

Total number of reported drug abusers declines but youth drug abusers and youth drug crimes warrant attention

The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) reviewed the local drug situation in the first half of 2021 at its quarterly meeting today (September 16). While the total number of reported drug abusers declined compared to the figure for the same period in 2020, the numbers of young 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 half of 2021 slightly decreased by 5 per cent (from 3 594 to 3 426) as compared to the figure for the same period last year. However, the number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 increased substantially by 76 per cent (from 290 to 511), and the number and proportion of students among them also increased (from 85 to 209 and from 30.4 per cent to 43.4 per cent).

The number of reported cannabis abusers continued to rise, by 67 per cent (from 346 to 578) compared to that in the same period last year. The number of reported young cannabis abusers aged under 21 went up by 92 per cent (from 147 to 282). Cannabis remained the most common type of psychotropic substance abused for reported young drug abusers aged under 21, accounting for 55.6 per cent in the age group.

In addition, the number of reported cocaine abusers increased by 42 per cent (from 403 to 571), and the number of young abusers aged under 21 rose substantially by 77 per cent (from 111 to 196). The number of reported ketamine abusers increased by 28 per cent (from 254 to 324), and among them, the number of young people aged under 21 doubled as compared to the figure for the same period last year (from 33 to 66).

The number of newly reported drug abusers in the first half of 2021 increased by 38 per cent (from 720 to 991) 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 3.3 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 1.5 years) and the increase in the proportion of such abusers among all newly reported drug abusers.

In the first half of 2021, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) increased by 20 per cent (from 1 941 to 2 320) compared to the figure for the same period last year. The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers decreased by 34 per cent (from 2 068 to 1

355). Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 916) remained substantially higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 54), while cannabis was the drug with the highest number of abusers (at 339).

Heroin remained the single most common type of drug abused among all reported drug abusers, with the number of reported abusers having decreased by 34 per cent (from 2 065 to 1 355) 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 10 per cent (from 702 to 633).

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to prevail, the figures in 2020 and in the first half 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. 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 trends.

The CRDA figures for the first half 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 half of 2021 increased by nearly 50 per cent, from 1 504 to 2 248, as compared to the figure for the same period last year. The number of arrestees aged under 21 increased by more than 70 per cent, from 203 to 348.

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Donald Li, said, "There has recently been a rising trend in cannabis and ketamine abuse, and the number of cocaine abusers also increased. The situation of young people reported as abusing these drugs warrants particular attention. Cocaine abuse can cause delirium, irregular breathing, convulsions, unconsciousness and even death. Young people should firmly say no to all drugs. Taking drugs will bring about severe harms and lifelong regrets."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "I have to remind young people that anyone who has committed drug offences is liable to serious criminal punishment. Young age is not a valid mitigating factor. Earlier, a young person was sentenced to imprisonment of more than two years for trafficking in and possession of about 6 grams (lighter than a coat button) of cannabis and cocaine. He was aged only 16 at the time of committing the offence and did it for a reward of just \$5,000. Young people are urged not to put their future at risk out of greed."

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