

Perceived Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and Public Health Implications of Risky Sexual Behaviour among Truck Drivers along Ijora Transport Corridor in Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the knowledge and attitudes of long-distance truck drivers toward HIV/AIDS at the Ijora loading point in Lagos, Nigeria. Given their mobile lifestyle and extended periods away from home, truck drivers are often exposed to high-risk sexual behaviours. A quantitative research design was employed, utilising a structured questionnaire distributed across four identified clusters, with a total of 240 respondents. Findings revealed that 45% of drivers maintained multiple wives along their routes, 37% engaged in casual sexual encounters, and 15% kept regular partners in different locations. Despite 95% reporting awareness about condoms, usage was low due to beliefs in the efficacy of traditional medicine (51%), reduced sexual satisfaction (10%), and trust in known partners (22%). Prolonged absence from home (up to 8 weeks) further exacerbated these practices. The study underscores a critical gap in the effectiveness of existing HIV prevention strategies, highlighting the persistence of cultural beliefs and misconceptions. It concludes that addressing these behavioural patterns is essential to reducing Nigeria's high HIV burden, particularly among mobile occupational groups like truck drivers.

Keywords

HIV/AIDS, truck drivers, sexual behaviour, condom use, risk perception

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Introduction

The global epidemic of HIV/AIDS poses a threat to reverse a generation's worth of human progress (Gori et al., 2020). By the end of 2023, there was an estimated 39.9 million HIV-positive individuals worldwide, with 65% of them living in Africa (Zouré et al., 2024). An estimated 1.3 million people contracted HIV in 2023, while 630,000 people died from HIV-related causes (Adhikary et al., 2025). With goals to detect 95% of individuals living with HIV, treat 95% of those diagnosed with antiretroviral therapy, and achieve viral suppression in 95% of those receiving treatment, the WHO hopes to end the HIV pandemic by 2030 (Saaka & Antabe, 2025; WHO, 2024).

The gravity of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its detrimental effects on people, families, and communities make it extremely difficult to achieve sustained socioeconomic development (Mark, 2024). Medical data continues to demonstrate the dynamics of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in many regions of Nigeria, indicating that this threat has not been eliminated (Basse & Miteu, 2023). Research advances have demonstrated that social and cultural factors have a role in HIV transmission and control (Obeagu & Obeagu, 2025). Studies conducted in the America, Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa have also consistently shown a link between the prevalence of HIV infections and people's lifestyles (Akinyemi et al., 2021). Given the low level of education, poverty, ignorance, and other obstacles that work against the adoption of innovations and behavioural change, this is particularly noticeable in developing countries like Nigeria (Ipinnaiye & Olaniyan, 2023).

The 2018 National Demographic Health Survey also found that Nigerians lacked a widespread understanding of the essential facts of HIV/AIDS, which is necessary to take preventive and care measures (Joseph et al., 2020; Udoh & Ushie, 2020). In addition, the United Nations Population Fund stated that, of the 1.5 billion young people around the globe, 11.8 million are expected to be living with HIV, placing young people at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in terms of infection rates and vulnerability (Rahyani, 2023). Garrett (2017) reported that between 5,000 and 6,000, young people (ages 15 to 24) get HIV every day, and many of them still don't know enough about how to avoid getting the virus. Knowledge is crucial when it comes to HIV education (Aggleton et al., 2018). However, research has also shown that there is a weak link between sexual behaviour and knowledge since people continue to engage in risky sexual behaviour even after learning about HIV/AIDS (Omoponle & Veronica, 2023).

The decline in life expectancy in Nigeria has been attributed to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Basse & Miteu, 2023). As of 2020, the estimated number of Nigerians living with an infection was 3.5 million, with a national prevalence rate of 4.4% (Nguyen et al., 2021). Although national rates have been used to describe the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, the epidemic's historical spread also indicates that international interactions are the primary cause of the disease's infection of the general population (Naik et al., 2020). In order to

combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic, timely, reliable, and multi-sectoral information on the illness must be provided (Mark, 2024; Naik et al., 2020). This stems from the fact that a successful HIV/AIDS education campaign has been found to require the ability to provide greater information to influence sexual behaviour in order to lower HIV infection and alter sexual behaviour (Mayer et al., 2021). However, past and current HIV/AIDS programmes have disseminated information and education via television and radio, and other basic prevention and intervention initiatives have persisted throughout Nigeria (Meherali et al., 2024). The premise behind the process of educating and providing information is that people would engage in safe sexual behaviour.

Truck drivers, especially those who drive long distances and are more susceptible to HIV/AIDS infection, are typical in this situation. They travel frequently, often spending months away from home (Blanco-Penedo et al., 2023; Adey et al., 2021). It means they must spend a lot of time away from home and then look for other ways to satisfy their sexual urges in order to feel less alone. Having unsafe sex with other crew members and commercial sex workers is not unusual. The number of visit to sex workers by the mobile population is correlated with their discretionary income when they are not at home, according to studies (Zhou et al., 2023; Siegel et al., 2022). A study in India found that truck drivers often engage in mindless sex under the influence of alcohol and opium, and up to 25% have AIDS or STDs (Pachauri et al., 2022). Truck drivers' ignorance of AIDS, sexual health, and the significant risk of HIV/AIDS transmission through risky sexual behaviour exacerbates this even more (Paul & Paul, 2020).

Similar to migration, the demands of long-distance driving have frequently caused spouses to be separated for short or extended periods, which has the tendency to increase the likelihood of having several sexual partners and is now a major contributing factor to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The prevalence of commercial sex in Nigeria is consistently high at the majority of locations used as stopovers by heavy truck drivers, suggesting that the drivers are likely to patronise these sex workers. In Nigeria, this group has not received the necessary attention regarding their attitude and level of awareness regarding this condition.

The question remains how far this medium of enlightenment has gone in ensuring that people are adequately informed and taking the advice being given for a positive sexual relationship. What is the state of the drivers' awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS? What is their sexual behaviour and attitude towards HIV/AIDS? What are the factors responsible for their attitudes towards HIV/AIDS? What are the public health implications of their attitude and general productivity? The answer to these lies with this study, which sets out to examine the perceived vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and public health

security implications of sexual risk behaviour among truck drivers along Ijora transport corridor, Lagos, Nigeria.

Material and Method

The respondents were heavy truck drivers operating within the Ijora Transport corridor in Lagos. Ijora is a busy and important area in Lagos State, serving as a key transit point that connects the Apapa port to the city and beyond. Because of this, it's a major route for heavy trucks carrying goods. However, the area often faces serious traffic jams, mainly because numerous container trucks pass through narrow roads that are sometimes poorly maintained. This creates significant safety risks on the roads. While measures like limiting truck movements to certain times of the day help reduce congestion, they don't solve the bigger problem of the constant stream of heavy vehicles.

For truck drivers, being on the road so much, often far from home and immersed in the busy, urban environment of Ijora, can lead to lifestyle choices that increase the likelihood of risky sexual behaviours. Understanding these behaviours is important because they have public health implications, especially when it comes to the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Carrying out research in Ijora offers a valuable chance to gather real evidence that can help design targeted programmes to improve the health and safety of these drivers, who are considered a high-risk group.

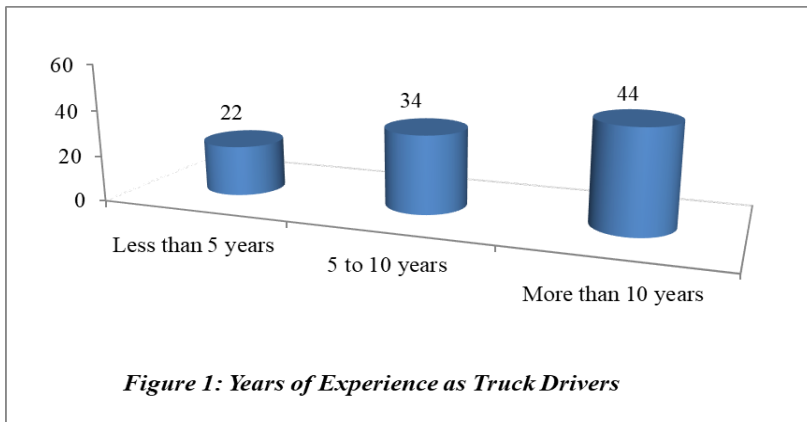
The sample size for the study population is 240. The questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. It consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. It was designed to collect demographic information and address issues pertaining to the focus of this study from the respondents. Initial survey of the study area revealed the existence of 5 major Parking/Loading Points for the heavy truck drivers in Ijora, Lagos. These points are: (a) Ijora Olopa/Dockyard road, (b) Marine Bridge, (c) Ijora Seven Up, (d) UBA area, and (e) Ijora Railway crossing. From each of these loading points, fifty (50) respondents were randomly sampled, making 250 respondents altogether. The drivers and their assistants were included in the study. Consideration was given to the eligible respondents who were willing and ready to take part in the study. At the end, only 240 copies of questionnaire were found worthy for analysis after data cleaning. The data generated for the study after the administration of questionnaire were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSSv30.0.0). The findings were illustrated and expressed in frequency and simple percentages.

Results and Discussion

Socio-characteristics of the Respondents

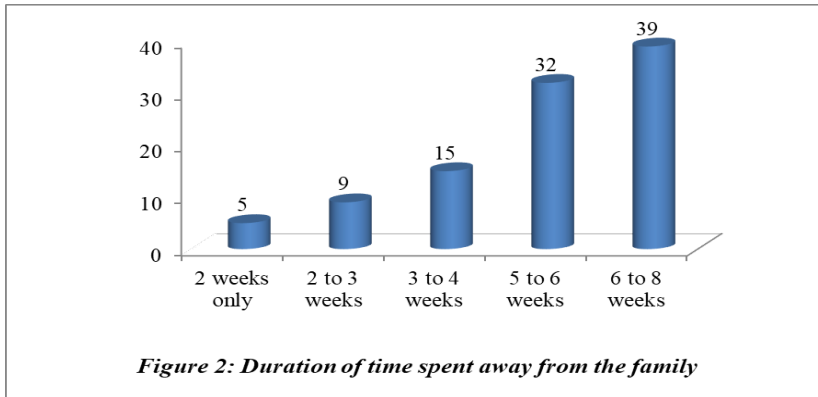
The entire study population in this work consisted of males. The focus and study population requirement of this study were the truck drivers. By the nature

of this profession, these drivers were predominantly males. Data revealed that the majority of the respondents (45%) fall within the age of 50 years and above, while those who are less than 30 years of age constituted 25%, followed by those between the ages of 30 and 50 years, which constituted about 30% of the study population. The educational background of the respondents revealed that 40% of them had primary education, 24% attempted secondary education, and 26% completed their secondary education. Marital status of the respondents revealed that single or unmarried constituted 18% of the respondents, and 82% of the respondents are married. The religious affiliations of the respondents were also taken into consideration. It was revealed that 39% of the respondents are Christians, 55% are Muslims, while 6% are African religion adherents. Income after every trip embarked upon by the respondents was also sought in the questionnaire, and it was revealed that 20% had between ₦20,000 and ₦30,000 as their income, while 34% of the respondents earned between ₦31,000 and ₦45,000. The study also revealed that 30% earned between ₦46,000 and ₦50,000, while 16% earned over ₦50,000. These amounts were the income accrued after deduction of the amount for personal upkeep.



Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 1 reveals that the majority of the respondents (44%) according to figure 1, have been in heavy truck driving profession for more than 10 years, others' experience on the job as heavy truck drivers ranged between 5 to 10 years (34%) and less than 5 years (22%).



Source: Field Survey, 2025

From Figure 2, it can be concluded that in the course of their job, most of the respondents always stayed away from home for as long as 6 to 8 weeks (39%) and 5 to 6 weeks (32%).

Attitude towards HIV/AIDS, Sexual Behaviour and Determining Factors

This focuses on respondents' knowledge and attitudes of HIV/AIDS; issues pertaining to their knowledge of this disease, behavioural approach towards the disease and related matters.

Table 1: Knowledge and Attitude of HIV/AIDS

Statement	Mean
I have heard of HIV/AIDS on the mass media	4.42
It is a common issue under discussion in Nigeria	4.04
HIV/AIDS is a disease that is contracted through sexual intercourse	4.30
I don't believe in what people say about HIV/AIDS	2.84
AIDS is a dangerous and killer disease	2.36
HIV/AIDS is easily contracted through interactions with people infected with this disease	3.52
HIV/AIDS is a disease noted as incurable by orthodox medicine, but curable through herbal remedies	3.68
HIV/AIDS is preventable through careful selection of sexual partners	4.32
God is not a wicked being; he created no incurable disease, so HIV/AIDS is not an exception	4.26
Persons infected with HIV/AIDS are easily identified through their physical appearance	3.50
HIV/AIDS is a tool for discouraging uncontrolled sexual activities	4.12
The polygamous family system remains the best solution to HIV/AIDS	4.42
With conflicting causes of HIV/AIDS, it remains an effective weapon being used to 'caution' every human being	4.14

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The table affirmed that the respondents have heard of HIV/AIDS on mass media, and that HIV/AIDS is a common issue under discussion in Nigeria. The data further stressed that HIV/AIDS is a disease that is contracted through sexual intercourse, and it also agreed with what people say about HIV/AIDS.

Surprisingly, some respondents did not agree with the assertion that AIDS is a dangerous and killer disease. It also revealed that HIV/AIDS is easily contracted through interactions with the persons infected with this disease; that HIV/AIDS is a disease noted as incurable by orthodox medicine but curable through herbal remedy; that HIV/AIDS is preventable through careful selection of sexual partners. According to the data from this study, the respondents asserted that God is not a wicked being; He created no incurable disease, so HIV/AIDS is not an exception. Persons infected with HIV/AIDS were revealed as easily identified through their physical appearance; that HIV/AIDS is a tool for discouraging uncontrolled sexual activities; that polygamous family system remains the best solution to HIV/AIDS and finally, that the conflicting causes of HIV/AIDS make it an effective weapon used to caution every human being.

Table 2: Management of Sexual Desire while on Duty

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Since I don't always travel far, I usually go back home if I feel like having sex	07	03.0
My work can take me anywhere in Africa; I have female friends in selected areas to effectively take care of my sexual needs	36	15.0
I married more than one wife and housed them at strategic places along my routes to take care of my sexual urges	108	45.0
I pick any girl I fancy at random since I have an effective antidote against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS	89	37.0
Total	240	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Since the nature of their profession requires constant travelling, inquiry into how they cope with the issue of sex revealed that some (45%) of the respondents married more than one wife and housed them at strategic places along their routes in order to take care of their sexual urges, 15% of the respondents have female friends in selected areas in order to handle their sexual needs effectively, 37% picked girls they fancied at random due to what they perceived as effective antidote against sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS. The remaining 3% claimed that they don't always travel far, hence the practice of returning home to their wives whenever they feel like having sex (see table 2).

Inference into the above findings revealed the practice of keeping intimate sexual partners. Further probing showed that only 3% of these respondents did

not have intimate sexual partners apart from the wives they legally got married to. The remaining respondents have sexual partners scattered all over the route of their operations as truck drivers. The study further revealed that 59% of the respondents have between 3 and 5 sexual partners, 24% have less than three sexual partners, while 17% have more than five sexual partners.

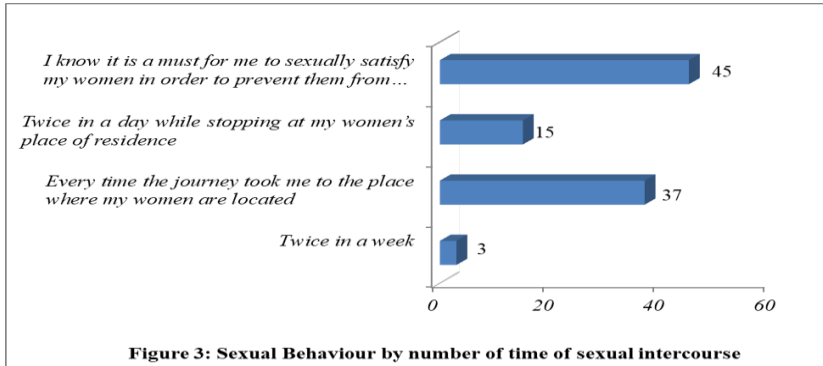


Figure 3: Sexual Behaviour by number of time of sexual intercourse

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 3 above shows that only a few (3%) respondents have sexual intercourse twice in a week, while the rest of them have sex every time the journey took them to the places where their sexual partners were located (37%). Sexual intercourse was twice a day for some respondents whenever they stopped at the places of residence of their sexual partners (15%). Others could not determine the number of times they had sex, but they knew that it was a must that these partners must be sexually satisfied whenever they had a stopover in order to prevent them from having affairs with other men (45%).

Awareness of Condoms and Their Usage

The majority of the respondents (95%) affirmed their awareness of what a condom is all about, while 5% did not respond to the question. A condom was variously described as the rubber prescribed for use during sexual intercourse to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

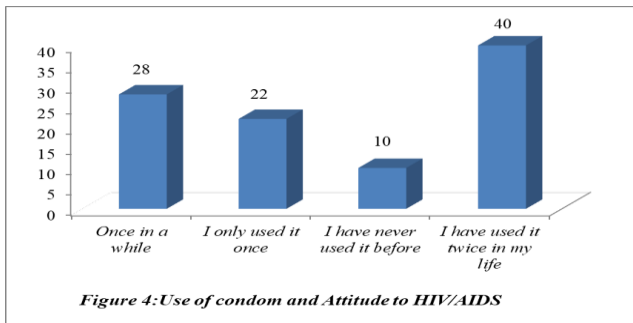
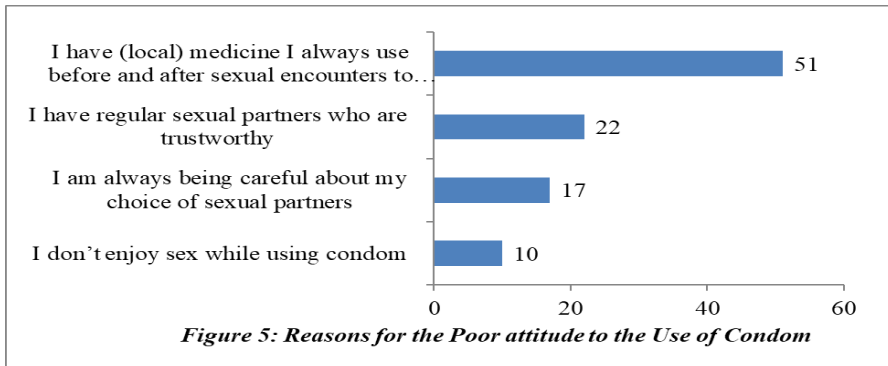


Figure 4: Use of condom and Attitude to HIV/AIDS

Source: Field Survey, 2025

In relation to their active involvement in sexual activities, especially with multiple partners, the opinion of the respondents was sought on their knowledge and usage of condoms while having sex. In their response, according to the data presented in Figure 4, all respondents affirmed that they know what a condom is. However, only 10% of the respondents have not used a condom before. The remaining 90% have utilised it before. The majority of the respondents (40%) claimed that they had used a condom twice, 28% made use of it once in a while, and 22% only used it once in their lifetime. Inference from the data in the figure showed that attitudes to the usage of condoms during sexual intercourse with multiple partners were poor. It was also an indication that usage was not regular on one hand, while on the other hand, its usage had been abandoned. The reasons behind this were illustrated in Figure 5.



Source: Field Survey, 2025

Condom was rarely used or utterly abandoned because the respondents believed that local medicine in their possession was potent enough to ward off problems like HIV/AIDS (51%), 10% of them were of the view that they don't enjoy sexual intercourse whenever they used condom, and 17% asserted that they were always being careful when selecting sexual partners. Others (22%) claimed to have regular sexual partners whom they trusted as being faithful (see figure 5).

Table 3: Attitude to Condom Usage and Possibility of HIV/AIDS Infection

Response	Frequency	Percentage
I don't see the possibility of my having such a disease	84	35.0
A condom is a waste of time	51	21.0
My partners may assume that I was labelling them as being unfaithful with the use of a condom	43	18.0
I can't stand the use of that rubber	24	10.0
I felt horrible the last time I used it, so I have stayed away from its use	38	16.0
Total	240	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

From Table 3, it is obvious that virtually all the respondents did not see any possibility that they could contract sexually related diseases or HIV/AIDS. This position largely points to their poor attitude toward the use of condoms. According to the data from this study, most of them (35%) do not believe in the possibility of their contracting HIV/AIDS while being sexually active with multiple partners without using condom, 21% believed that the use of condom while having sex was a waste of time, 16% revealed that they felt horribly bad the last time they used condom during sexual intercourse, 18% opined that their partners may perceived their usage of condom as lack of trust about their fidelity when condom is used during sexual intercourse. It means an outright disregard of the necessity of condom usage, which was further made obvious with the position of some respondents (10%) that they found it difficult to imagine their usage of the condom.

Implications of Findings for Positive Livelihood and Public Health Security

The study undoubtedly demonstrated that the study population was knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS. Their attitudes towards this disease were not encouraging, as most of them have a very active sexual life and kept multiple sexual partners. The respondents also believed that they are capable of managing themselves against the infection of this disease through caution in selecting sexual partners and reliance on the perceived faithfulness of their sexual partners. It was further revealed that these people believed in and relied on supernatural power as a means of protecting themselves against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. In spite of awareness of condoms and their prowess at curbing the possibility of contracting this disease, they have little interest in condoms and their usage during sexual intercourse. The study thus showed that a reasonable level of knowledge about disease does not automatically translate to attitudinal compliance for positive healthful living. In view of this, there is a high possibility of them having infections from sexual intercourse due to multiple partners and unprotected sex. It also indicated one

of the possible factors that made Nigeria the second highest burden of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa.

A situation of this nature may equally lead to total disregard for Voluntary Counselling and Testing for HIV and AIDS status. Absence of testing for HIV/AIDS status means inability to go for appropriate medical treatment. Improperly treated infection may develop into HIV/AIDS, while full-blown HIV/AIDS will lead to sickness and social burden on the rest of society, as well as diversion from work and psychological suffering. All these will have serious effects on the contributions these people are making to the economic system and overall productivity. Inconsistency or poor attitude to the use of protection, such as condoms, among the truck drivers implies poor concern about sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. The position further supported the findings of Rao and Rao (2023), who classified long-distance truck drivers as a high-risk category for gonorrhoea, chlamydia, hepatitis B, syphilis, and HIV because of (a) frequent, unprotected intercourse with multiple partners and (b) poor condom use because of stigma. Given their mobility, truck drivers are potential vectors for HIV transmission across regions, potentially exacerbating the spread of the epidemic. The intersection of perceived vulnerability and sexual risk behaviours among truck drivers thus manifests the impact of their activities on public health security. Therefore, public health interventions must be tailored to address the specific needs and circumstances of this population.

Conclusion

This research has made a significant contribution to academic discourse by shedding light on prevailing patterns in the sexual behaviour of truck drivers. Having a basic knowledge of illnesses does not automatically result in adopting a healthy attitude towards well-being. Researchers specialising in culture and sexually transmitted diseases can now re-examine individuals and provide insight into key matters that can help prevent the spread of HIV, both in the present and over the long term. The following are specific steps being recommended for mitigation of risky sexual behaviours among the truck drivers:

1. **Spread Awareness and Provide Knowledge:** Help drivers understand the importance of safe sex by sharing information through conversations and materials. Peer educators, drivers themselves, can be especially effective in making these messages relatable.

2. **Make Condoms Easy to Access:** Provide free condoms at truck stops, rest areas, and other places drivers frequently visit. Having these readily available makes it easier for drivers to practice safe sex without hassle.
3. **Offer Friendly Healthcare Services:** Partner with clinics to bring testing and counselling services closer to drivers, maybe through mobile clinics that visit popular routes. Confidential and non-judgmental support encourages drivers to take care of their health.
4. **Support Healthy Choices:** Create programmes that help drivers think about their behaviors and make healthier decisions. Personal counselling or motivational talks can inspire drivers to prioritise their well-being.
5. **Foster a Supportive Work Environment:** Encourage trucking companies and managers to promote a culture where drivers feel comfortable discussing health concerns and accessing support without fear of judgment.
6. **Help Manage Stress and Emotions:** Long hours and being away from loved ones can lead to stress. Offering resources like counselling or relaxation techniques can help drivers cope and reduce the likelihood of risky behaviours.
7. **Work Together to Keep Drivers Safe:** Transportation companies can include health and safety topics in driver training and regularly check in to see how drivers are doing, fostering a sense of care and responsibility.
8. **Use Technology to Stay Connected:** Apps or messaging services can remind drivers about safe sex practices, provide tips, and inform them about nearby clinics, making health support more accessible and convenient.

The recommendations above will be best implemented through a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders. Here's a breakdown of who can play key roles:

- (a) **State Ministry of Health:** They can provide policy support, funding, and oversee the integration of health services, awareness campaigns, and regulation enforcement. They can also coordinate with healthcare providers to ensure accessible testing and counselling services.
- (b) **Associations of Truck Drivers or Trucking Companies:** These organisations are crucial for reaching drivers directly. They can promote health programmes, distribute condoms, facilitate peer education, and create a supportive work environment that encourages safe behaviours.

- (c) Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): NGOs specialising in health, HIV/AIDS prevention, and worker welfare can facilitate education, outreach, and service delivery. They often have experience working directly with at-risk populations and can tailor interventions to meet drivers' specific needs.

Overall, an effective approach involves partnership among these groups, government agencies, driver associations, NGOs, healthcare providers, and the drivers themselves, to ensure that interventions are comprehensive, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

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