

Total number of drug abusers declines but number of student drug abusers and youth drug crimes continue to rise

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first quarter of 2021 at its quarterly meeting today (June 17). While the total number of reported drug abusers declined compared to the figure for same period in 2020, the numbers of student drug abusers and youngsters involved in drug crimes continued to rise.

The figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first quarter this year decreased by 11 per cent (from 1 944 to 1 729) as compared to the figure for the same period last year. However, the number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased by 47 per cent (from 150 to 220), and the number and the proportion of students among them also increased (from 37 to 95 and from 25.5 per cent to 45 per cent).

The number of reported cannabis abusers continued to increase, by 48 per cent (from 169 to 250) compared to that in the same period last year. Cannabis was the most common type of drug abused among youth drug abusers, with the number of reported abusers having increased by 58 per cent (from 67 to 106).

In addition, the number of reported ketamine abusers went up by 24 per cent (from 130 to 161). The number of young ketamine abusers increased substantially by 94 per cent (from 16 to 31). The situation warrants attention.

The number of newly reported drug abusers in the first quarter of 2021 increased by 20 per cent (from 348 to 418) compared with that in the same period last year. Among them, young adults aged between 21 and 35 accounted for 43 per cent. The median drug history of newly reported abusers (i.e. the time for abusers to be reported to the CRDA by reporting agencies from their first drug abuse) was 2.8 years, compared with five years in 2020. One reason for the drop in the drug history of newly reported abusers was the shorter drug history of newly reported abusers aged under 21 (at 1.6 years) and the increase in the proportion of such abusers among all newly reported drug abusers.

In the first quarter of 2021, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) increased by 10 per cent (from 1 011 to 1 108) compared to the figure for the same period last year. The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers decreased by 34 per cent (from 1 135 to 750). Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 379) remained substantially higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 31).

Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused among all reported drug abusers, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 34 per cent (from 1 133 to 750) compared to that in the same period last year. Methamphetamine (commonly known as "Ice") continued to be the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 12 per cent (from 362 to 320).

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to prevail, the figures in 2020 and in the first quarter of 2021 recorded by the CRDA might have been affected. For instance, reporting agencies might have come into contact with fewer drug abusers due to the pandemic, and might have taken more time to submit data of drug abusers to the CRDA. The Narcotics Division (ND) and ACAN will pay close attention to the number of reported drug abusers in the remaining quarters of 2021 and the possible impact of the pandemic on the statistics, as well as make reference to other sources of statistics and information in order to analyse the drug trend.

The CRDA figures for the first quarter of 2021 are available on the website of the ND (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).

In addition, the total number of persons arrested for drug offences in the first quarter of 2021 increased by nearly 60 per cent, from 652 to 1 041, as compared to the figure for same period last year. The number of arrestees aged under 21 increased by more than 50 per cent, from 97 to 147.

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Donald Li, said, "There was an increase in the number of reported drug abusers being students and young people aged under 21. Cannabis was the most common type of drug abused by them. I appeal to young people to firmly stay away from drugs, and particularly fully understand that cannabis is a drug. The ND has also expressed that it will continue to step up anti-drug preventive education and publicity in schools."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "The increase in the number of persons arrested for drug offences in the first quarter this year is worth noting. I take this opportunity to remind young people that taking part in drug offences, especially drug trafficking, has very serious consequences. Earlier, a youth aged 16 at the time of committing the offence was sentenced to imprisonment of eight years and seven months for trafficking in more than 200 grams of a drug (which approximately equals the weight of a smartphone). Past court judgments clearly stated that young age is not a valid mitigating factor in favour of a more lenient sentence. Young people are urged to abide by the law lest they will regret it for a lifetime."

Anyone who encounters drug problems can make use of the ND's instant messaging service 98 186 186 or 24-hour hotline 186 186 to seek help.