

For Information

Legislative Council Panel on Security

Drug Situation in Hong Kong in 2018

Purpose

This paper provides information to Members on the drug situation in Hong Kong in 2018 and the Government's anti-drug efforts in response to the latest drug situation.

Background

2. The Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) is set up to provide relevant drug abuse statistics for monitoring changes in drug abuse trends and characteristics of drug abusers. It is a voluntary reporting system recording the details of drug abusers who have come into contact with and have been reported by the reporting agencies, including law enforcement agencies (LEAs), treatment and welfare agencies, tertiary institutions, hospitals and clinics.

3. Compiled statistics of CRDA are reported to the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) and released on a quarterly basis. By its nature, while CRDA statistics do not measure the exact size of the drug abusing population in Hong Kong at any particular time, they are indicators of the trends of drug abuse over time. Other relevant sources also provide reference on the drug trends, including the triennial surveys of drug use among students¹ and drug-related enforcement statistics. These data and findings provide useful information on the latest drug situation in Hong Kong, and support an evidence-based approach to the formulation of anti-drug policy and measures.

4. The key statistics of CRDA in 2018 and findings of the 2017/18 Survey of Drug Use among Students (the 2017/18 Student Survey) are set out below.

¹ The surveys mainly aim to (a) obtain the latest drug-taking trends among full-time students in major education programmes in Hong Kong; (b) find out the drug-taking patterns of student drug-takers and their profiles; and (c) assess students' knowledge of and attitudes towards the issue of drug-taking.

The 2018 CRDA Statistics

Profile of Drug Abusers

5. The key statistics on drug abusers reported to CRDA in 2018 are at **Annex A**. There was a continued decline in the total number of reported drug abusers in 2018 (at 6 611), 4% lower than that in 2017 (at 6 875). Their average age had increased from 40 to 41 years, while the average age of first abuse remained at 19 years. For reported young drug abusers aged under 21, the number increased by 1% (from 468 in 2017 to 471 in 2018). Their average age and average age of first abuse remained at 18 years and 16 years respectively.

6. The number of newly reported drug abusers in 2018 (at 1 662) was 2% higher than that in 2017 (at 1 622). Those aged under 21 increased by 3% (from 353 in 2017 to 362 in 2018). For young adults aged 21-35, while the number decreased by 1% (from 807 in 2017 to 797 in 2018), their proportion remained at a relatively high level (48% in 2018 and 50% in 2017).

7. Half of the newly reported drugs abusers had a drug history of at least 4.7 years (4.6 years in 2017).

Types of Drugs Abused

8. The total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) (at 3 894) continued to be higher than that of narcotics analgesics abusers (at 3 598). The higher rate was more evident among the newly reported abusers (number of PSAs and narcotics analgesics abusers at 1 458 and 217 respectively).

9. Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 3% (from 3 722 in 2017 to 3 597 in 2018). For psychotropic substances, methamphetamine (commonly known as “Ice”) continued to be the most popular, followed by cocaine and triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone. The total number of reported “Ice” abusers decreased by 15% (from 1 784 in 2017 to 1 518 in 2018), that of cocaine abusers increased by 10% (from 871 in 2017 to 962 in 2018), while that of triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone abusers increased by 2% (from 883 in 2017 to 904 in 2018). Ketamine was the fourth, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 23% (from 627 in 2017 to 485 in 2018). Cannabis came fifth, but the number

of reported abusers increased by 17% (from 402 in 2017 to 472 in 2018).

10. For reported young drug abusers aged under 21, the most popular psychotropic substance abused was cocaine, followed by cannabis and “Ice”. Increased cocaine and cannabis abuse continued to be observed. The number of reported cocaine abusers increased by 11% (from 233 in 2017 to 258 in 2018), that of cannabis abusers increased by 19% (from 129 in 2017 to 153 in 2018), while that of “Ice” abusers decreased by 39% (from 140 in 2017 to 85 in 2018).

Reasons and Localities

11. The most common reasons for taking drugs were “to avoid discomfort of its absence”, “to relieve boredom/depression/stress” and “to identify with peers”. On the localities of taking drugs, 58% of the reported drug abusers took drugs at home or friend’s home only.

Enforcement

12. The total number of drug-related arrests in 2018 decreased by 12% (from 4 798 in 2017 to 4 240 in 2018), with the highest proportion attributable to “Ice”-related cases (24%), followed by cocaine-related cases (23%). The total number of persons prosecuted for all drug offences decreased by 14% (from 3 512 in 2017 to 3 032 in 2018), with four persons aged under 16 convicted of drug trafficking (12 in 2017).

The 2017/18 Student Survey

13. The 2017/18 Student Survey², conducted in the 2017/18 school year, sampled some 120 700 full-time students at upper primary to post-secondary levels from over 230 schools/institutions, representing about 17% of the student population of 705 600 from over 1 100 schools/institutions. The key findings are at **Annex B**.

14. As compared with the 2014/15 Student Survey, the estimated number of drug-taking students increased by 23% (from 14 500 to 17 800). For upper primary students, cough medicine was the most common

² The full report is available at https://www.nd.gov.hk/en/survey_of_drug_use_17-18.htm. The Survey covered all full-time students of the following education programmes: (a) upper primary (i.e. Primary 4 to 6 of local primary schools and Year 5 to 6 of international primary schools); (b) secondary (i.e. Secondary 1 to 6 of local secondary schools and Year 7 to 13 of international secondary schools); and (c) post-secondary (covering full-time degree and sub-degree programmes).

type of drug taken; and for students at secondary and post-secondary levels, cannabis. Psychotropic substances were predominant, particularly increased cannabis taking (13 600 students in 2017/18 compared with 8 600 students in 2014/15).

15. 59% of the drug-taking students took drugs at home or friend's home (51% in 2014/15). 88% of the drug-taking students never sought help (81% in 2014/15), as the majority did not consider themselves addicted.

16. "Friends" continued to be the most common drug suppliers and drug abuse companions. For drug-taking students at secondary level or above, the drugs were mostly "free of charge" or obtained by using "pocket money".

17. "Curiosity" was the major reason for students at secondary level or above to take drugs for the first time, and for upper primary students to take drugs. For students at secondary level or above who took drugs in the last 30 days preceding the survey, the most common reasons for drug-taking were "to get away from stress" and "to seek excitement".

Major Drug Trends

18. The above figures and findings have reflected the following major drug trends -

- (a) **continued decline in the total number of reported drug abusers, but signs of increased drug abuse among youngsters** – CRDA revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers continued to decline in 2018 (paragraph 5 above). However, the increased reported drug abusers aged under 21, coupled with increased drug-taking students as indicated in the 2017/18 Student Survey, suggested signs of increased drug abuse among youngsters (paragraphs 5 and 14 above);
- (b) **continued relatively high proportion of newly reported abusers being young adults** – the proportion of newly reported drug abusers being young adults aged 21-35 remained at a relatively high level (paragraph 6 above);
- (c) **continued prevalence of psychotropic substance abuse, with increased cannabis and cocaine abuse** – while "Ice" as continuing to be the most popular psychotropic substance

registered decreased abusers, cocaine and cannabis abuse increased, especially among those aged under 21 (paragraphs 8-10 and 14 above); and

- (d) **hidden drug abuse still a concern** – the median drug history of 4.7 years of newly reported cases (paragraph 7 above), and home/friend’s home being the most common localities for drug taking (paragraphs 11 and 15 above), call for continued attention to the issue of hidden drug abuse.

Anti-drug Efforts

19. Our anti-drug policy and measures have been underpinned by a five-pronged approach, comprising preventive education and publicity (PE&P), treatment and rehabilitation (T&R), legislation and law enforcement, external cooperation and research. The fight against drugs is a long-term haul requiring continuous concerted efforts under the five-pronged approach to respond to the latest drug situation. In light of the major drug trends as observed in paragraph 18 above, we are taking forward focussed anti-drug initiatives along the directions outlined below.

PE&P

20. The PE&P plan will continue to enhance community awareness of the drug problem (especially the harms of cannabis, cocaine and “Ice” abuse), promote early identification of hidden drug abusers, and encourage early help-seeking. Specifically, we will sustain the dissemination of anti-drug messages, through conventional and web-based media, community platforms and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Drug InfoCentre, to different target groups especially the youth and young adults. We will also forge collaboration with different organisations and government units to launch suitable PE&P activities and programmes. Promotion of help-seeking through the 24-hour helpline “186 186” and the instant messaging service “98 186 186” will continue.

21. Schools are important PE&P platforms. We will strengthen anti-drug training and programmes for teachers, school management personnel and students. Secondary schools’ participation in the Healthy School Programme with a Drug Testing Component and the “Participate in Sports, Stay Away from Drugs” programme will continue to be encouraged.

22. In view of increased cannabis abuse among youngsters and the possible impact of some jurisdictions' legalisation of recreational cannabis on Hong Kong, we are stepping up efforts to provide correct information on the harms of cannabis abuse, rectify mistaken concepts and help identify cannabis products, utilising existing and new PE&P channels. Target groups include students, parents, teachers, practitioners in different professions/trades, and members of the public.

T&R

23. Multi-modality services are available to drug abusers with different T&R needs, including voluntary residential programmes implemented in drug treatment and rehabilitation centres by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based counselling centres for PSAs and centres for drug counselling run by NGOs, voluntary outpatient methadone treatment programme administered by the Department of Health, substance abuse clinics in all seven hospital clusters of the Hospital Authority, and compulsory treatment programmes operated in drug addiction treatment centres by the Correctional Services Department.

24. We issued the Three-year Plan on Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Services in Hong Kong for 2018-2020 (the Three-year Plan) in March 2018, which has recommended strategic T&R directions to respond to the prevailing drug situation, with the aim of facilitating anti-drug service providers to review and develop their plans and programmes in the three-year period. We will, in partnership with relevant parties, oversee and coordinate efforts as appropriate in pursuing initiatives according to the strategic directions set out in the Three-year Plan and the latest drug scene.

Beat Drugs Fund (BDF)

25. BDF supports worthwhile anti-drug projects. As at end March 2019, BDF has funded over 1 300 projects covering PE&P, T&R and research, with a total grant of over \$1.46 billion. The Governing Committee of the BDF Association will, taking into account the latest drug situation and ACAN's advice, draw up specific priority areas in the annual Funding Exercise of the BDF Regular Funding Scheme (RFS) to guide applicants in planning suitable projects addressing the drug problems. The latest drug trends have provided the basis for formulating the priority areas in the 2019 Funding Exercise of RFS.

Legislation, Law Enforcement and External Cooperation

26. LEAs will continue with the strategy of targeting drug supply at source through stemming the illegal import of dangerous drugs, strengthening the patrol of black spots, and adopting measures to combat drug trafficking. Liaison and intelligence exchange with regional and international counterparts, and conduct of joint law enforcement operations will also continue. Vigilance will be maintained in monitoring overseas and local drug trends, and timely action taken to bring new drugs under legislative control.

Advice Sought

27. Members are invited to note this paper.

**Narcotics Division
Security Bureau
December 2019**

**Key Statistics Reported to
Central Registry of Drug Abuse in 2018**

Profile of Drug Abusers

- (1) the total number of reported drug abusers in 2018 was 6 611, 4% lower than that in 2017 (at 6 875);
- (2) the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 recorded an increase by 1% (from 468 to 471);
- (3) the number of newly reported drug abusers in 2018 (at 1 662) was 2% higher than that in 2017 (at 1 622). Among them, those aged under 21 increased by 3% (from 353 to 362), and those aged 21 and above increased by 2% (from 1 269 to 1 300). The proportion of young adults aged 21-35 remained at a relatively high level (48% in 2018 and 50% in 2017);
- (4) half of the newly reported abusers in 2018 had abused drugs for at least 4.7 years (4.6 years in 2017). Among the newly reported young drug abusers aged under 21, half had abused drugs for at least 1.1 years (1.5 years in 2017);
- (5) the number of male abusers fell by 5% (from 5 583 to 5 315), and the number of female abusers rose by less than 1% (from 1 292 to 1 296);
- (6) compared with 2017, the average age of young drug abusers aged under 21 and their average age of first abuse remained at 18 years and 16 years respectively. As for all drug abusers, the average age had increased from 40 to 41 years, while the average age of first abuse remained at 19 years;

Type of Drugs Abused

- (7) in 2018, the number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) (at 3 894) was higher than that of narcotics analgesics abusers (at 3 598). Among those newly reported, the number of PSAs (at 1 458) was considerably higher than that of narcotics analgesics abusers (at 217);

- (8) compared with 2017, the number of PSAs reduced by 5% (from 4 080 to 3 894), while that of the narcotics analgesics abusers (vast majority being heroin abusers) decreased by 3% (from 3 725 to 3 598);
- (9) heroin remained to be the single most popular type of drug abused among the reported abusers, with the total number of reported abusers in 2018 (at 3 597) 3% lower than that in 2017 (at 3 722);
- (10) methamphetamine (commonly known as “Ice”) continued to be the most popular psychotropic substance abused in 2018. Compared with 2017, the number of reported “Ice” abusers decreased by 15% (from 1 784 to 1 518), with 6% of whom aged under 21. Cocaine came second while triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone came third. The number of reported cocaine abusers was 10% higher (from 871 to 962) than that in 2017, with 27% of whom aged under 21. The number of reported triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone abusers increased by 2% (from 883 to 904), with less than 1% of whom aged under 21. Ketamine was the fourth, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 23% (from 627 to 485). Cannabis came as the fifth, but the number of reported abusers increased by 17% (from 402 to 472);
- (11) compared with 2017, the numbers of reported abusers of other major types of psychotropic substances were as follows: nimetazepam having dropped by 20% (from 30 to 24); cough medicine having dropped by 5% (from 272 to 258) while MDMA having increased by 41% (from 29 to 41);
- (12) for reported young drug abusers aged under 21, the number of cocaine abusers increased by 11% (from 233 in 2017 to 258 in 2018); that of cannabis abusers increased by 19% (from 129 in 2017 to 153 in 2018); while that of “Ice” abusers decreased by 39% (from 140 in 2017 to 85 in 2018).;
- (13) the number of drug abusers taking more than one type of drugs in 2018 was 6% lower than that in 2017 (from 1 576 to 1 489)¹;

Others

¹ For an abuser taking more than one type of drugs, he/she would be counted more than once in analysing individual types of drugs and “multiple counts” of the same person would occur.

- (14) the most common reasons for all drug abusers reported for taking drugs were to avoid discomfort of its absence (49%), to relieve boredom/depression/stress (41%), and to identify with peers (30%). For young drug abusers aged under 21, to identify with peers (56%) was the most common reason for taking drugs, followed by to relieve boredom/depression/stress (46%) and out of curiosity (28%);
- (15) 58% of the reported drug abusers took drugs at home/friend's home only, another 21% at both home/friend's home and other localities, and the remaining 21% at other localities only. Among the reported young drug abusers aged under 21, the three most popular localities for taking drugs were home/friend's home (65%), public areas like recreation area/public park/public toilet (29%) and party gathering in club house/building/hotel/bar (11%);
- (16) reported abusers of heroin and triazolam/midazolam/zopiclone had a relatively higher frequency of abusing drugs in general, with a median monthly frequency of abusing drugs at 60 times. The corresponding figures for other reported psychotropic substance abusers were much lower (e.g. 30 times for cough medicine abusers, 13 times for "Ice", ketamine and nimetazepam abusers, 11 times for MDMA abusers, and 9 times for cocaine abusers); and
- (17) 72% of the reported drug abusers had previously been convicted. Among them, most had previous convictions of either drug-related offences only (34%) or both drug-related and other offences (28%), while 10% had previous convictions of other offences only.

* * *

**Key Findings of
2017/18 Survey of Drug Use among Students**

Profile of Drug-taking Students

- (1) the 2017/18 Survey of Drug Use among Students (the 2017/18 Student Survey) sampled some 120 700 full-time students at upper primary to post-secondary levels from over 230 schools/institutions, representing about 17% of the student population of 705 600 from over 1 100 schools/institutions. The overall response rate was 35.7%;
- (2) the estimated number of lifetime drug-taking students¹ was 17 800, showing a 23% increase from the 2014/15 Student Survey (at 14 500);
- (3) the percentage of lifetime drug-taking students was 2.5% (2% in the 2014/15 Student Survey); while the percentages of students who took drugs within one year and 30 days of the survey were 1.1% and 0.6% respectively (0.7% and 0.5% respectively in the 2014/15 Student Survey);
- (4) drug-taking at young age remained stable. The percentage of drug-taking students at secondary or above levels who first took drugs at the age of 10 or below decreased to 7.9% (10.5% in the 2014/15 Student Survey). Their median age of first drug-taking rose to 16.1 years (15.2 years in the 2014/15 Student Survey). The percentage of lifetime drug-taking students at the age of 10 or below was 1.2% (0.9% in the 2014/15 Student Survey);

Types of Drugs Abused

- (5) Psychotropic substances were predominant. Increased number of cannabis, cough medicine and cocaine takers was noted (from 8 600, 2 200 and 2 200 respectively in the 2014/15 Student Survey to 13 600, 3 500 and 2 600 respectively in the 2017/18 Student Survey). On the other hand, the number of “Ice” and ketamine takers decreased (from 2 100 and 2 400 respectively in the 2014/15 Student

¹ “Lifetime drug-taking students” referred to students who had taken drugs at least once in their lifetime.

Survey to 1 700 and 1 700 respectively in the 2017/18 Student Survey);

- (6) the three most common types of drugs taken were - cough medicine (40%), ecstasy² (17.6%) and cocaine (16.3%) for upper primary students; cannabis (78.1%), cough medicine (25.3%) and cocaine (12%) for secondary students; and cannabis (87%), cocaine (17.4%) and ecstasy (16.7%) for post-secondary students. About 69% of the drug-taking students took one type of drugs only;

Reasons, Localities and Help-Seeking

- (7) “curiosity” was the major reason for upper primary students (44.8%) to take drugs, and for students at secondary or above levels to take drugs for the first time (73.4% and 61.2% respectively). For students at secondary or above levels who took drugs in the last 30 days preceding the survey, the most common reasons for drug-taking were “to get away from stress” (39.8% and 38.6% respectively) and “to seek excitement” (41.2% and 27.8% respectively);
- (8) 59% of the drug-taking students took drugs at home or friend’s home. 22.8% of the drug-taking students took drugs alone;
- (9) 88% of the drug-taking students never sought help from others, as the majority did not consider themselves addicted. For those who had sought help, “parents” (34.7%) and “friends” (21.6%) were the persons who gave the greatest help to upper primary students; “friends” (41.5%) and “schoolmates” (15.4%) to secondary students; and “friends” (32%) and “social workers” (17.9%) to post-secondary students;

Others

- (10) 50% of the drug-taking students at secondary or above levels indicated that their drugs were “free of charge”. Others commonly used “pocket money” (34.5%) and “earnings from doing legal part-time jobs” (17.1%) to buy drugs;
- (11) the most common drug suppliers were “friends” (67.5% for

² Same as MDMA.

secondary students' first drug-taking, 63.2% for post-secondary students' first drug-taking and 48.1% for non-drug-taking students at all education levels), followed by "schoolmates" (26.4% for secondary students' first drug-taking, 22.9% for post-secondary students' first drug-taking and 27.2% for non-drug-taking students at all education levels) and "friends of friends" (12.7% for secondary students' first drug-taking, 15% for post-secondary students' first drug-taking and 22% for non-drug-taking students at all education levels);

(12)over 90% of non-drug-taking students at secondary or above levels agreed that taking drugs would adversely affect their health. For drug-taking students at secondary or above levels, more than 80% had the same view; and

(13)39.2% of lifetime drug-taking students had taken drugs outside Hong Kong, among whom 70.8% had done so in overseas countries.

* * *