

For Discussion
3 May 2001

Legislative Council Panel on Security
Juvenile Crime and Problem of Youth Gangs

Purpose

This paper presents the trends of juveniles (aged between 7 to 15) and young persons (aged between 16 to 20) arrested for crimes over the past three years. The paper also sets out the measures taken by bureaux/departments concerned in tackling the problem of juvenile and youth crimes.

Trends of Juvenile and Youth Crimes

2. In 2000, the number of juvenile (aged between 7 to 15) arrested for crimes was 6 229, an increase of 13.5% compared with 5 486 in 1999. The figure was 5 834 in 1998. About 85% of juvenile offenders in 2000 were students. The most prevalent crimes committed by them in 2000 were shop theft (28.9%), miscellaneous thefts (19%), wounding and serious assault (13.1%) and robbery (9.3%). Despite slight variations, the pattern largely resembled one another in the past three years.

3. The number of young persons (aged between 16 to 20) arrested for crime was 6 465 in 2000. This represents a drop of 8.1% compared with 7 038 in 1999. The figure was 6 613 in 1998. About 21% of young offenders in 2000 were students. The most prevalent crimes committed by young offenders in 2000 were miscellaneous thefts (15.4%), wounding and serious assault (14.7%), shop theft (10%) and robbery (7.5%).

4. While there was a 13.5% increase in the number of juveniles arrested for crimes in 2000 when compared with 1999, an analysis from a broader perspective revealed that the number of juveniles arrested for crimes had in fact declined by 11.4% (reduced by 801 arrests) from 1994 to 2000. The figure had declined gradually since 1994, reaching the ebb in 1999, but the trend had reversed in 2000.

5. The same declining trend is observed in respect of young persons arrested for crime since 1994 but with 1998 as the ebb. The number of young offenders had risen slightly in 1999 but declined in 2000. In percentage

terms, the drop between 1994 to 2000 was 29.5%, representing a decrease of 2 710 arrests.

6. Members will be aware that there has been a significant increase in narcotics offences in 2000 by juveniles and young persons. The number of juvenile offenders under 16 arrested for major¹ and minor² narcotics offences in 2000 was 135, representing an increase of 77.6% compared with 76 in 1999. The figure was 102 in 1998. For young persons, 417 were arrested for major and 1 321 for minor narcotics offences in 2000. This represents an increase of 77.5% compared with 979 arrests in 1999. The figure was 1 396 in 1998. Psychotropic drugs remained the main drugs of abuse for juveniles and young persons for both major and minor drug offences, principally because of the prevalent rave party culture in recent years.

Measures Taken by Concerned Departments

7. Recognising that the problem of juvenile crime has to be tackled through the combined efforts of the Government, social services agencies, schools and parents, the Government is committed to adopting a multi-agency approach to address the problem of juvenile delinquency. Efforts made by various bureaux/departments, including the Health and Welfare Bureau (HWB), the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), the Security Bureau (SB), Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Education Department (ED) and the Police under the multi-agency strategy are presented in the following paragraphs.

8. Programmes devised and launched by government departments in tackling the increasing youth crime problem focus on the following : prevention, timely intervention and measures to address the drug abuse problem among youths.

Preventive Measures

9. Preventive measures are always regarded as more effective than remedial ones. In this regard, all departments concerned are devoted to ensuring that the chance for youth to be influenced by bad elements is kept to the minimum.

1 Major narcotics offences include trafficking in and manufacturing/ supplying of dangerous drugs, etc.

2 Minor narcotics offences include simple possession/ smoking/ consumption of dangerous drugs, possession of equipment, keeping a divan, etc.

Student Guidance and School Social Work Service

10. The education system is one of the fundamental systems under which juveniles form their attitude and develop their judgement on right and wrong. In order to provide student guidance service which is particularly important in the formative years of the youth, the Education Department has been advocating the implementation of the Whole School Approach to Guidance since 1992. This approach emphasises the united efforts of all school personnel working together to create a caring and inviting environment where students can learn with enhanced self-esteem and where positive behaviour, values and attitudes can be cultivated through systematic guidance programmes and awards schemes. In primary schools, the Students Guidance Officer/Teachers (SGOs/SGTs) assist the school heads in planning and implementing Whole School Approach to Guidance to help pupils develop positive values, attitudes and behaviour. They also play a key role in the prevention and handling of behavioural problems of pupils.

11. In cooperation with parent-teachers associations in the schools, SGOs/SGTs conduct talks, seminars and small groups on positive parenting skills in order to help parents deal with their children's behavioural problems. In April to June 2001, 14 sharing sessions between SGOs/SGTs and family life education workers will be held in various districts to enhance their joint efforts in providing parent education. In schools, the extra-curricular activities coordinators, with the assistance of other teachers, introduce extra-curricular activities such as Community Youth Club, drama and uniformed groups in order to promote the positive values and attitudes of students and help them develop a healthy lifestyle.

12. Non-governmental Organization (NGOs) have been operating school social work service for secondary school students under the subvention of the Social Welfare Department. The objectives of school social work service are to help students develop their potentials, build up positive values, prevent them from falling astray, and tackle their behavioural/emotional problems. In August 2000, the initiative of "one school social worker for each secondary school" was implemented in 456 secondary schools. With the provision of one full-time, stationing social worker for each secondary school, school social workers are more able to provide timely services for students as well as their parents.

Multi-Disciplined Youth Initiatives at Police Regions/Districts

13. To inculcate correct attitude in young people, the Police have since 1999 implemented at different Police regions and districts a variety of youth

projects and initiatives targeted at youths of different age groups with concerted efforts from other government departments, NGOs, schools, parent-teacher associations and District Fight Crime Committees, etc.

14. These projects include educational programmes such as seminars and exhibitions which enhance the awareness of young persons on the pitfalls of crimes, the consequences of delinquency, police and social service assistance available and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The Junior Police Call is also a popular youth programme providing a wide range of healthy activities for young persons aged 9 to 25 with a view to enhancing their sense of civic responsibility in fighting crimes.

Police School Liaison Teams

15. At present, sergeants of the School Liaison Teams under the respective District Police Community Relations Officers (Chief Inspectors) are responsible for giving talks to students on topics such as drug abuse, association with triads, students' involvement in crime, etc. and assisting the schools to develop recreational activities with anti-crime themes. The purpose of these activities is to help the students understand the causes and consequences of committing crime, to instill a sense of civic responsibility, moral values and discipline among them, and to enhance the communication between the students and Police. The sergeants will also act as contact persons in the event that the schools require assistance from the Police in handling students with problems. Officers of the District Anti-triad Squads will work closely with the schools authorities and perform anti-crime patrols in the vicinity of schools where students are more prone to the bad influence of the criminal elements. They would take enforcement actions as and when necessary to minimize the effect of juvenile crime on other students. To step up police-school liaison with a view to preventing juvenile delinquency, additional annual recurrent funds of \$10 million will be allocated to the Police to undertake more intensive and dedicated work with schools. About 33 sergeant posts will be created.

The Understanding the Adolescent Project

16. The Understanding the Adolescent Project (UAP) involves the development of a comprehensive screening tool for identifying potential at-risk youth and the provision of primary preventive programme for early intervention. The UAP has been run as a pilot project from 1994 to 2000 during which the screening tool has been validated through longitudinal studies and implementation of both the screening tool and the primary preventive programme for wider application have been conducted. The UAP

indicated that some 18% of Secondary One students who took part in the pilot study were potentially at-risk and should benefit from early preventive programme aiming at building up their resilience to meet life challenges.

17. In the 2000 Policy Address and 2001 Budget, the Administration has announced that \$24 million per annum will be allocated to implement the UAP in 200 secondary schools over the coming three years with a view to identifying those who are potentially at-risk for early intervention with the primary preventive programmes. Concurrently, recognising that many primary school students already exhibit various at-risk behaviour, resources at \$10 million in 2001-02, \$30 million in 2002-03 and \$50 million in 2003-04 and thereafter have been earmarked to extend the screening and early prevention programmes to primary schools in phases.

Preventive work for juvenile gang problems

18. The Committee on Services for Youth at Risk, chaired by the Director of Social Welfare with multi-disciplinary representations, has examined the issues of juvenile gangs and endorsed a series of action to address the problems. First, a Sub-group has been formed, with representatives from SWD, ED, the Police, NGOs, secondary schools and Parent-Teacher Associations, to produce a reference kit for the purpose of raising parents' awareness in identifying their children's possible involvement in gangs and enriching their knowledge in seeking community support in handling the problems. Second, the Committee would consider taking forward the Enhancement of Careers Education in School Project through which youth workers from children and youth centres or integrated teams provide career guidance to potential Secondary Three school leavers to prepare them for future employment, thus minimizing their chance of going astray.

Timely Intervention

19. To allow early and timely intervention to be made to youth at risk before they go down the route of committing offences, we have to identify potential young offenders at the earliest possible opportunity in order to render them with appropriate guidance and advice. Services providers should also be equipped with knowledge and techniques in handling such youth at-risk who are more likely to have behavioural and emotional problems. Programmes conducted by various departments on these fronts are set out below.

Integrated Teams

20. It has been established that effective youth services should be delivered in a holistic and integrated manner to meet the multi-farious needs of young people, thus contributing to preventing youth from committing crimes. Integrated teams (ITs), formed by pooling of resources from school social work service, children and youth centres and outreaching social work service, render targeted services with a view to nurturing a healthy environment for young people to grow up to be contributing and responsible members of the community. In view of the effectiveness of ITs in delivering well-coordinated youth welfare services, the Administration has announced in the 2001 Budget that a total of \$70 million per annum will be allocated to expedite the formation of ITs over a period of three years.

Enhancing Services for Youth at-risk

21. To enable that timely and effective services could be provided to schools drop-outs, unemployed or under-employed young people roaming the streets at night, many outreaching social work teams and ITs have been extending their service hours to provide services for young night drifters (YNDs). In view of the increasing number of YNDs, service network involving the Police and service units of SWD and NGOs (and in some districts, also the District Councils, District Fight Crime Committees and parents groups) have been formed for reaching out to the YNDs and making referrals to appropriate units for follow up work. Such multi-disciplinary collaborations have proved to be effective in maintaining public awareness of the needs of youth-at-risk and maximising resources for efficient delivery of appropriate services. To further enhance outreaching services for youth-at-risk, the Administration has pledged to make available a total of \$22 million per annum to extend the service scope and service hours of 18 ITs to provide services for YNDs from 2001-2002.

Training for Students Guidance Offices/Teachers (SGOs/SGTs), teachers and youth workers on skills in handling students at risk

22. To equip SGOs/SGTs with the necessary knowledge and skills and to enhance their sensitivity to the psychological needs and behaviour of students at risk and abilities to handle these problems, the Education Department provides pre-service and in-service training courses on peer relationship and juvenile gang including relevant laws, gang behaviour and the culture of triad, etc.

23. In order to enhance teachers' effectiveness on school discipline work, the Student Discipline Section of the Education Department organises different training opportunities for teachers such as the certificate courses for discipline teachers, teachers training workshops and seminars. In the current school year, the professional development series for teachers include themes like problems of bullying and youth gangsters in schools. Four workshops have been conducted and multi-disciplinary personnel (including academics from tertiary institutes, professional from the social work field, disciplinary force, as well as frontline teaching professionals) were invited to analyse the causative factors, explore the management strategies and share collaborative projects with a view to enhancing teachers' knowledge, skills and attitude in managing high risk students in schools. The section also plans to develop related resource materials for teachers' reference. In March 2001, three seminars on student violence were conducted. These seminars aimed at familiarising teachers with the behaviour of secondary school students in relation to their expression of anger or frustration, and illustrating to teachers ways to help students develop positive values and good behaviour.

24. In view of the increasing complexity of behavioural problems and prevalence of gang affiliation among young people, refresher programmes for frontline youth workers and team supervisors will be necessary to enhance their professional knowledge and skills in early identification of problematic personality attributes and behaviour of young people involved in juvenile gangs and effective intervention work. Likewise, training for teachers in areas such as understanding the developmental needs of young people, signs of deviant behaviour, and early involvement of professional social workers and psychologists in serving the needs of students is also essential. SWD, in collaboration with ED and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, is taking stock of existing training for youth workers and teachers in handling juvenile gang problems and will invite academics and experts specializing in the issue to advise on the overall training need.

Enhancing Discipline Services for Students

25. Since April 2000, the Police, in collaboration with the Student Discipline Section of the Education Department, have conducted the Smart Teen Challenge Camps for secondary schools students who have behavioural and disciplined problem. The purpose of the Camp is to help the students build up their resilience, self-discipline and law-abiding behaviour through receiving specialised physical and discipline training in the Police Training School. To benefit more students, Civil Aid Service will also join hands in organising the Camps starting from April 2001.

Psychological Counselling Services

26. Educational psychologists and educational counsellors of ED work in collaboration with teachers and school social workers to help those students with emotional-behavioral problems. After assessment of these students' educational and psycho-social needs, educational psychologists and counsellors would work out intervention measures with the school. Cases with serious behavioural problems would be referred for structured behavioral programmes in school for social development. Education psychologists and counsellors would also hold case conferences with relevant school personnel to follow-up and monitor these students' school adjustment.

Alleged Nuisance and Illegal Activities

27. The Police deal with reports of alleged nuisance caused by youth gangs by deploying uniformed officers to patrol the problem areas. When youths are found causing nuisance, they will initially be warned and asked to keep the peace. Should crimes be committed or should there be a breach of the peace, appropriate law enforcement action will be taken. Most of the youth gangs are found to be gathering at the convenience stores, fast food shops or playgrounds at night time. Where necessary, relevant information would be passed to the SWD for follow-up action.

28. If Police intelligence indicates that the youth gangs are engaged in suspected illegal activities, police officers of the relevant units will be deployed to investigate the allegation, for example, District Anti-triad Squad for triad related offences.

Specific measures to address the drug abuse problem among youth

29. Year 2000 saw a 77% increase in juvenile and young persons arrested for narcotics offences, which was in line with the rapid increase in number of young drug abusers in 2000. To tackle the drug abuse problem, in particular psychotropic substance abuse among young people, the Government has been stepping up efforts in its five-pronged approach which included legislation and law enforcement, preventive education and publicity, treatment and rehabilitation, research and external co-operation.

30. To co-ordinate the efforts of all concerned Government departments and the community in tackling psychotropic substance abuse, the Narcotics Division of SB and the Action Committee Against Narcotics set up in early 2000 a dedicated Task Force on Psychotropic Substance Abuse. The Task Force, which comprises 34 members representing different fields, has already

recommended and put in place a number of measures to tackle the problem. Such measures include, amongst others, the tightening of control over ketamine which is a drug gaining popularity at dance parties, introduction of new preventive education initiatives and enhancement of law enforcement strategies, etc.

31. To resolve the problem of cross boundary drug abuse, following a visit of the Task Force to Guangdong, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Macau in December 2000, it is planned that a conference on policy to tackle drug abuse involving participants from Mainland, Hong Kong and Macau will be held in November 2001 in Hong Kong. The conference will further enhance the exchange and co-operation between the three places on both policy and enforcement actions to tackle the drug abuse problem among the region. A special forum to facilitate exchange amongst the youths in these three places will be an integral part of the conference.

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