

Report on an in-depth study  
of psychotropic substance abuse in Hong Kong



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香港賽馬會藥物資訊天地

# **Report on An In-depth Study of Psychotropic Substance Abuse In Hong Kong**

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Hong Kong Jockey Club Drug InfoCentre

**Commissioned by Task Force on Psychotropic Substance Abuse**

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**Narcotics Division  
Government Secretariat**

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1 The present study was commissioned to examine the recent changes in the local drug scene, in particular the use of mind-altering substances in party and disco contexts.
- 1.1.2 A qualitative approach was adopted and the study was ethnographic in design. By using an open-ended approach to collect insider information from those who live within the “rave” culture, it was hoped that the data would shed lights on the rapidly changing drug culture. The investigation consisted of four components: participant observations in drug abuse educational activities, interviews with key players of local party and drug scenes, participant observations in parties and discos, and in-depth interviews with party and disco informants.
- 1.1.3 The study yields rich and novel data on what is commonly called “rave culture.” The so called “rave” is actually made up of parties, discos and clubs, which are distinctive entities that deserve independent examination and analysis. Party and disco drug scenes are shaped by different history, cultures, key players, participants, and meanings. While party drug use is new to Hong Kong, disco drug abuse is long-standing and is only one facet of a more complicated youth problem.
- 1.1.4 The alleged “epidemic” of ecstasy and ketamine abuse was re-examined. It is felt that Hong Kong lacks quality empirical data on party drug use. Although the CRDA recorded a rising trend of ecstasy and ketamine abuse, the figures should be interpreted with caution. This is because the CRDA system is better

suitable for addictive substances, which generally have well-defined caseness. The fact that most ecstasy and ketamine users do not develop significant physical and psychosocial dysfunctions also contributes to the ambiguity in reporting caseness. Given these difficulties, the rise in ecstasy and ketamine user population may not be as acute as the CRDA suggested.

- 1.1.5 The size of the party drug user population is estimated. Though the estimation is preliminary, it is hoped that it may alleviate some of the unjustified panic generated by misrepresenting reports.
- 1.1.6 It is felt that parties and discos require different policies and interventions. It is envisioned that party culture is a hype that will gradually fade out. Thus prevention of morbidity and mortality caused by overdose and dehydration is of priority. Provision of creative substitutes (e.g. break dance, skate boarding) may also help shorten the hype cycle for rave party. Local discos are frequented mostly by marginalized youths. Social policy is more important than drug policy in reintegrating them into the society. It is also felt that supply reduction executed at the border may be more effective than party and disco drug raid.
- 1.1.7 Party and disco drug users often restrain their drug use following serious overdoses. However, unless they quit partying and discoing, it is unlikely that they will cease their drug use. Full time employment and stable relationship are central to recovery and abstinence from the disco scene. For people who have not yet contemplated leaving the drug scene, a multi-stage approach that emphasizes controlled drug use, harm reduction, healthy substitute pastimes, and meaning centered counseling is proposed.