nam were aware that an oral swab HIV test exists.
- Only half of pharmacy professionals sampled (49% in Thailand and 56% in Viet Nam) were aware of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and its ability to prevent HIV infection.



Insight 3: Pharmacy staff are interested in expanding the offering of STI/HIV products and services at their pharmacy, including referral of clients for more comprehensive HIV/STI care.

- 8 in 10 reported "agree" or "strongly agree" to being willing to provide HIV rapid-tests at their pharmacy in future (83% Viet Nam, 80% Thailand).
- 85% respondents in Viet Nam reported willingness to provide PrEP at their pharmacy in future.
- 81% of respondents in Viet Nam reported interest in digitally referring clients for HIV/STI diagnosis and treatment.



Insight 4: Stigma-related attitudes may limit pharmacy professionals' ability to provide client-centered counseling for clients at risk of HIV/STI, particularly in Viet Nam.

- Only 61% of the pharmacy professionals sampled in Viet Nam compared to 79% in Thailand "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement: "I am comfortable counseling my clients about HIV."
- 29% of pharmacy professionals sampled in Viet Nam, compared to 12% in Thailand, "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, "people with HIV brought it on themselves."



Conclusion

Digital surveys through SwipeRx can efficiently generate insights from pharmacies relevant to HIV/STI program goals in Southeast Asia. Results from two surveys deployed through SwipeRx in 2020 indicate knowledge and attitudinal barriers to HIV/STI care at the pharmacy. The surveys also indicate strong interest in offering HIV rapid tests at the pharmacy and participating in e-Referral programs in the future.

Disclaimer: The information described in this poster is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Linkages and SHIFT programs. The contents are the responsibility of SwipeRx and do not necessarily represent the views of USAID.