

A Focus Group Study on Psychotropic Substance Abuse

by

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for

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Executive Summary

This study was carried out to solicit detailed information on the characteristics and abuse patterns and factors contributing to abuse of psychotropic drugs in Hong Kong. Eleven focus groups had been held involving 6 social workers and 44 service recipients from agencies providing services relating to drug prevention and rehabilitation. Findings indicated that the majority of these young abusers came from intact and relatively well-off families with at least lower-secondary education (p.10-11). Their first attempt of drug taking usually began in their early teens (p.12), prompted by their curiosity about, and the availability of, drugs amongst their peers (p.25-26). Drugs were found to be distributed extensively by what they claimed to be triad members (p.17-18). Drug taking seems to be taken as a way of coping with life's frustrations (p.24) and develop into a lifestyle that may be considered as an inferior substitute of a more meaningful way of living. The participants seem to be unreceptive to the information about the harmful effects of drugs as promulgated by government sources and believe that they have control over the use of drugs through self-medication (p.22-23). They accept information regarding the serious harm consequent to drug abuse based only on their own experiencing of the ill effects or that conveyed by fellow drug users. Treatment is usually sought on an involuntary basis through legal order or after their having sustained serious physical damage due to drug abuse (p.32-33).

Several implications on prevention and treatment can be drawn from the findings. First, the use of natural support networks in terms of family and non-drug taking friends can be essential for recovery. Teaching the family the detection of early signs of drug use might deter young drug users from further abuse (p.41-42). Second, the encouragement of alternative life-styles with practical support services are likely to help rehabilitated persons to give up their drug habit as an inferior alternative (p.43). Third, to gain the credibility of these young drug abusers, drug prevention messages may best be delivered by reformed peers who have had personal experiences with drugs (p.45). Fourth, more communication between social workers and government officials may facilitate more efficient delivery of services (p.46). Lastly, as the findings are based upon a convenience sample predominated by males from lower-to-middle class, further studies involving more selective samples such as female participants, or users from other social strata, using other research methods, such as in-depth interviewing, are suggested (p.40).