

## Health and the Politics of Trust: Multi-Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis in Kathmandu

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**Abstract :** Public health is a social endeavour, which involves many different actors: from extremely stratified, structured health systems to unofficial networks of people and knowledge. Health and diseases are an intertwined individual and social experiences. Both patients and health workers navigate this public space through relations of trust. Trust in healthcare goes from the personal trust between a patient and her/his doctor to the trust of both the patient and the health worker in the medical knowledge and the healthcare system. Trust it is not a given, but it is continuously negotiated, given and gained. The key to understand these essential relations of trust in health is to recognise them as a social practice, which therefore implies agency and power. In these terms, health is constantly public and made public, as trust emerges as a meaningfully political phenomenon. Trust as a power relation can be observed at play in the implementation of public health policies such as the WHO's Directly-Observed Therapy Short-course (DOTS), and with the increasing concern for drug-resistance that tuberculosis pose, looking at the role of trust in the healthcare delivery system and implementation of public health policies becomes significantly relevant. The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in four months through observation of the daily practices at the National Tuberculosis Center of Nepal, and semi-structured interviews with MultiDrug-Resistant Tuberculosis (MDR-TB) patients at different stages of the treatment, their relatives, MDR-TB specialised nurses, and doctors. Throughout the research, the role which trust plays in tuberculosis treatment emerged as one fundamental ax that cuts through all the different factors intertwined with drug-resistance development, unfolding a tension between the DOTS policy, which undermines trust, and the day-to-day healthcare relations and practices which cannot function without trust. Trust also stands out as a key component of the solutions to unforeseen issues which develop from the overall uncertainty of the context - for example, political instability and extreme poverty - in which tuberculosis treatment is carried out in Nepal.

**Keywords :** trust, tuberculosis, drug-resistance, politics of health

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