

Total number of reported drug abusers declines but cannabis and ketamine abuse warrant concern

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first three quarters of 2020 at its quarterly meeting today (December 11). While the total number of reported drug abusers declined compared to the same period last year, there was an increase in young drug abusers. Cannabis and ketamine abuse were in particular worth noting.

Although the latest figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first three quarters of 2020 decreased as compared with the corresponding period last year, the figures might have been influenced by the COVID-19 situation. 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 closely monitor the number of reported drug abusers for the fourth quarter of 2020 to arrive at a suitable analysis of the drug situation in Hong Kong.

The total number of reported drug abusers in the first three quarters of 2020 declined by 4 per cent (from 4 729 to 4 526) compared to the same period last year. The number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased by 10 per cent (from 353 to 390). Among them, students accounted for over 30 per cent.

The number of reported cannabis abusers increased by 23 per cent (from 400 to 493) compared to the corresponding period in 2019. The number of reported ketamine abusers also increased by 14 per cent (from 332 to 377). For reported drug abusers aged under 21, the number of cannabis abusers increased by 20 per cent (from 168 to 201) compared to the same period last year, while the number of ketamine abusers substantially increased by 76 per cent (from 33 to 58).

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 16 per cent (from 1 210 to 1 020) compared to the same period last year, and nearly half (46 per cent) of them were young adults aged between 21 and 35. The median history of drug abuse 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 5.1 years, compared with 5.5 years last year, indicating that hidden drug abuse still persisted.

In the first three quarters of 2020, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) dropped by 11 per cent (from 2 938 to 2 628) compared to the same period last year. The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers went up by 2 per cent (from 2 411 to 2 453). Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 933) remained significantly

higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 98).

Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused among all reported drug abusers, with the number of reported abusers having increased by 2 per cent (from 2 408 to 2 449) compared to 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 13 per cent (from 1 086 to 943).

The CRDA figures for the first three quarters of 2020 are available on the website of the ND (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, expressed concern over the increase of ketamine abusers and said, "Ketamine abuse can seriously damage a person's brain and mental health, and impair the functions of the liver and heart. Uterine contraction is common for prolonged abusers of ketamine, causing frequent urination or even urinary incontinence, thereby seriously affecting their daily life. For many ketamine abusers, their damaged uterine cannot be restored to the original state even after they have quit the drug. In this light, members of public should clearly recognise the harm caused by ketamine and refrain from taking drugs."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "We notice that there was also an increase in cannabis abusers. Cannabis is a drug strictly controlled by the United Nations. The Government will not legalise the use of the so-called "recreational cannabis", and will continue to combat cannabis through education and publicity as well as law enforcement. This year, there were also drug trafficking cases involving online platforms or air cargo and postal parcels. In some of such cases, young people took part in receiving parcels with drugs. Members of the public, especially young people, should stay alert, and should not release their personal data or home address to others for receiving parcels or cargo, or carry unknown items into and out of Hong Kong for other people. Drug trafficking is a serious offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment."