

For information  
on \_\_\_\_\_

**Legislative Council Panel on Security**  
**Psychotropic Substance Abuse in Hong Kong**

**Purpose**

This paper informs Members of the situation of psychotropic substance (generally referred to as “soft drugs”) abuse in Hong Kong, the related crime scene and the measures taken by the Administration to tackle the problem.

**Background**

Trend of psychotropic substance abuse

2. For statistical purpose, “psychotropic substances” include hallucinogens, depressants, stimulants, tranquilizers and other drugs such as cough medicine and organic solvents. According to the Government Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), despite the generally falling trend of the number of reported drug abusers since 1995, the number of reported psychotropic substance abusers has increased from 2 328 in 1994 to 3 493 in 1999. In 1994, 31.8 % or 1 238 of drug abusers aged under 21 were reported to have abused psychotropic substances. The corresponding percentage and figure increased to 57.9 % and 1 263 in 1999.

3. According to the latest statistics, the most commonly abused psychotropic substance by persons of all ages is cannabis, to be followed by methylamphetamine (“ice”), triazolam, MDMA (“ecstasy”) and cough medicine. Amongst abusers under the age of 21, cannabis remains the most commonly abused psychotropic substance, to be followed by “ice”, “ecstasy”, organic solvents and cough medicine. It is worth noting that while the number of persons reported to have abused cannabis and cough medicine decreased by 9.4 % and 2.2 % respectively in 1999, those

abused “ice”, triazolam and “ecstasy” increased by 6.2 %, 9.0 % and 456.7 % respectively during the same period.

#### Control of psychotropic substances

4. Psychotropic substances, like narcotic drugs, are strictly controlled in Hong Kong under the law and administrative procedures reflecting international drug control conventions. The Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) is the principal law dealing with dangerous drugs including the commonly abused psychotropic substances (except organic solvents) mentioned in paragraph 3 above. The Dangerous Drugs Ordinance is enforced jointly by the Hong Kong Police Force, the Customs & Excise Department and the Department of Health. The first two agencies are mainly concerned with the enforcement in respect of trafficking, manufacture and other non-medical use of dangerous drugs, while the Department of Health is responsible for the import/export, manufacture, sale and supply of dangerous drugs for medical purposes. Penalties for offences under this Ordinance are severe. For example, the maximum penalty for trafficking in or illegal manufacturing of dangerous drugs is a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment, that for opening or managing a divan is a fine of \$5 million and 15 years’ imprisonment, and that for cultivating cannabis or opium poppy is a fine of \$100,000 and 15 years’ imprisonment.

#### **Drug Related Offences, Arrests and Seizures**

5. In 1999, the arrest figure reported by the Police and Customs in respect of major drug-related offences which include trafficking in and manufacturing of dangerous drugs was 2 904, and that in respect of minor drug-related offences which include simple possession of dangerous drugs or drug abuse equipment and consumption of drugs was 5 829, representing a decrease of 15.4 % and 20.6 % respectively compared to the figures in 1998. In 1999, 1 055 (12%) persons arrested locally for drug offences were under 21 and a majority of them (700 or 66%) were arrested for minor offences. It was not uncommon that persons arrested were found in possession of different or mixed types of drugs, including narcotic and psychotropic drugs.

6. In 1998 and 1999, the Police and Customs detected 86 and 75 major cases involving psychotropic substances respectively. Among these cases was one in May 1999 in which the Police seized 30 kilograms of “ice” in Tsimshatsui and arrested two persons. In the same month, Customs officers found 6 955 tablets of “ecstasy” after bodily check of two persons entering Hong Kong from Amsterdam. The Police and the Customs also cooperate with their overseas counterparts to detect drug crimes. For example, in October 1999, as a result of cooperation between Hong Kong Customs and Japan enforcement agencies, a record seizure of 616 kilograms of “ice” on board a Taiwanese fishing vessel was made and 12 persons were arrested in Japan. It is worth noting that detection rates for drug cases investigated by the Police and the Customs were generally high, and indeed, close to 100%, as most of these investigations were proactive in nature based on intelligence received.

7. Vigorous law enforcement efforts reduced the market supply of drugs, including psychotropic drugs. In 1998 and 1999, the two enforcement agencies seized a total of 624.8 kilograms and 40.7 kilograms of cannabis (herbal cannabis and cannabis resin inclusive) respectively. As for “ice”, 232.7 kilograms and 13 tablets, and 102.1 kilograms and 1 111 tablets were seized in 1998 and 1999 respectively. As regards triazolam, a total of 60 263 tablets and 656 tablets were seized in 1998 and 1999 respectively. The sharpest increase was seen in the seizure of “ecstasy” - from 271 tablets in 1998 to 21 202 tablets in 1999.

8. In 1999, the Department of Health detected 9 cases of suspected offence under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance. Of these cases, one conviction was made. The corresponding figures for 1998 were 11 cases of suspected offence and 5 convictions. All these cases concerned the possession of small quantities of various dangerous drugs for medical use by persons who were not licensed or authorized to possess them, or the failure to keep proper records of the supply and receipt of dangerous drugs by doctors or dispensaries.

### **Cross-boundary Drug Crimes**

9. The Customs takes proactive enforcement actions on

passengers at boundary checkpoints to deter the trafficking of dangerous drugs. Statistics on arrests for drug offences made at Land Boundary Control Points and the China Ferry Terminal (with specific reference to the major passenger channel, Lowu) are summarised below. Details are given at Annexes I and II.

<b>Year</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>
<b>No of Arrests</b>			
<b>Lowu</b>	51	48	63
<b>Land Boundary Control Points And China Ferry Terminal</b>	63	65	80

10. According to the Customs, drugs seized at boundary checkpoints usually ranged from a few unused tablets to a few bottles of triazolam, diazepam and midazolam or small quantities of cannabis. The persons arrested normally claimed to have carried the unused drugs unconsciously or as procurement for self-consumption. In 1999, three “ecstasy” cases were detected at Lowu Control Point compared with no seizure of “ecstasy” at the same location in 1998; in the same year, over 2 600 tablets of ecstasy were also seized at Macau Ferry Terminal compared to only one tablet seized in 1998.

11. So far, enforcement statistics suggest that there have been incidents of Hong Kong people consuming psychotropic drugs in the Mainland. Persons arrested by the Customs at the above checkpoints below the age of 21 and whose offences involved psychotropic substances also rose from four in 1998 to 20 in 1999. However, statistics and the significance of cases collected so far do not suggest that Hong Kong people crossing the boundary to take drugs has become a major trend. It is believed that although lower illicit drug prices in the Mainland may appear to be an attraction for Hong Kong drug consumers, the cost and inconvenience for crossing the boundary, together with the severe penalties in both the Mainland and Hong Kong have deterred abusers from crossing the boundary solely for the purpose of taking drugs. In fact, known cases showed that most of these people were casual drug abusers who tried to add excitement to their pursuits in recreational venues such as discotheques. There are also others who are habitual drug users visiting the Mainland for other reasons and consume drugs to

satisfy their craving while they are there.

12. So far, the Customs only identified isolated cases of casual abusers taking drugs back to Hong Kong. There was no indication that these people organized to smuggle large quantities of drugs from the Mainland for re-sale in Hong Kong. In fact, such carriage, in whatever quantity, does face risks of detection because of the double clearance of Customs on both sides of the boundary.

### **Measures to Tackle the Problem**

13. To tackle any possible worsening of the cross-boundary drug problem, the Mainland and the Hong Kong enforcement authorities are closely monitoring the situation. Both the Police and the Customs have regular forums to exchange views and information with their counterparts in the Mainland on cross-boundary drug issues. Enforcement agencies on both side of the boundary are also prepared to share intelligence and take appropriate enforcement actions correspondingly when necessary. In 1999, the Customs increased the number of its search or check on incoming passengers at Lowu by about 8%. There were also reported cases of Mainland authorities raided and closed problematic discotheques where psychotropic substances were found to have been frequently trafficked and abused. The Action Committee Against Narcotics also visited Guangdong and Shenzhen in November 1999 to reflect its concerns and exchange views with the Mainland authorities on cross-boundary drug issues.

14. To cope with the heavy vehicle and passenger flow at entry and exit points as well as the coastline of Hong Kong, the Customs continues to impose strict control on all boundary fronts. One additional Customs Superintendent post was created in 1999 in the Control Points Command to strengthen the management of operations at control points. Moreover, 10 additional vehicle processing kiosks were installed at Lokmachau Control Point to cope with the increasing traffic. Detection and inspection capabilities of officers are further enhanced through acquisition and utilization of drug detector dogs whose number has been expanded from four to 14 in 1999, and to more than 20 in 2000; additional high-tech equipment including Ion-scanners, X-ray checkers, optical fibrescope search equipment, etc, is being purchased; computer

systems and intelligence support are being strengthened.

15. The Department of Health continues to monitor the supply of dangerous drugs for medical use by monitoring the import of such drugs through a licensing system and inspections at importers, wholesalers, manufacturers and retailers (i.e. dispensaries) of such drugs to check law compliance. It also continues to investigate complaints and suspected offences, and prosecutes offenders vigilantly.

16. The Government regularly reviews and amends the existing Dangerous Drugs Ordinance to ensure that it reflects the needs of the latest drug scene and the latest resolutions of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs in respect of dangerous drugs control. Where there is evidence of widespread abuse of a substance locally or in other territories, the substance concerned will be considered for scheduling as a dangerous drug under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance. The full sanctions and controls provided in the Ordinance can then be applied with regard to dealing in, possession, import, export and supply, etc, of the drug. In 1998 and 1999, the Government tightened control over 13 substances under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance. It is planning to impose strict control on two more substances.

17. Apart from the above, the Government also focuses on educating the public that there is no difference between “hard” and “soft” drugs as both are extremely harmful to the body. This, together with the concept on the importance of “healthy living” and skills to refuse the temptation of drugs, etc, are conveyed through tailored-made programmes to students, young people and parents. In 2000, more focused publicity on psychotropic substances in the form of information materials, publicity and community projects will be launched.

### **Way Forward**

18. The Government is keeping a close watch on the problem of psychotropic substance trafficking and abuse, and will continuously put in place new measures to tackle the problem. In April 2000, the Government will form a multi-disciplinary task force comprising enforcement personnel, social workers, medical and health practitioners and policy makers, educationalists, drug treatment and rehabilitation

experts, etc, to tackle the problem of psychotropic substance abuse. The task force will be entrusted with the mission to draw up a comprehensive strategy to tackle this problem, particularly amongst the youth and in respect of cross boundary drug abuse. It will also formulate plans to target publicity, to keep a close watch on the strategies to deal with similar problem worldwide and to apply appropriate solutions to Hong Kong.

Security Bureau  
March 2000

**Seizure and Arrest**  
**Lowu Control Point**

**1999**

Type of D.D.	Jan		Feb		Mar		Apr		May		Jun		Jul		Aug		Sep		Oct		Nov		Dec		Total		
	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Cases
Heroin (gm)	3	1			0.2	1	0.8	1	1400.6	3	378.7	2	1.1	2							0.6	1	700		2485	12	9
Cannabis (gm)	11	4 (2)	5.6	3					0.5	2	13	3	3.6	4 (3)	0.2	1 (1)	8	4 (1)			0.8	1			42.7	22 (7)	21
“Ice” (gm)																							7140.8	4 (2)	7140.8	4 (2)	2
MDMA (tab)	4		2	1 (1)							2	1					3	1 (1)							11	3 (2)	3
Other psychotropic drugs (tab)	27				697	2	36	1	1624	3 (1)	3414	2	1084	3 (3)			270	1 (1)	25	2	60	2	2639	6 (3)	9876	22 (8)	21
																										63 (19)	56

**1998**

Type of D.D.	Jan		Feb		Mar		Apr		May		Jun		Jul		Aug		Sep		Oct		Nov		Dec		Total		
	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Cases
Heroin + Opium (gm)							9.41	4 (1)	342.01	2			0.78	1	0.2	1	0.12	1	6.55	2				1	359.07	12 (1)	12
Cannabis (gm)					1.12	3			2.44	2	0.17	1	2077.44	1	0.16	1	5.73	2							2087.06	10	10
“Ice” (gm)			0.27	1													0.6	1 (1)	3854.96	3					3855.83	5 (1)	3
MDMA (tab)																											
Other psychotropic drugs (tab)	420	1	2020	2	1372	2	190	2	1400	1	5929	3	1410	2			1361	5	5	1	2994	1 (1)	1399	1	18500	21 (1)	21
																										48 (3)	46

( ) denotes aged under 21

Figures in 1999 are provisional



**Seizure and Arrest**  
**Land Boundary Control Points & China Ferry Terminal**

**1999**

Type of D.D.	Jan		Feb		Mar		Apr		May		Jun		Jul		Aug		Sep		Oct		Nov		Dec		Total				
	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arr	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arr	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arr	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Cases		
Heroin (gm)	4	2			0.2	1	1.8	2	1400.6	3	1109.9	3	1.1	2				1				12.99	3	700	1	3230.59	18	15	
Cannabis (gm)	16.7	5 (2)	5.6	3			2.5	1	1.5	3 (1)	13.2	4	3.6	4 (3)	0.2	1 (1)	8.6	5 (1)					0.8	1			52.7	27 (8)	26
“Ice” (gm)					3050	1			2100	1														7140.8	4 (2)	12290.8	6 (2)	4	
MDMA (tab)	4		2	1 (1)							2	1					3	1 (1)								11	3 (2)	3	
Other psychotropic drugs (tabs)	27		1200	1	697	2	36	1	1500	3 (1)	3447	3	1084	3 (3)	100 kg	1	270	1 (1)	25	3	60	2	2639	6 (3)	11109 100 kg	26 (8)	24		
																									80 (20)	72			

**1998**

Type of D.D.	Jan		Feb		Mar		Apr		May		Jun		Jul		Aug		Sep		Oct		Nov		Dec		Total		
	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arr	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arr	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arr	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Qty	Arrest	Cases
Heroin + Opium (gm)		1			4.31		9.41	4 (1)	342.01	2	0.63	1	0.78	1	0.2	1	0.12	1	6.55	2			10	2	374.01	15 (1)	15
Cannabis (gm)	0.18	1			1.3	4	44.2	1	2510.71	4	0.17	1	2076.84	2	0.16	1	5.98	4 (1)	4.06	2					4644.6	20 (1)	20
“Ice” (gm)			0.27	1													0.6	1 (1)	3854.96	3					3855.83	5 (1)	3
MDMA (tab)																											
Other psychotropic drugs (tab)	2622	2	2020	2	2271	4	190	2	1850	2	5929	3	1410	2			1361	5	5	1	2994	1 (1)	1399	1	22051	25 (1)	26
																									65 (4)	64	

( ) denotes aged under 21

Figures in 1999 are provisional