

**An Analysis of
the Reported Drug Abuse Trend
in the Past Decade, 1987 - 1996**



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Government Secretariat
Government of the Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region**

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	
□ Objectives	1
□ Coverage of study	1
□ Limitations of the drug abuse statistics	1
2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	2
3. DRUG ABUSERS REPORTED TO THE CRDA	
□ Number of persons reported	5
□ Distribution of drug abusers by reporting agencies	6
4. PREVALENCE OF DRUG ABUSE	
□ Drug abuse rate by sex and age-group	8
□ Drug abuse rate by district of residence	10
5. CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWLY REPORTED PERSONS	
□ Common drugs of abuse	13
□ Sex and age	18
□ Age of initial drug abuse	21
□ Marital status	22
□ Educational attainment/vocational training	23
□ Employment status	24
□ Previous conviction	25
□ District of residence	26

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Hong Kong reported drug abuse
trend in the past decade, 1987-96s(1998)



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	Page
6 CHARACTERISTICS OF REPORTED INDIVIDUALS	
□ Common drugs of abuse	27
□ Sex and age	33
□ Age of initial drug abuse	36
□ Marital status	37
□ Educational attainment/vocational training	38
□ Employment status	39
□ Previous conviction	40
□ District of residence	41

1. INTRODUCTION

Objectives

- 1.1 The objectives of the study are as follows :
- a) To provide an overview of the drug abuse situation in Hong Kong in the past decade;
 - b) To provide a trend analysis on the characteristics of different types of drug abusers; and
 - c) To depict any change in the characteristics of drug abusers within the study period.

Coverage of study

1.2 The study covers drug abusers reported to the CRDA for the period 1987 to 1996. Separate analyses are provided for reported individuals and newly reported persons (i.e. those reported to the CRDA for the first time).

Limitations of the drug abuse statistics

1.3 As reporting to the CRDA is made through the reporting agencies on a voluntary basis, the Registry can only record those who have come into contact with and been reported by these agencies. The drug abuse statistics presented in this report are hence based on the information available to the CRDA which is inevitably incomplete. Care should be taken when interpreting the findings of the report and the statistics should be taken as indicators of the trends/changes in drug abuse over time rather than a finite definition of the situation.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

2.1 The drug abuse situation in the past decade (1987 - 1996) can be summarised as follows :

- a) In the past decade, the CRDA recorded an average of 17 200 individuals each year. Of whom, 3 300 (19%) were newly reported drug abusers. There was a marked increase in the number of individuals reported as well as the newly reported persons in the latter half of the decade. (paragraphs 3.1 - 3.2)
- b) Law enforcement agencies and methadone clinics were the two major types of reporting agencies of the CRDA, accounting for the majority of the total reported drug abusers throughout the decade. In particular, more of the newly reported drug abusers were reported by the law enforcement agencies. (paragraphs 3.3 - 3.4)
- c) There was an increase in the prevalence of drug abuse in the decade. Males and persons aged under 21 were observed to exhibit a higher rate of drug abuse. When analysed by district of residence, higher abuse rates for reported individuals were observed in Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin and Kwun Tong, while higher abuse rates for newly reported persons were found in Tuen Mun, Yau Tsim Mong, Islands and Yuen Long. (paragraphs 4.1 - 4.4)
- d) The decade saw the decline in the significance of narcotics abuse on the one hand and the emergence of psychotropic substances abuse on the other. (paragraphs 5.1 and 6.1)
- e) Heroin continued to be the most popular drug of abuse throughout the decade despite the decline in its predominance. The proportion of newly reported heroin abusers fluctuated downwards from 76.5% in 1987 to 53.4% in 1996 and that of reported individuals having abused heroin fluctuated downwards from 96.9% in 1987 to 86.5% in 1996. (paragraphs 5.2 and 6.2)
- f) Cannabis emerged as the most common psychotropic substance among the drug abusers reported to the CRDA,

especially among those aged under 21. The proportion of newly reported cannabis abusers rose from 4.8% in 1987 to 29.3% in 1996 and that of reported individuals having abused cannabis rose from 0.6% in 1987 to 8.5% in 1996. (paragraphs 5.3 and 6.3)

- g) Towards the latter half of the decade, cough medicine emerged as the second most common psychotropic substance of abuse, especially among young drug abusers aged under 21. The proportion of newly reported cough medicine abusers rose from 3.1% in 1988 to 8.9% in 1996 and that of reported individuals having abused cough medicine rose from 0.3% in 1988 to 3.1% in 1996. (paragraphs 5.4 and 6.4)
- h) Towards the latter half of the decade, there were marked increases in the proportions of abusers of amphetamines and organic solvents. On the other hand, there was a sharp decrease in the proportion of methaqualone abusers over the decade. (paragraphs 5.5 and 6.5)
- i) Over the decade, the majority (over 78%) of drug abusers were male. The proportion of reported female individuals increased gradually from 7.7% in 1987 to 12.3% in 1996. (paragraphs 5.6 and 6.6)
- j) The decade saw the decline in the age of drug abusers reported to the CRDA. The proportion of newly reported persons aged over 40 decreased from 20.2% in 1987 to 4.9% in 1996 while the proportion of those aged under 21 rose from 30.0% in 1987 to 43.2% in 1996. Likewise, the proportion of reported individuals aged over 40 decreased from 30.9% in 1987 to 29.1% in 1996 while the proportion of those aged under 21 rose from 7.9% in 1987 to 18.6% in 1996. In comparison, the mean age of male drug abusers was higher than their female counterparts. (paragraphs 5.7 - 5.8 and 6.7 - 6.8)
- k) There was also a decrease in the age when drug abusers started taking drugs. The mean age of initial drug abuse among newly reported persons decreased from 21.8 in 1987 to 20.9 in 1996 and that of reported individuals decreased from 19.6 in 1987 to 18.6 in 1996. On average, female drug

abusers had started drug use at an age earlier than their male counterparts. (paragraphs 5.9 and 6.9)

- l) The majority (over 58%) of drug abusers were single. There was an increase in the proportion of those who were single, divorced, separated or widowed while there was a decrease in the proportion of those who were married or cohabiting. (paragraphs 5.10 and 6.10)
- m) The education attainment of drug abusers was much higher towards the end of the decade, in particular the newly reported persons. The proportion of newly reported persons who had received secondary education increased significantly from 54.2% in 1987 to 83.0% in 1996 and that of reported individuals increased from 33.7% in 1987 to 59.9% in 1996. On the other hand, the proportion of newly reported persons who had received primary education or no schooling decreased sharply from 43.1% in 1987 to 15.0% in 1996 while that of reported individuals decreased from 65.6% in 1987 to 39.5% in 1996. Likewise, there was a marked decrease in the proportion of drug abusers who had received vocational training. (paragraphs 5.11 and 6.11)
- n) The majority (over 51%) of drug abusers were employed at the time of report. However, the proportion of the employed drug abusers decreased gradually in the decade. (paragraphs 5.12 and 6.12)
- o) There was a slight decrease in the proportion of drug abusers who admitted previous convictions over the decade. The proportion of newly reported persons who had previous convictions decreased from 47.9% in 1987 to 42.7% in 1996 and that of reported individuals decreased from 85.7% in 1987 to 80.9% in 1996. (paragraphs 5.13 and 6.13)
- p) A greater proportion of the drug abusers reported in the decade were known to live in Kwun Tong, Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin and Tuen Mun. (paragraphs 5.14 and 6.14)

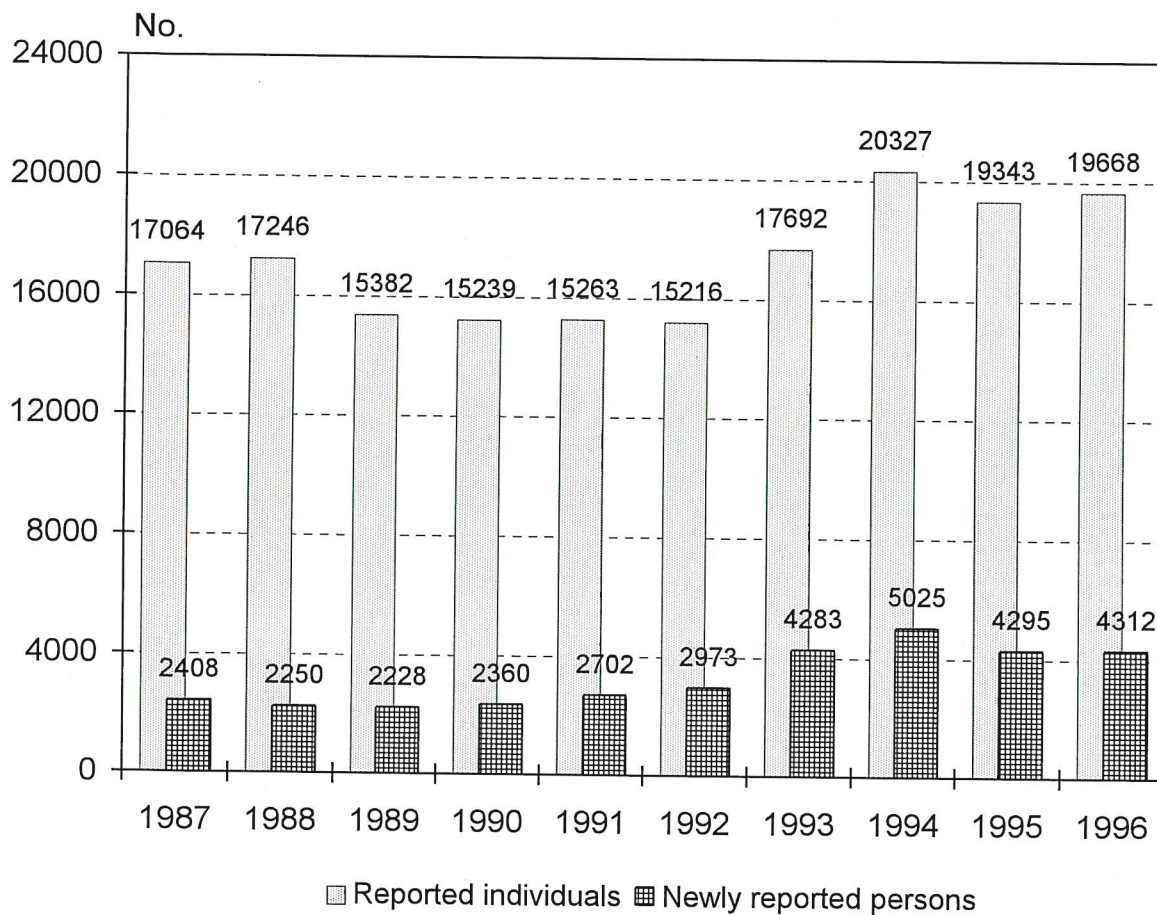
3. DRUG ABUSERS REPORTED TO THE CRDA

Number of persons reported

3.1 In the past decade (1987 - 1996), the CRDA recorded an average of 17 200 reported individuals each year. Of whom, 3 300 (19%) were newly reported persons. (Chart 3.1)

3.2 The trend in the number of reported individuals fluctuated downwards since 1987 until it reached its low (15 216) in 1992. Then the number started to increase and reached its peak (20 327) in 1994, after which, it dropped to 19 668 in 1996. Similarly, the number of newly reported persons, having decreased to its low (2 228) in 1989, increased gradually to 2 973 in 1992. Then the number rose sharply to reach its peak (5 025) in 1994 and dropped to 4 312 in 1996. (Chart 3.1)

Chart 3.1 : Number of persons reported to the CRDA, 1987 - 1996



Distribution of drug abusers by reporting agencies

3.3 Throughout the decade, the majority of drug abusers (reported individuals) were reported by law enforcement agencies and methadone clinics. The proportion of drug abusers reported by methadone clinics fluctuated downwards from 60.2% in 1990 to 45.6% in 1996 while that reported by law enforcement agencies fluctuated upwards from 46.2% to 61.4% over the same period. Other major reporting agencies were, in order of significance, Correctional Services Department's Drug Addiction Treatment Centres (CSD's DATCs), Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers (SARDA) and voluntary treatment agencies. (Table 3.1)

3.4 As for the newly reported persons, over 60% were reported by law enforcement agencies and about 20% (except 12.7% in 1988) by methadone clinics throughout the decade. Other major reporting agencies included CSD's DATCs, voluntary treatment agencies and SARDA. (Table 3.1)

Table 3.1 : Drug abusers by reporting agencies, 1987 - 1996

Reporting agencies	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Newly reported persons</u>										
Law enforcement agencies*	75.9	75.1	69.4	66.6	62.3	61.3	73.2	68.0	73.5	68.8
Methadone clinics	19.5	12.7	17.1	23.8	25.5	22.9	18.4	22.4	20.2	19.7
SARDA	2.6	2.0	2.0	2.2	3.0	4.1	5.2	4.5	2.7	2.3
CSD's DATCs	7.8	8.8	8.0	5.9	7.3	9.5	11.5	6.4	4.3	8.8
Voluntary treatment agencies	1.5	3.1	3.1	4.3	3.8	4.1	5.4	5.2	3.7	3.8
Others (e.g. hospitals/clinics, family services of Social Welfare Department)	11.8	13.6	13.1	12.1	14.7	17.3	15.9	21.4	14.7	15.9
<u>Reported individuals</u>										
Law enforcement agencies*	59.6	57.2	54.6	46.2	45.9	47.1	57.3	59.0	70.0	61.4
Methadone clinics	54.6	52.4	51.8	60.2	56.7	50.2	43.7	47.8	43.8	45.6
SARDA	12.3	11.3	12.8	13.3	14.0	14.3	16.3	13.1	10.3	10.7
CSD's DATCs	15.0	20.9	21.4	16.1	16.8	20.6	21.1	14.8	11.1	21.4
Voluntary treatment agencies	3.9	4.1	4.6	6.5	7.5	6.4	7.1	5.4	4.2	5.3
Others (e.g. hospitals/clinics, family services of Social Welfare Department)	7.8	6.0	5.6	5.5	8.5	9.5	11.4	12.0	10.6	9.5

Notes : * Excluding DATCs

SARDA - Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers

CSD's DATCs - Correctional Services Department's Drug Addiction Treatment Centres

4. PREVALENCE OF DRUG ABUSE

Drug abuse rate by sex and age-group

4.1 Over the period 1989 - 1996, the drug abuse rate for reported individuals fluctuated between 3.16 - 4.06 per 1 000 population aged 11 and over, with its low in 1992 and its peak in 1994. The abuse rate for males, fluctuated between 5.72 - 7.17 per 1 000, was significantly higher than that for females, varied between 0.52 - 0.90 per 1 000. The abuse rate for youngsters (aged under 21) increased sharply from 1.46 per 1 000 in 1989 to 4.25 per 1 000 in 1996, while that for adults (aged 21 and over) fluctuated mildly between 3.34 - 3.83 per 1 000 throughout the period. It was observed that, starting from 1993, the drug abuse rate for youngsters was higher than that of adults. (Table 4.1)

4.2 As for the newly reported persons, the drug abuse rate was in an upward trend since 1989 (0.47 per 1 000) until it reached its peak (1.00 per 1 000) in 1994, then the rate dropped to 0.80 per 1 000 in 1996. Similar to reported individuals, males had a much higher drug abuse rate (0.76 - 1.58 per 1 000) than females (0.17 - 0.41 per 1 000). Comparing with the adults (0.35 - 0.54 per 1 000), the drug abuse rate for the youngsters (1.01 - 3.47 per 1 000) was higher and increased more rapidly throughout the period. (Table 4.1)

Table 4.1 : Drug abuse rates in population by sex and age, 1989 - 1996

Sex/age	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
<u>Newly reported persons</u>								
Sex								
Male	0.76	0.80	0.93	1.03	1.43	1.58	1.28	1.29
Female	0.17	0.18	0.21	0.19	0.30	0.41	0.36	0.31
Age-group								
Under 21	1.01	1.03	1.23	1.72	2.72	3.47	2.57	2.17
21 and over	0.35	0.38	0.43	0.39	0.50	0.52	0.50	0.54
Overall	0.47	0.50	0.58	0.62	0.87	1.00	0.83	0.80
<u>Reported individuals</u>								
Sex								
Male	5.94	5.82	5.87	5.72	6.46	7.17	6.48	6.42
Female	0.52	0.52	0.55	0.53	0.68	0.88	0.90	0.89
Age-group								
Under 21	1.46	1.40	1.68	2.35	3.78	5.22	4.87	4.25
21 and over	3.69	3.61	3.59	3.34	3.57	3.83	3.51	3.52
Overall	3.28	3.21	3.25	3.16	3.61	4.06	3.72	3.64

Note : Drug abuse rate denotes the corresponding number of drug abusers per thousand of the respective group in the population aged 11 and over.

Drug abuse rate by district of residence

4.3 For the reported individuals, districts of residence with a higher drug abuse rate over the period 1989 - 1996 included Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin and Kwun Tong. Districts of residence with a lower abuse rate in the period included Sai Kung, Sha Tin and Central & Western. Except Central & Western and Kwai Tsing, there was an increase in the drug abuse rate in all districts in the past decade.(Table 4.2)

4.4 In respect of the newly reported persons, districts of residence with a higher drug abuse rate over the period 1989 - 1996 included Tuen Mun, Yau Tsim Mong, Islands and Yuen Long. Districts of residence with a lower drug abuse rate in the period included Eastern, Sha Tin, Kowloon City and Sai Kung. All districts, except Southern, experienced an increase in the drug abuse rate at the end of the period. (Table 4.2)

**Table 4.2 : Drug abuse rates in population by district of residence,
1989 - 1996**

District of residence	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
<u>Newly reported persons</u>								
Hong Kong Island	0.37	0.32	0.35	0.45	0.66	0.80	0.61	0.52
Central & Western	0.34	0.36	0.30	0.55	0.45	0.77	0.56	0.53
Wanchai	0.30	0.24	0.47	0.43	0.50	0.63	0.61	0.54
Eastern	0.22	0.20	0.22	0.31	0.59	0.48	0.49	0.40
Southern	0.77	0.62	0.58	0.68	1.13	1.62	0.90	0.77
Kowloon	0.53	0.51	0.60	0.59	0.86	0.89	0.89	0.86
Yau Tsim Mong	0.89	0.99	1.09	0.91	1.16	1.22	1.43	1.72
Sham Shui Po	0.57	0.48	0.56	0.60	0.71	0.75	0.92	0.81
Kowloon City	0.29	0.30	0.34	0.31	0.54	0.56	0.65	0.61
Wong Tai sin	0.47	0.52	0.61	0.61	0.87	0.92	0.71	0.69
Kwun Tong	0.53	0.42	0.55	0.62	1.02	1.04	0.92	0.79
New Territories & Islands	0.41	0.51	0.61	0.64	0.88	1.06	0.79	0.80
Kwai Tsing	0.39	0.34	0.37	0.59	0.78	0.85	0.48	0.52
Tsuen Wan	0.33	0.37	0.53	0.57	0.77	0.81	0.81	0.68
Tuen Mun	0.65	1.37	1.47	1.04	1.40	1.81	1.17	1.08
Yuen Long	0.56	0.59	0.81	0.93	1.19	1.43	0.95	1.07
North	0.39	0.38	0.47	0.74	0.93	1.29	0.98	0.95
Tai Po	0.42	0.37	0.57	0.46	0.54	0.93	0.98	1.01
Sha Tin	0.24	0.26	0.32	0.38	0.59	0.69	0.63	0.52
Sai Kung	0.22	0.24	0.29	0.39	0.70	0.64	0.38	0.81
Islands	0.69	0.22	0.55	1.05	1.57	1.24	1.01	1.22
<u>Reported individuals</u>								
Hong Kong Island	2.24	2.14	2.06	2.11	2.47	2.84	2.69	2.48
Central & Western	1.96	1.92	1.57	1.83	1.78	2.24	1.94	1.77
Wanchai	2.87	2.81	2.78	2.62	3.01	3.39	3.64	2.93
Eastern	1.90	1.79	1.79	1.79	2.19	2.29	2.24	2.27
Southern	2.77	2.64	2.63	2.74	3.37	4.22	3.78	3.27
Kowloon	4.11	4.11	4.18	3.96	4.39	4.81	4.80	4.80
Yau Tsim Mong	5.27	5.74	6.17	5.99	5.86	6.69	6.80	7.58
Sham Shui Po	4.60	4.70	4.89	4.83	4.96	5.16	6.07	5.48
Kowloon City	2.37	2.29	2.27	2.08	2.35	2.75	2.67	2.59
Wong Tai sin	4.91	4.71	4.55	4.41	5.19	5.49	4.76	5.04
Kwun Tong	3.87	3.73	3.80	3.47	4.21	4.64	4.62	4.40

**Table 4.2 : Drug abuse rates in population by district of residence,
1989 - 1996 (Cont'd)**

District of residence	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
New Territories & Islands	2.27	2.32	2.47	2.47	2.99	3.52	3.16	3.15
Kwai Tsing	2.76	2.81	2.65	2.73	3.14	3.67	2.28	2.37
Tsuen Wan	2.02	1.97	2.23	2.22	2.81	3.15	4.53	4.30
Tuen Mun	2.06	2.75	3.23	3.25	4.07	4.88	4.34	4.34
Yuen Long	3.18	3.42	3.59	3.64	4.06	4.98	4.13	4.07
North	2.96	2.89	3.35	3.58	3.73	4.38	4.21	3.67
Tai Po	2.43	2.19	2.29	2.04	2.26	2.91	3.01	3.13
Sha Tin	1.34	1.38	1.53	1.44	1.85	2.16	2.07	1.98
Sai Kung	1.77	1.49	1.28	1.42	1.98	2.11	1.33	2.06
Islands	3.02	1.77	2.06	2.73	4.48	4.67	3.20	3.31

Note : Drug abuse rate denotes the corresponding number of drug abusers per thousand of the respective group in the population aged 11 and over.

5. CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWLY REPORTED PERSONS

Common drugs of abuse

5.1 The past decade saw the decline in the significance of narcotics abuse, particularly heroin, on the one hand and on the other the emergence of psychotropic substances abuse, such as cannabis, cough medicine, amphetamines and flunitrazepam. (Table 5.1)

Table 5.1 : Newly reported drug abusers by type of drug abused, 1987 - 1996

Type of drug	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Heroin	76.5	60.9	60.8	66.5	69.6	67.4	75.8	77.4	62.7	53.4
Opium	2.8	2.8	3.5	1.5	1.9	1.2	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.3
Morphine	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.2	*	0.1
Physeptone/methadone	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.1	1.2	0.9	1.0	0.5	0.4
Other narcotic analgesics	0.9	1.6	2.4	3.4	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	*
Amphetamines	0.6	-	0.3	0.5	0.9	1.2	1.2	1.0	2.4	8.2
Cocaine	0.2	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.2	0.3
Barbiturates	0.1	1.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	*
Methaqualone	19.6	13.4	5.7	4.6	0.7	1.1	0.8	0.7	0.3	0.5
Cannabis	4.8	20.3	26.9	19.5	16.2	18.7	18.2	17.2	28.0	29.3
Brotizolam	N.A.	0.5	4.2	5.7	1.6	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1	*
Flunitrazepam	0.6	6.5	2.1	3.9	1.7	1.2	4.5	5.5	3.3	2.8
Triazolam	N.A.	N.A.	1.0	1.7	0.9	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.8	1.3
Cough medicine	N.A.	3.1	5.8	7.0	10.2	15.0	8.3	9.1	8.3	8.9
Organic solvents	N.A.	N.A.	0.2	0.2	1.2	1.1	0.4	0.6	1.2	3.9
Number of newly reported persons with known type of drug abused	935	813	1476	1556	1863	2246	3342	4124	3337	3532

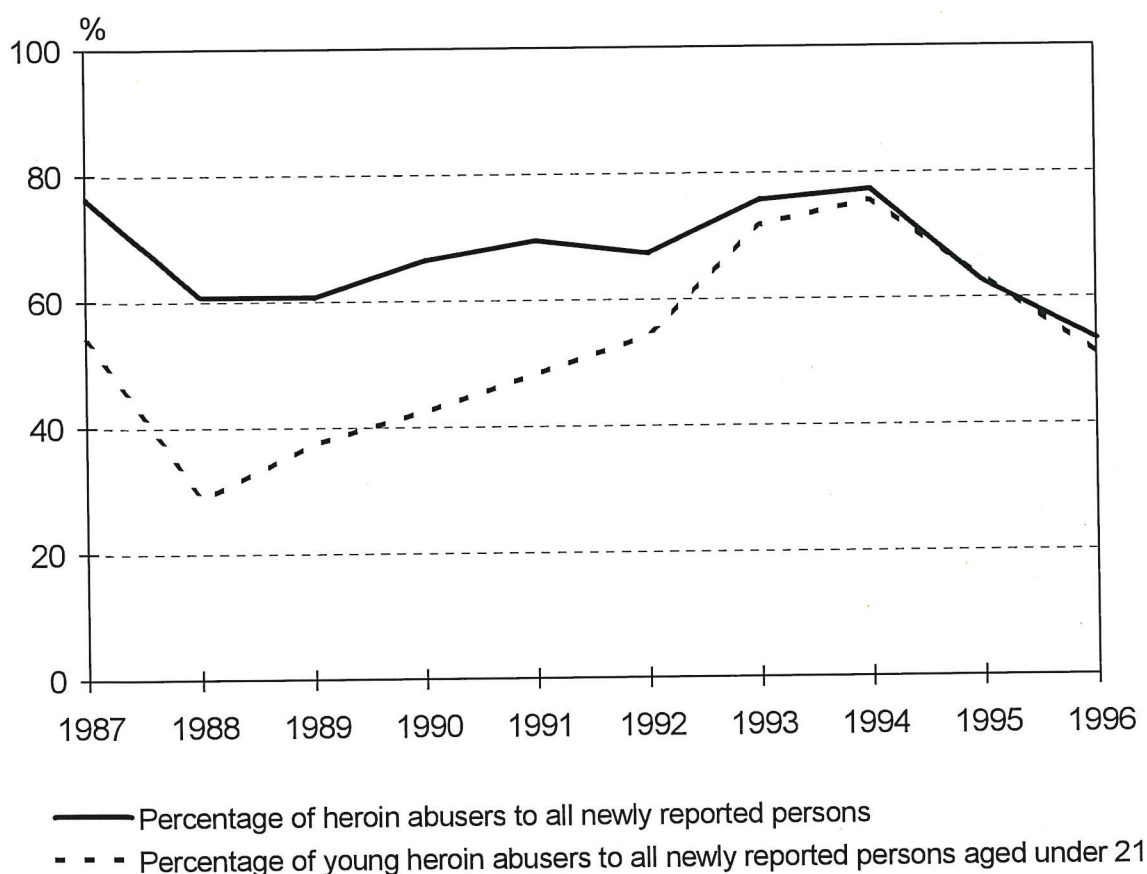
Notes : (1) * Less than 0.05

(2) N.A. - Not available

(3) Abuser taking more than one type of drug is separately counted in each type of the drugs concerned.

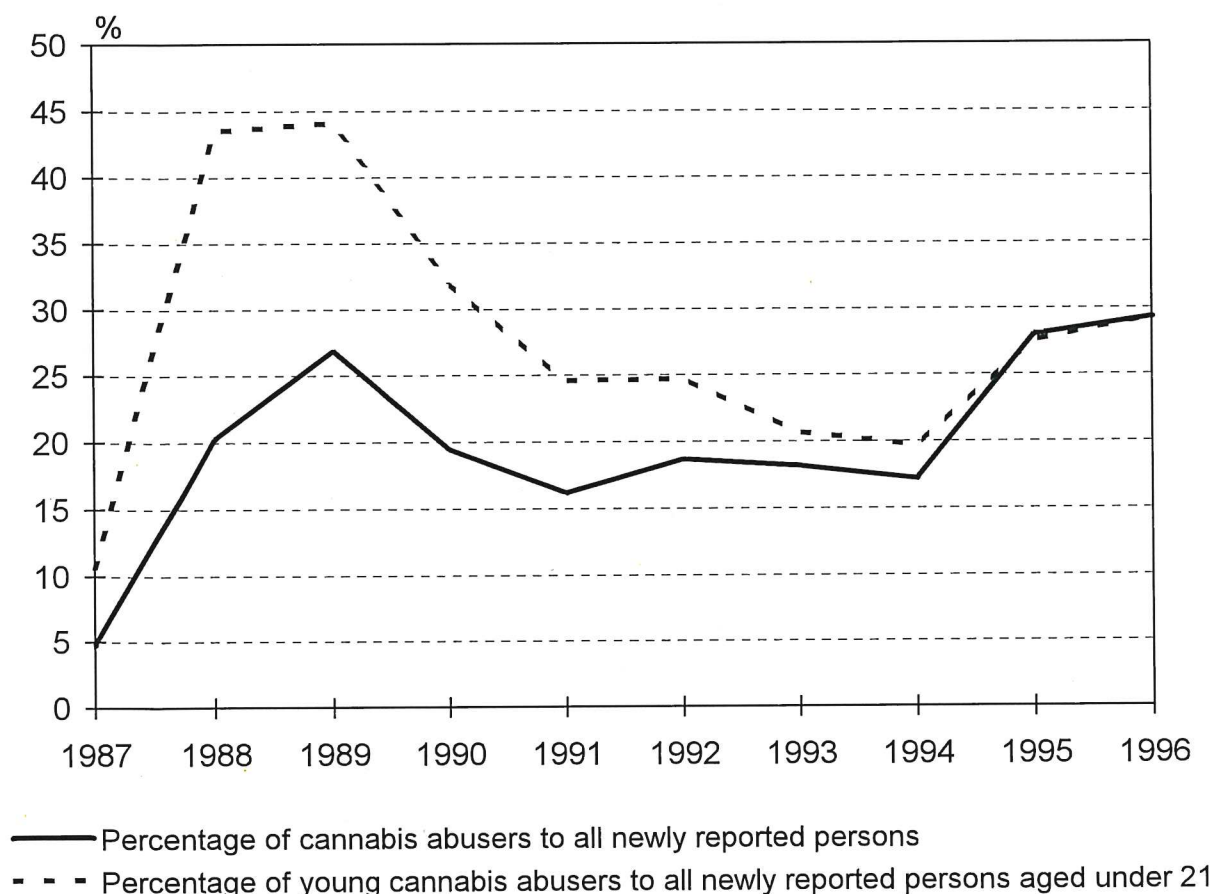
5.2 Heroin continued to be the most common drug of abuse throughout the decade despite the decline in its predominance. The proportion of newly reported heroin abusers, having dropped from 76.5% in 1987 to 60.8% in 1989, rose to a peak of 77.4% in 1994, then decreased sharply to a record low of 53.4% in 1996. Among the newly reported persons aged under 21, the proportion of young heroin abusers, after suffering from a substantial decrease from 54.3% in 1987 to 28.7% in 1988, rose to a peak of 75.7% in 1994, then declined gradually to 51.3% in 1996. (Chart 5.1)

Chart 5.1 : Newly reported heroin abusers, 1987 - 1996



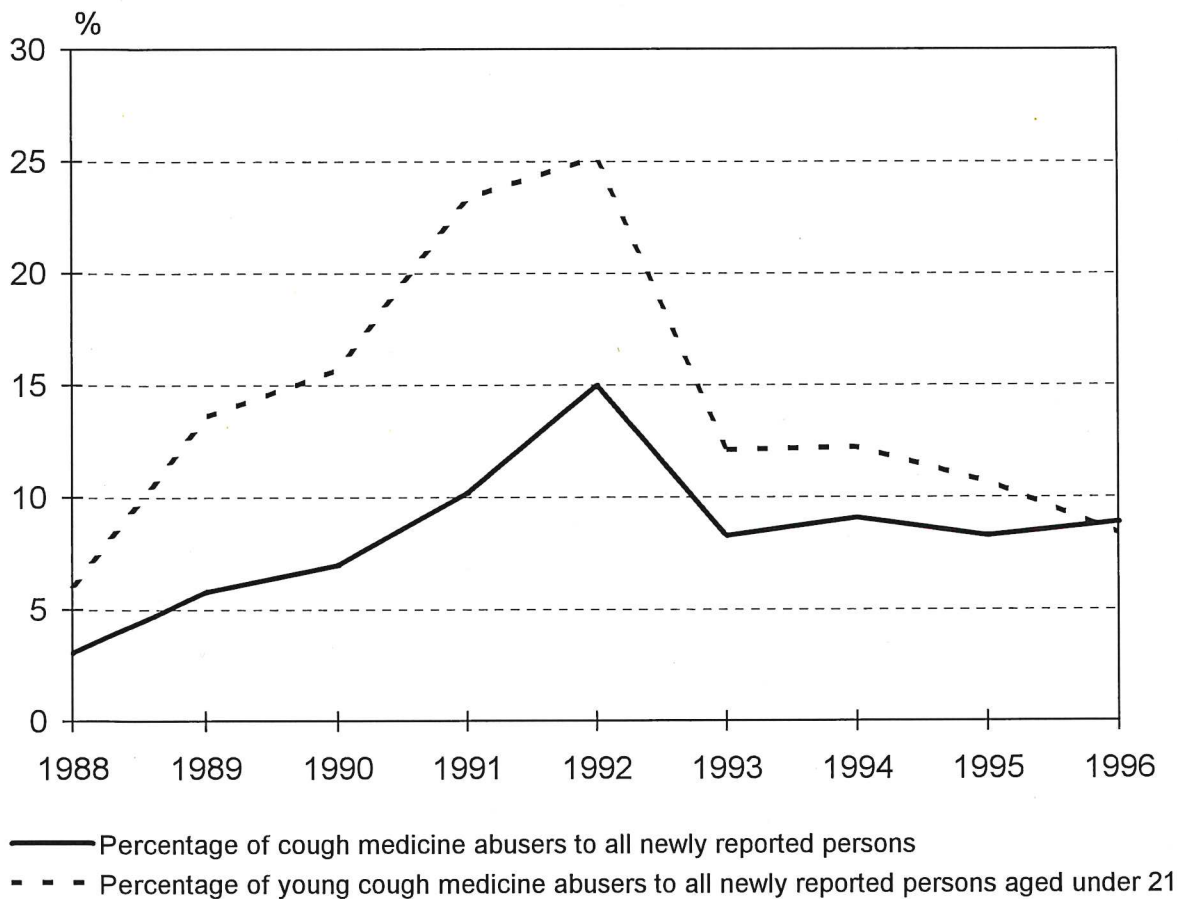
5.3 Starting from 1988, cannabis emerged as the most common psychotropic substance among newly reported persons, especially among those aged under 21. The proportion of newly reported cannabis abusers rose drastically from 4.8% in 1987 to 26.9% in 1989, then fluctuated downwards to 17.2% in 1994 and rose again to reach a peak of 29.3% in 1996. Similar rise and fall were noted for the proportion of those aged under 21. Over 40% of all young drug abusers newly reported in 1988 and 1989 were cannabis abusers. The proportion, however, dropped to about 20% in 1994 and then rose to about 30% in 1996. (Chart 5.2)

Chart 5.2 : Newly reported cannabis abusers, 1987 - 1996



5.4 Cough medicine was the second most common psychotropic proportion of newly reported cough medicine abusers increased gradually from 3.1% in 1988 to 15.0% in 1992, then fluctuated downwards to 8.9% in 1996. A similar trend was observed in the proportion of those aged under 21 which fluctuated between 6.0% and 25.2% in the decade with its low in 1988 and its peak in 1992. (Chart 5.3)

Chart 5.3 : Newly reported cough medicine abusers, 1987 - 1996



Note : Figures for cough medicine were not available before 1988.

5.5 The decade also saw the changes in the abuse of some other psychotropic substances including methaqualone, amphetamines, flunitrazepam and organic solvents. Methaqualone, which was commonly abused in 1987 and 1988, declined to a minor drug of abuse towards the end of the decade. After fluctuating for several years, there were marked increases in the proportions of newly reported abusers of amphetamines and organic solvents in the last two years of the decade. The proportion of newly reported flunitrazepam abusers fluctuated (between 0.6% and 6.5%) throughout the past ten years. (Charts 5.4 - 5.5)

Chart 5.4 : Newly reported abusers of methaqualone and flunitrazepam, 1987 - 1996

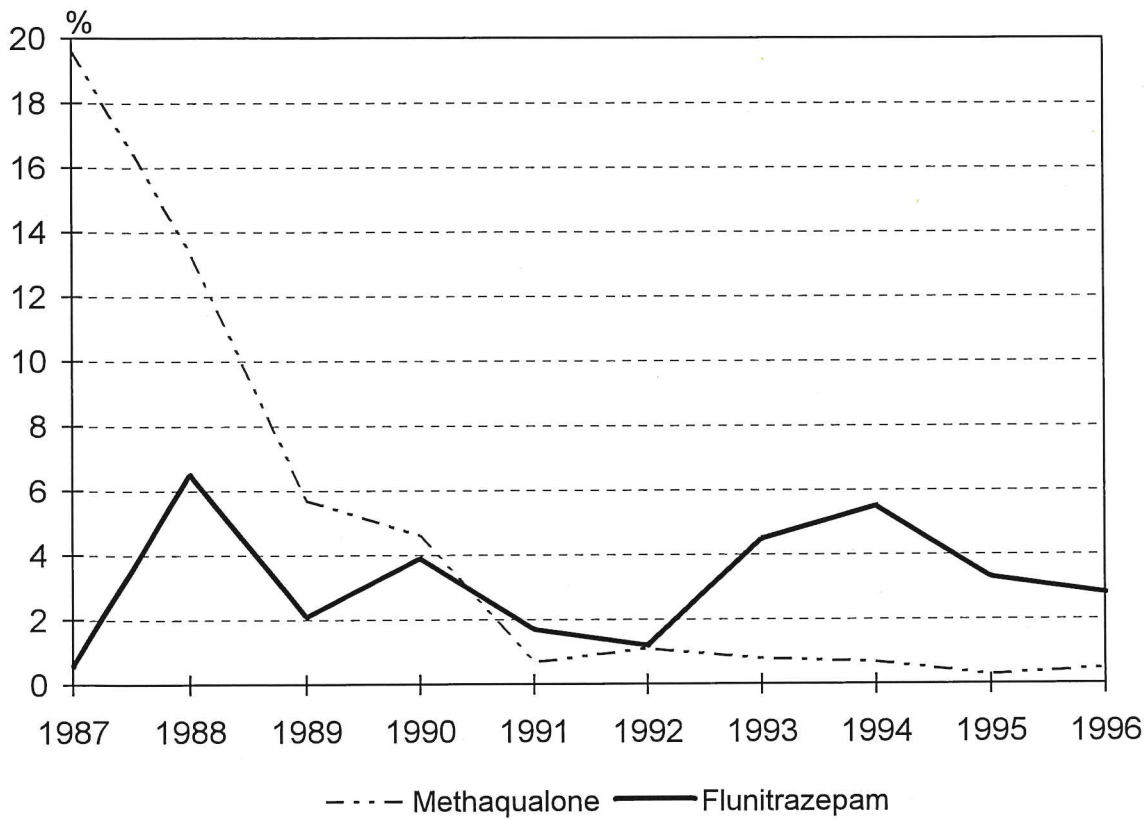
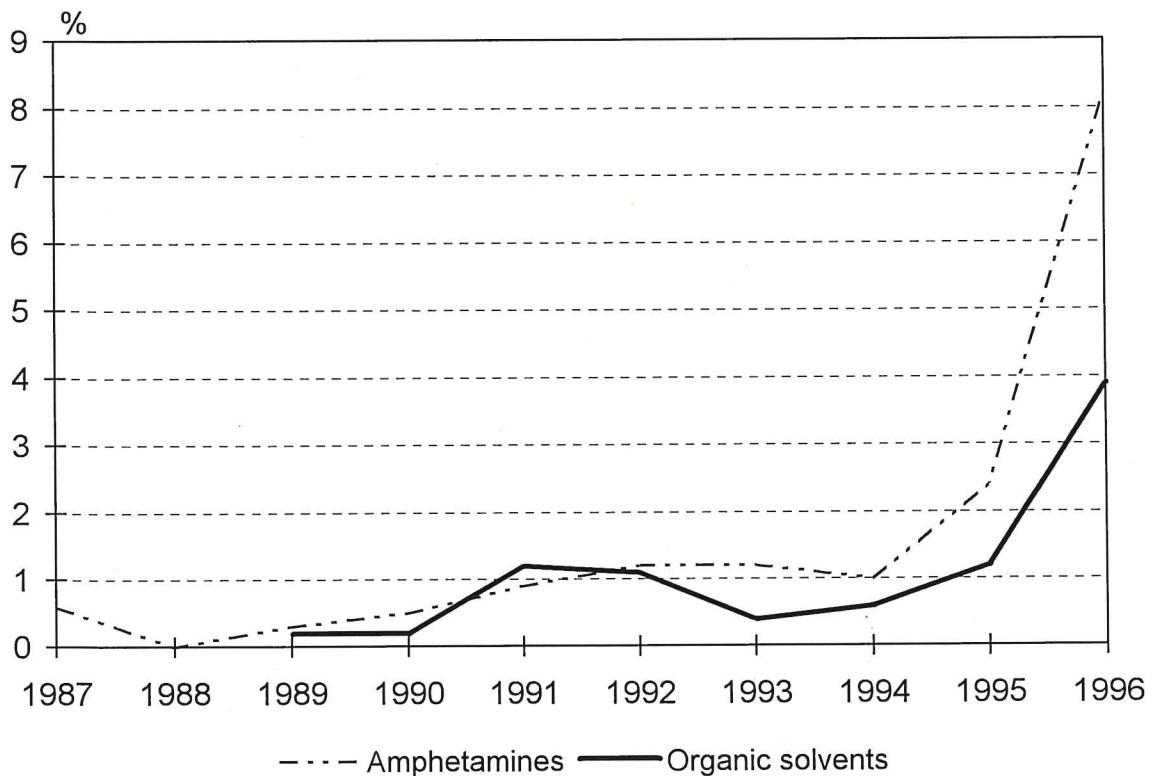


Chart 5.5 : Newly reported abusers of amphetamines and organic solvents, 1987 - 1996

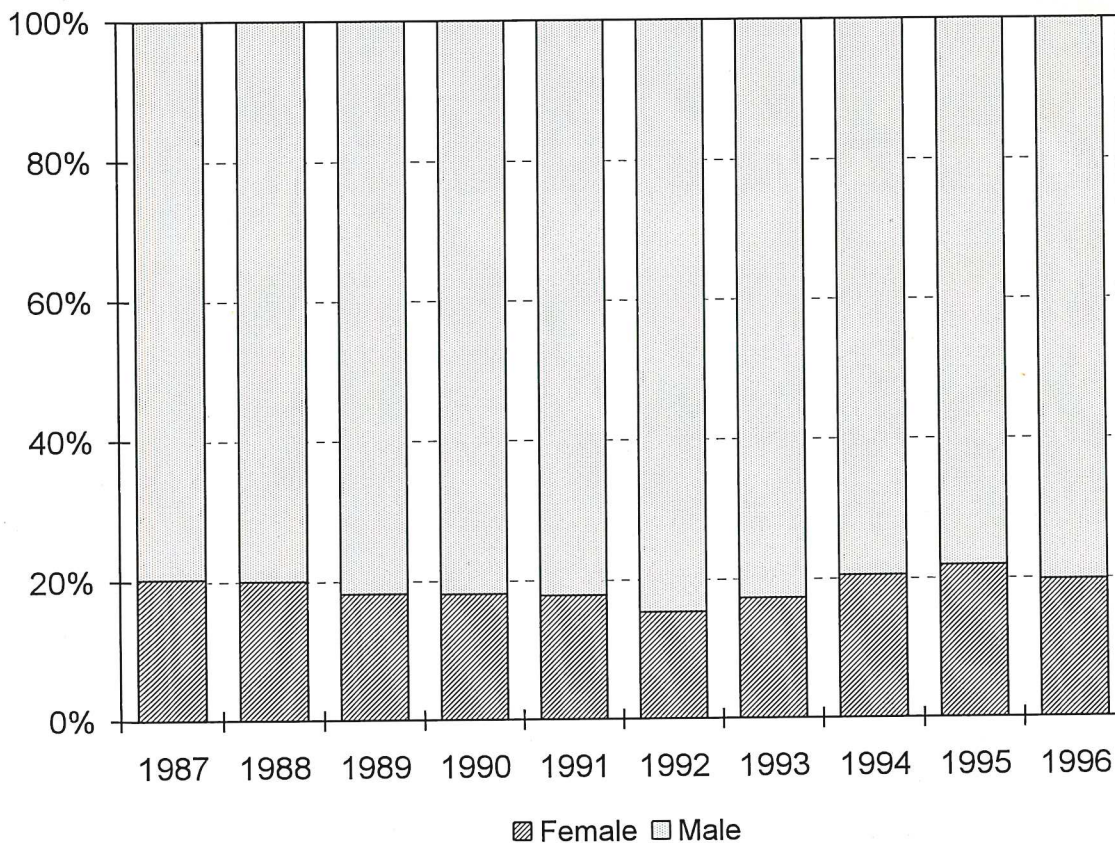


Note : Figures for organic solvents were not available before 1989.

Sex and age

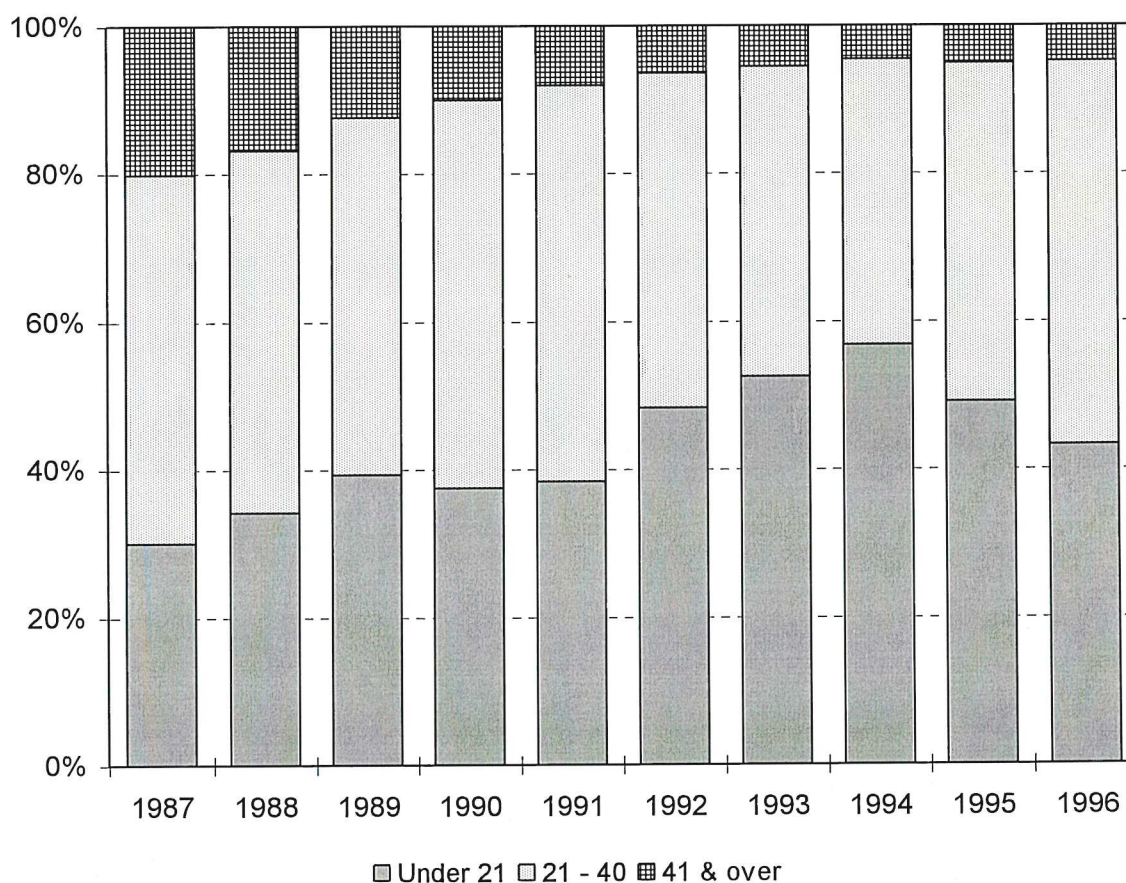
5.6 In the past ten years, about 80% of the persons newly reported to the CRDA were male. The proportion of newly reported females decreased gradually from 20.2% in 1987 to a low of 15.3% in 1992, then rose to 21.8% in 1995 and dropped again to 19.7% in 1996. (Chart 5.6)

Chart 5.6 : Newly reported persons by sex, 1987 - 1996



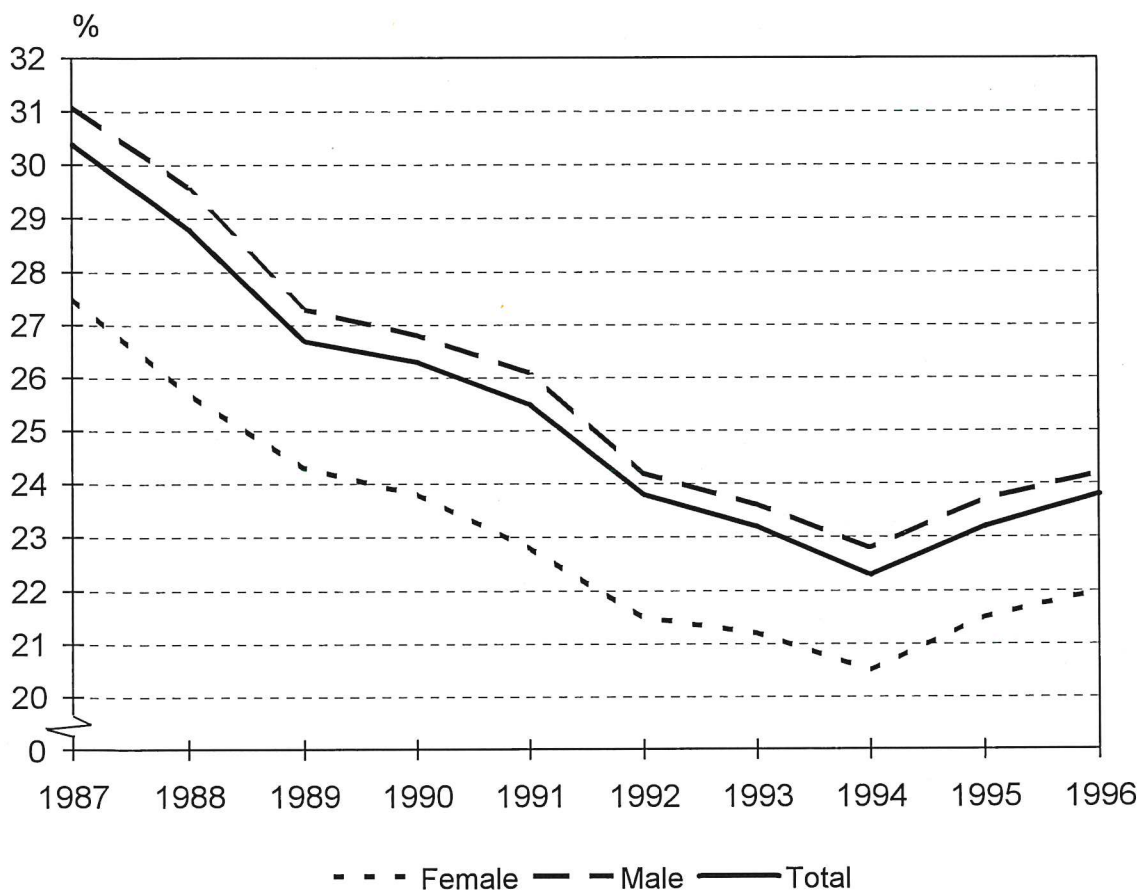
5.7 The proportion of newly reported persons aged over 40 decreased gradually since the beginning of the decade, from 20.2% in 1987 to 4.9% in 1996. On the other hand, the proportion of those aged under 21 increased from 30.0% in 1987 to a peak of 56.7% in 1994, then dropped to 43.2% in 1996. In 1993 and 1994, more than half of the newly reported persons were aged under 21. The proportion of those aged 21 - 40 fluctuated between 38.6% and 53.6% throughout the decade. (Chart 5.7)

Chart 5.7 : Newly reported persons by age, 1987 - 1996



5.8 Over the decade, more of the newly reported persons were from the younger age bracket. The mean age of the newly reported drug abusers fluctuated downwards from 30.4 in 1987 to 23.8 in 1996. It was noted that the mean age of the persons newly reported in 1996 was about 7 years younger than those reported ten years ago. Besides, the mean age for males was also higher than that for females. (Chart 5.8)

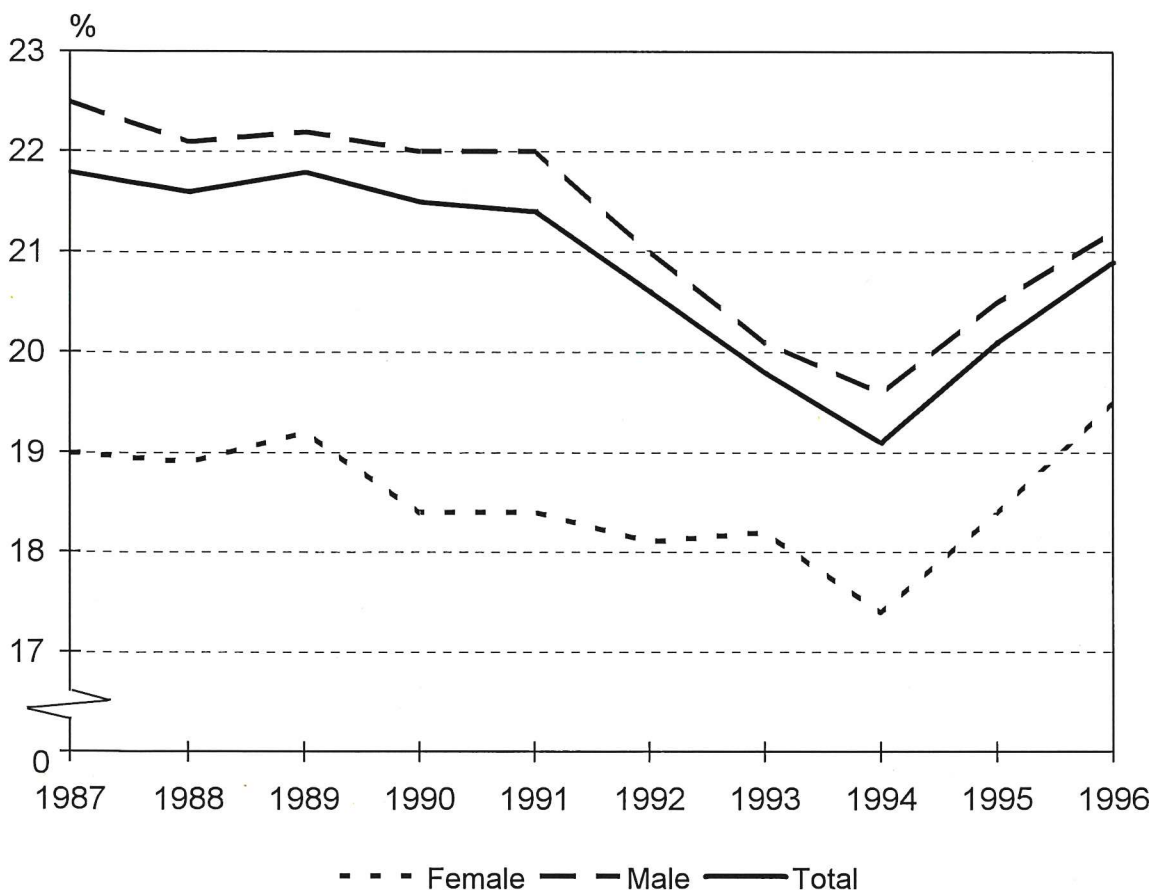
Chart 5.8 : Mean age of newly reported persons, 1987 - 1996



Age of initial drug abuse

5.9 Among the newly reported persons, the mean age of their initial drug abuse decreased from 21.8 in 1987 to 19.1 in 1994, then rose slightly to 20.9 in 1996. The newly reported females had started abusing drugs at an earlier age than their male counterparts. (Chart 5.9)

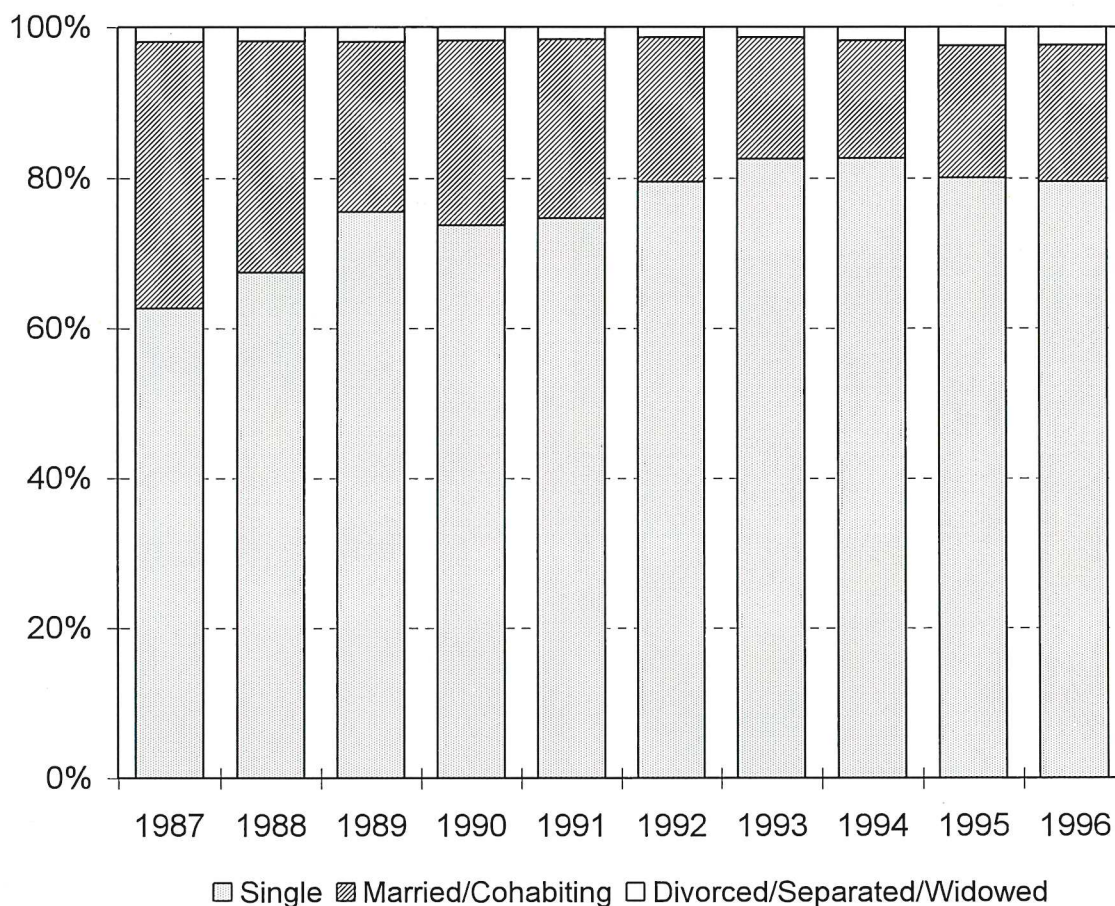
Chart 5.9 : Mean age of initial drug abuse of newly reported persons, 1987 - 1996



Marital status

5.10 Over the decade, more than 60% of the newly reported persons were single and the proportion of these single drug abusers was on the increase, from 62.6% in 1987 to 79.5% in 1996. The proportion of those who were married or cohabiting decreased gradually from 35.4% in 1987 to 18.1% in 1996. There was a slight increase in the proportion of those who were divorced, separated or widowed, from 2.0% in 1987 to 2.4% in 1996. (Chart 5.10)

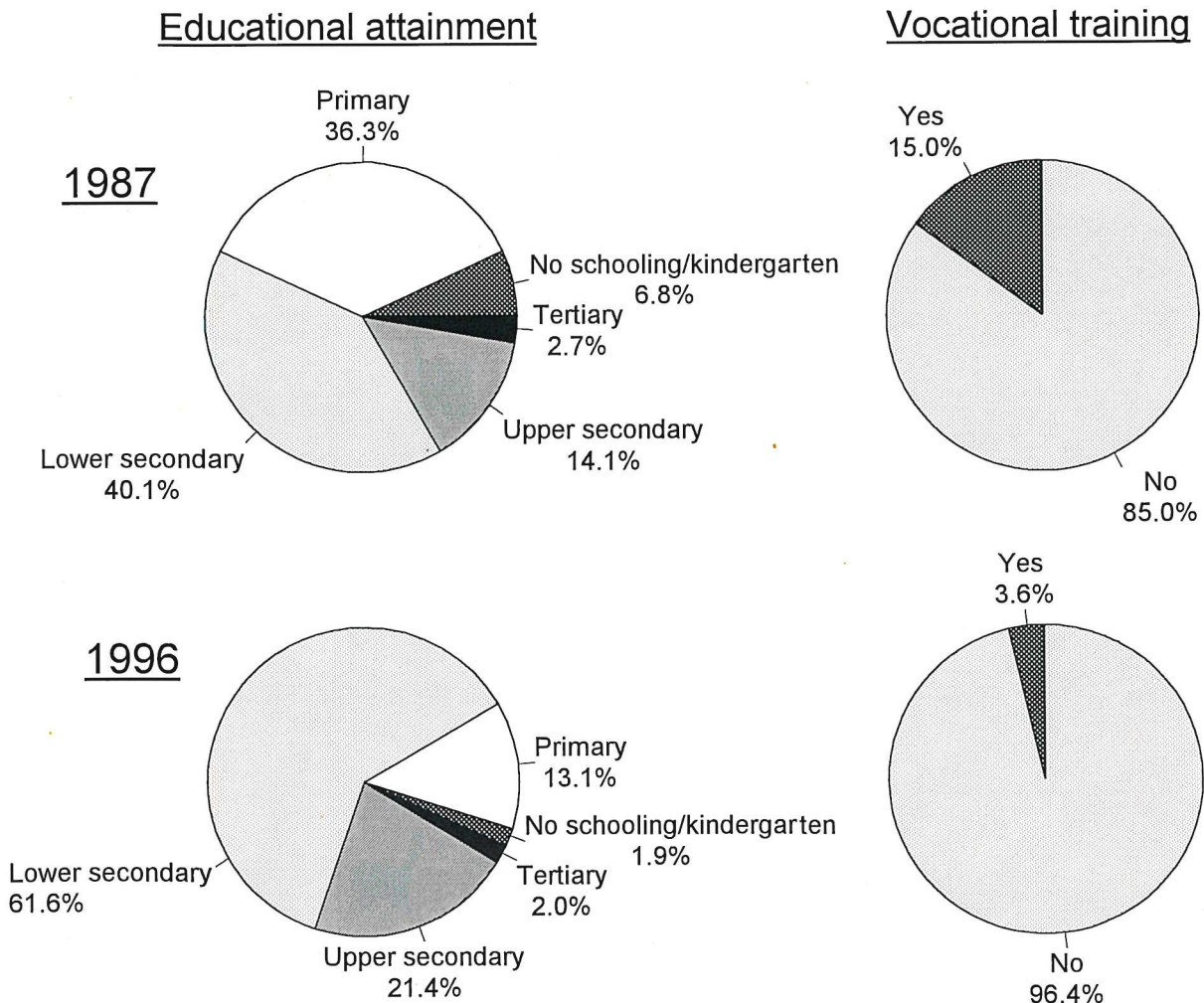
**Chart 5.10 : Newly reported persons by marital status,
1987 - 1996**



Educational attainment/vocational training

5.11 The educational attainment of the newly reported persons was much higher towards the end of the decade. The proportion of newly reported drug abusers who had received lower secondary education increased significantly from 40.1% in 1987 to 61.6% in 1996 and the proportion of those who had received upper secondary education increased from 14.1% in 1987 to 21.4% in 1996. The proportion of those who had received tertiary education remained low in 1996. On the other hand, the proportion of those who had received primary education decreased significantly from 36.3% in 1987 to 13.1% in 1996 and the proportion of those who had not received any education decreased from 6.8% to 1.9% over the decade. Likewise, the proportion of newly reported persons who had received vocational training decreased markedly from 15.0% in 1987 to 3.6% in 1996. (Chart 5.11)

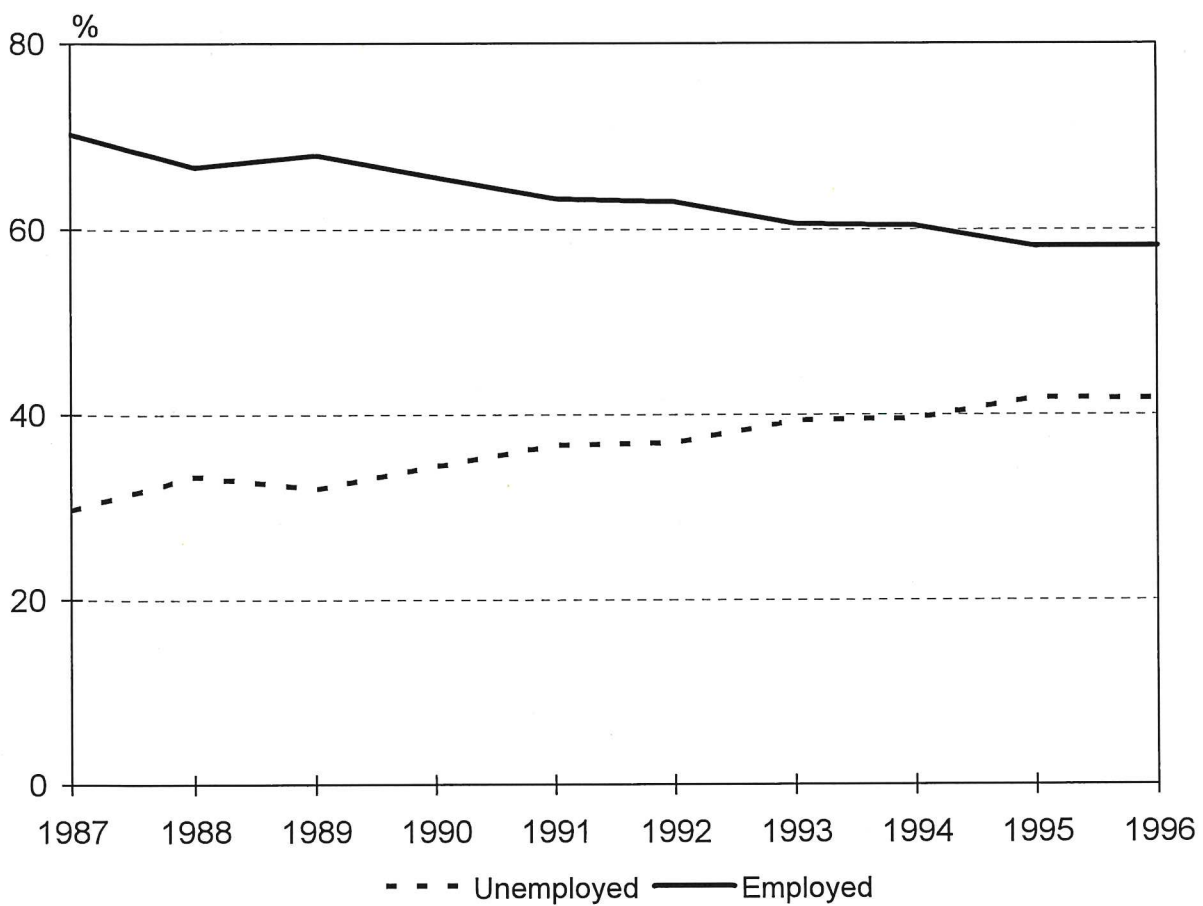
**Chart 5.11 : Newly reported persons by educational attainment/
vocational training, 1987 and 1996**



Employment status

5.12 The majority (over 58%) of newly reported persons were employed at the time of report. However, the proportion of these drug abusers who were employed decreased gradually from 70.3% in 1987 to 58.3% in 1996. (Chart 5.12)

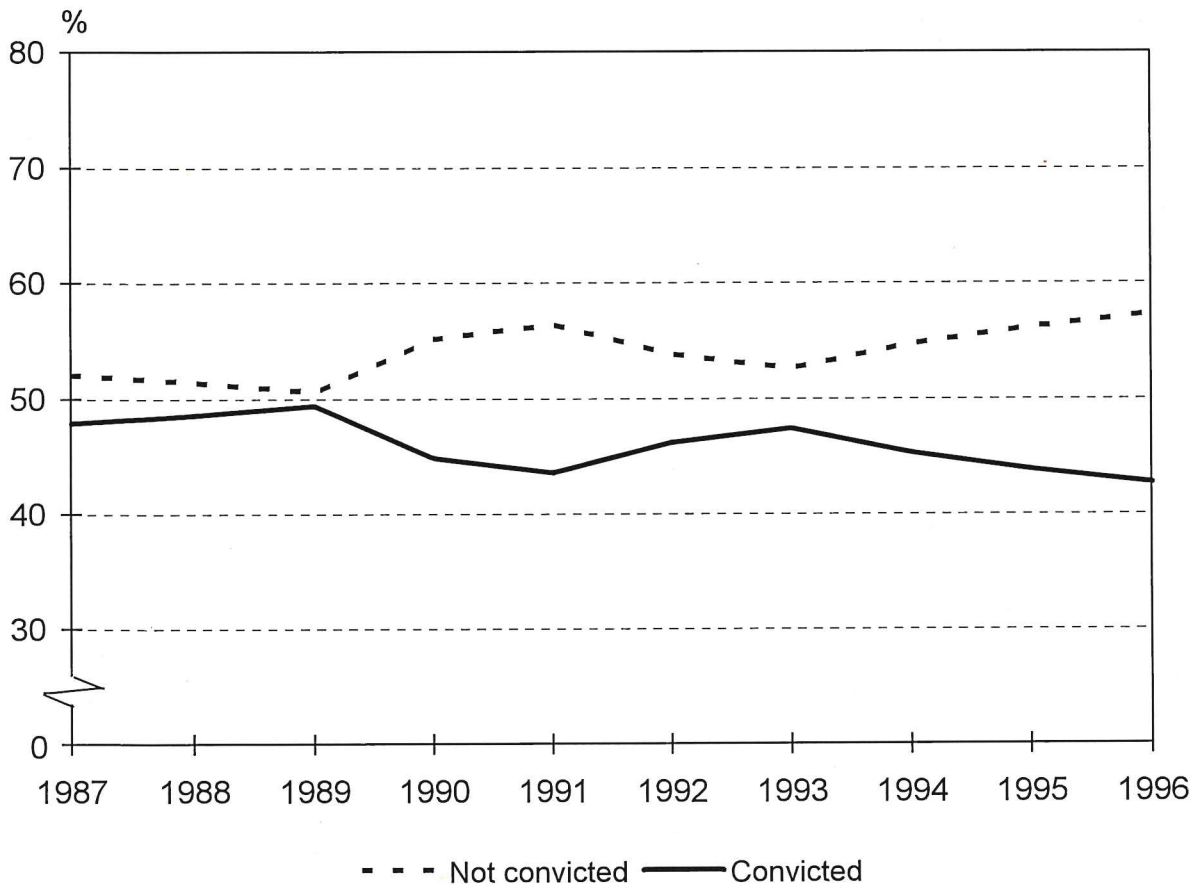
**Chart 5.12 : Newly reported persons by employment status,
1987 - 1996**



Previous conviction

5.13 Less than half of the newly reported persons had admitted previous convictions. There was a slight increase in the proportion of newly reported persons who admitted previous convictions in the first three years of the decade, from 47.9% in 1987 to 49.4% in 1989, then the proportion fluctuated downwards to 42.7% in 1996. (Chart 5.13)

**Chart 5.13 : Newly reported persons by previous conviction,
1987 - 1996**



District of residence

5.14 Of the 18 districts of residence, Kwun Tong, Tuen Mun and Yau Tsim Mong were found to have a greater proportion of drug abusers newly reported in the past ten years. Those districts with a smaller proportion included Islands, and Wanchai. It was noted that the proportion of newly reported drug abusers in all districts of the New Territories, except Kwai Tsing, increased in 1996 when compared with 1987, while the proportions of those in the districts of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island all decreased in 1996. (Table 5.2)

Table 5.2 : Newly reported persons by district of residence, 1987 - 1996

District of residence	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Hong Kong Island	20.9	19.0	18.8	15.6	14.3	17.3	17.6	18.8	16.8	14.8
Central & Western	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.7	2.5	4.1	2.4	3.7	3.1	3.0
Wanchai	4.1	3.6	2.3	1.7	2.8	2.3	1.8	2.0	2.2	2.0
Eastern	7.7	6.4	4.9	4.2	4.0	5.5	7.1	5.0	6.1	5.1
Southern	5.9	5.9	8.2	6.1	4.9	5.5	6.4	8.0	5.3	4.7
Kowloon	49.0	50.0	46.6	41.4	40.2	35.5	36.0	31.9	37.3	37.1
Yau Tsim Mong	12.4	14.3	11.4	11.5	10.2	7.1	6.6	5.4	7.7	9.7
Sham Shui Po	9.2	8.3	9.5	7.5	7.0	6.5	5.4	5.2	6.6	6.4
Kowloon City	6.1	5.7	5.0	4.6	4.5	3.6	4.4	3.7	5.2	5.0
Wong Tai Sin	7.6	8.0	7.2	7.8	7.9	7.0	6.8	6.5	6.0	5.9
Kwun Tong	13.6	13.7	13.5	10.0	10.6	11.3	12.8	11.1	11.7	10.1
New Territories	30.1	31.0	34.7	42.9	45.5	47.2	46.4	49.3	45.9	48.2
Kwai Tsing	7.2	5.9	6.9	5.6	5.3	8.1	7.4	6.8	4.8	5.3
Tsuen Wan	3.4	3.0	3.6	4.2	4.7	5.0	4.5	4.1	4.6	3.9
Tuen Mun	6.1	7.8	8.0	17.9	16.9	12.7	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.2
Yuen Long	4.2	4.3	4.9	4.7	5.7	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.2	7.4
North	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.2	2.3	3.3	3.4	4.4	4.1	4.4
Tai Po	1.9	1.7	2.6	2.3	3.5	3.1	2.7	4.2	5.4	5.8
Sha Tin	3.9	4.0	4.4	4.7	5.1	6.0	6.5	6.8	7.5	6.4
Sai Kung	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.7	2.2	1.9	1.4	3.3
Islands	0.6	1.4	1.0	0.4	0.9	1.5	1.6	1.0	1.3	1.6
Number of newly reported persons with known district of residence	2330	2168	2103	2213	2567	2794	4044	4724	4080	4118

6. CHARACTERISTICS OF REPORTED INDIVIDUALS

Common drugs of abuse

6.1 Over the past decade, there were a decrease in the abuse of narcotics, including heroin, and on the other hand an increase in the abuse of psychotropic substances, such as cannabis, cough medicine, triazolam, flunitrazepam and amphetamines. (Table 6.1)

Table 6.1 : Reported individuals by type of drug abused, 1987 - 1996

Type of drug	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Heroin	96.9	95.2	92.3	92.8	93.1	91.8	92.2	92.7	89.0	86.5
Opium	0.9	1.1	2.3	1.6	1.4	1.5	0.9	0.9	0.3	0.4
Morphine	0.6	0.5	0.5	1.2	0.7	0.9	1.1	0.4	*	*
Physeptone/methadone	1.6	1.8	2.3	3.3	3.6	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.1	1.0
Other narcotic analgesics	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	*
Amphetamines	0.1	*	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.9	3.0
Cocaine	*	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Barbiturates	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	*	*
Methaqualone	2.8	2.2	1.4	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.1	0.2
Cannabis	0.6	1.9	4.2	3.3	3.3	4.2	5.5	5.8	7.9	8.5
Brotizolam	N.A.	*	0.6	1.0	0.3	0.1	*	*	*	*
Flunitrazepam	0.1	0.7	1.0	1.5	1.1	1.1	2.2	2.6	1.7	1.6
Triazolam	N.A.	N.A.	0.2	0.6	0.7	1.2	1.9	1.9	2.2	2.9
Cough medicine	N.A.	0.3	1.0	1.3	2.0	3.6	2.8	2.9	2.9	3.1
Organic solvents	N.A.	N.A.	*	*	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.9
Number of reported individuals with known type of drug abused	12932	11532	13521	13466	13526	13642	15921	18591	18006	18624

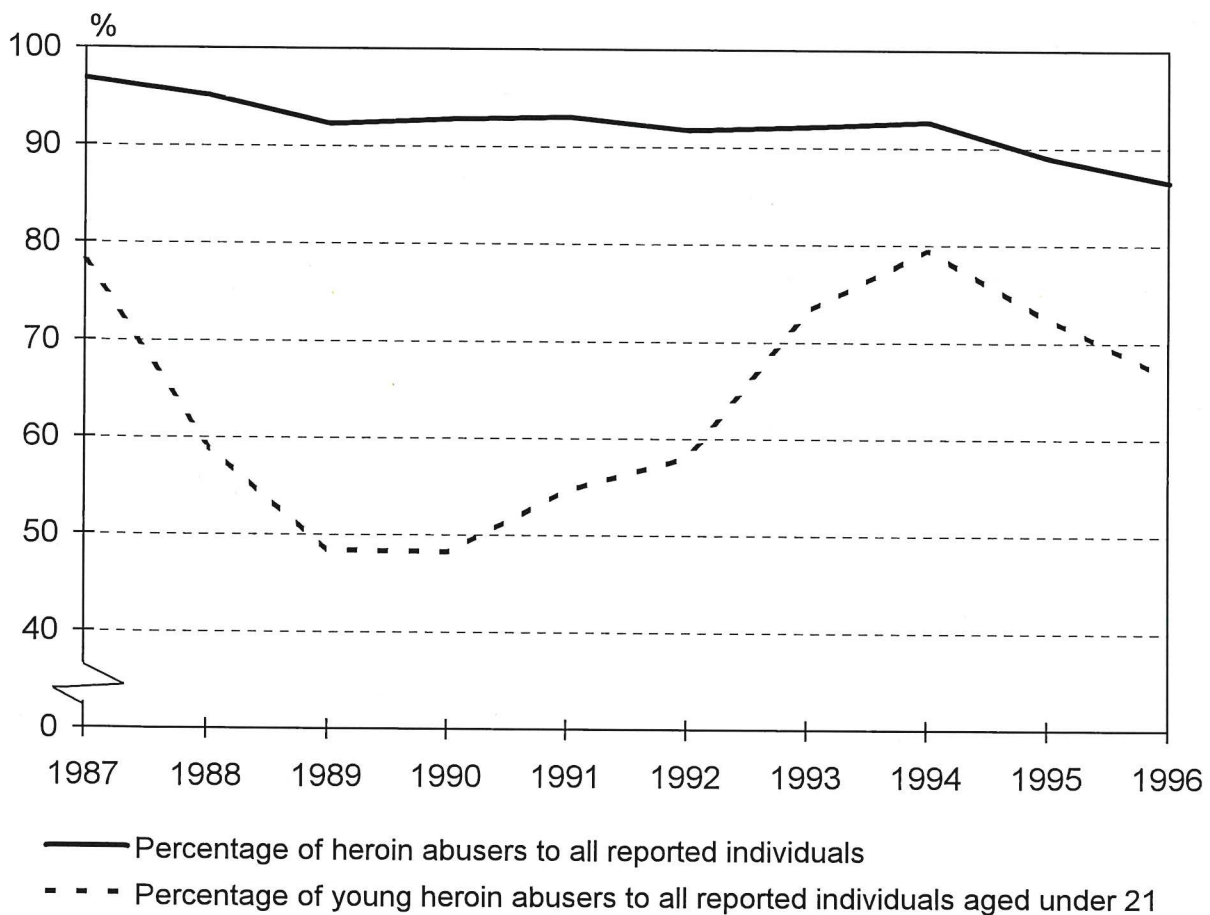
Notes : (1) * Less than 0.05

(2) N.A. - Not available

(3) Abuser taking more than one type of drug is separately counted in each type of the drugs concerned.

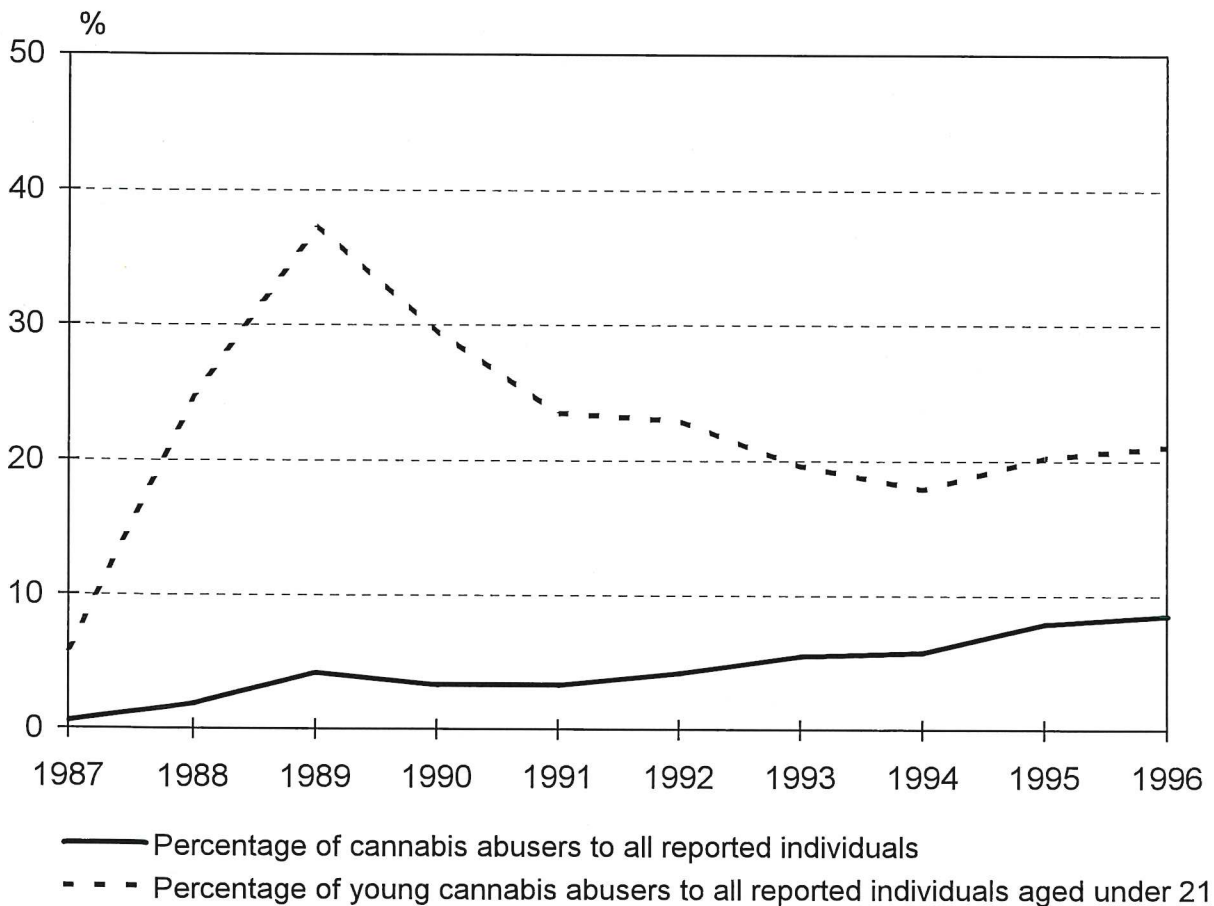
6.2 Heroin remained the most common drug abused by more than 85% of the drug abusers reported to the CRDA in the past ten years. The proportion of heroin abusers decreased gradually from 96.9% in 1987 to 86.5% in 1996. Among reported individuals aged under 21, the proportion of young heroin abusers dropped sharply from 78.3% in 1987 to 48.2% in 1990, then rose to a peak of 79.5% in 1994 and dropped again to 66.6% in 1996. (Chart 6.1)

Chart 6.1 : Heroin abusers, 1987 - 1996



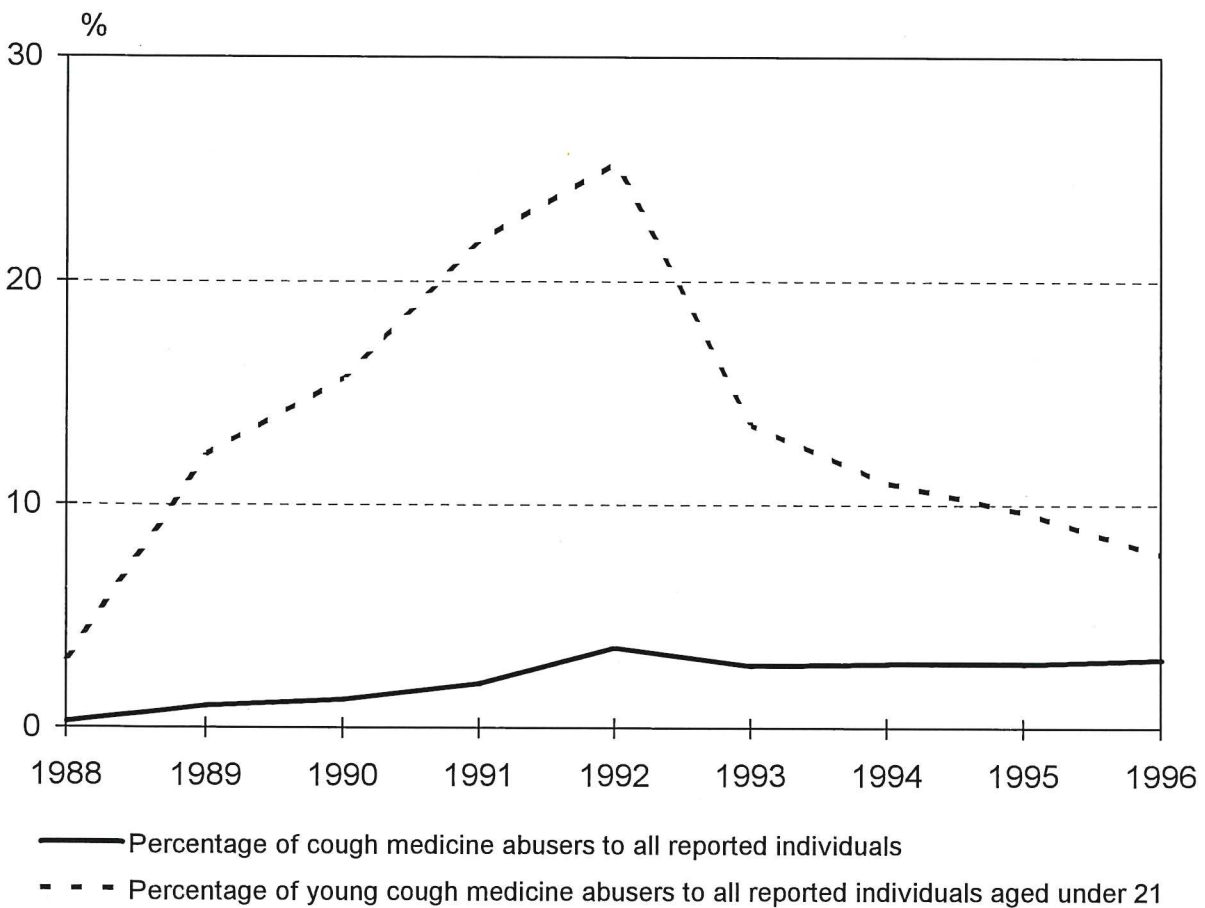
6.3 Since 1989, cannabis was the most common psychotropic substance among reported individuals, especially among those aged under 21. The proportion of cannabis abusers reported to the CRDA rose significantly from 0.6% in 1987 to 4.2% in 1989, then dropped to 3.3% in 1990 and 1991 and rose again from 4.2% in 1992 until it reached a peak of 8.5% in 1996. As for the young cannabis abusers, the proportion increased sharply from 5.7% in 1987 to a peak of 37.3% in 1989, then dropped to 17.9% in 1994 and rose again to 21.0% in 1996. (Chart 6.2)

Chart 6.2 : Cannabis abusers, 1987 - 1996



6.4 Cough medicine emerged as the second most common psychotropic substance among reported individuals in the latter half of the decade. The proportion of cough medicine abusers reported to the CRDA increased steadily from 0.3% in 1988 to 3.1% in 1996. However, the proportion of young cough medicine abusers rose sharply from 3.0% in 1988 to a peak of 25.3% in 1992, then plunged downwards to 7.8% in 1996. (Chart 6.3)

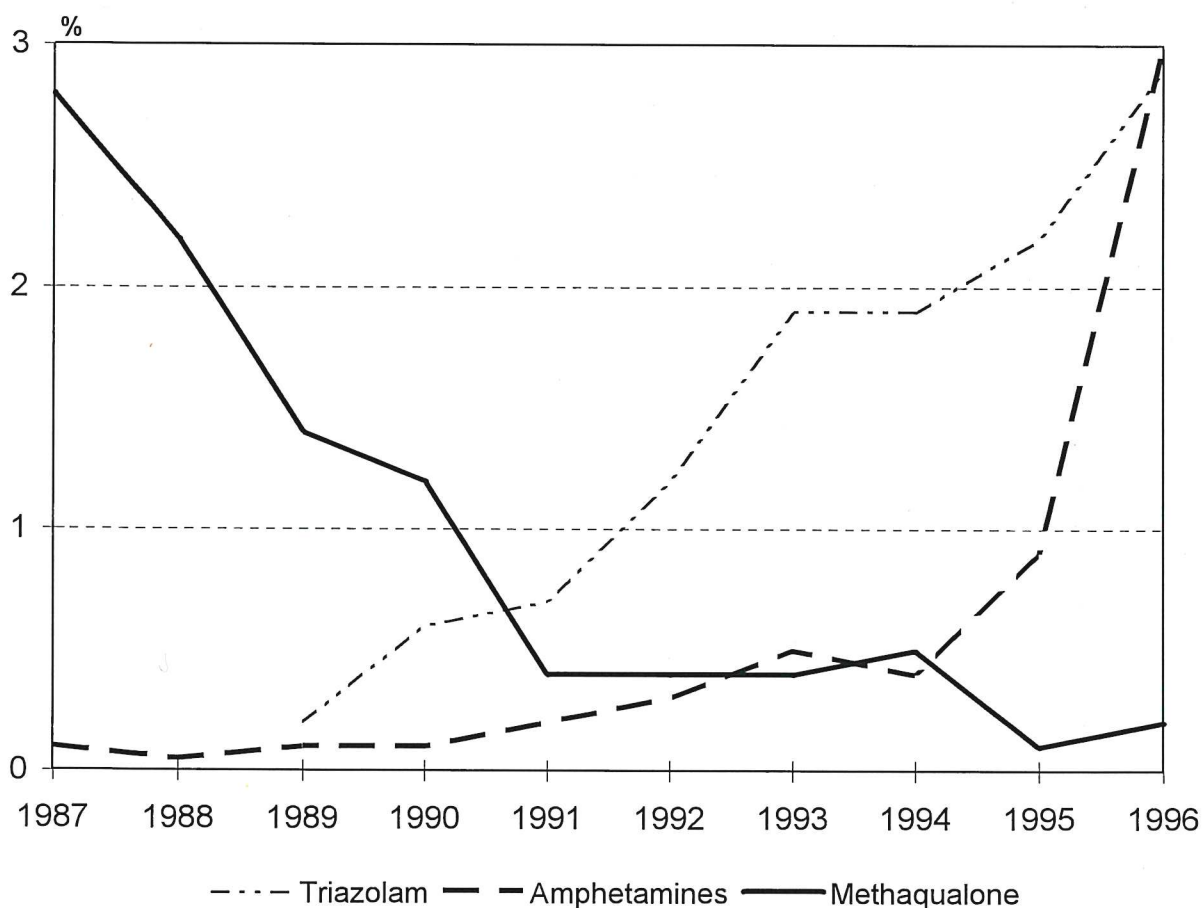
Chart 6.3 : Cough medicine abusers, 1988 - 1996



Note : Figures for cough medicine were not available before 1988.

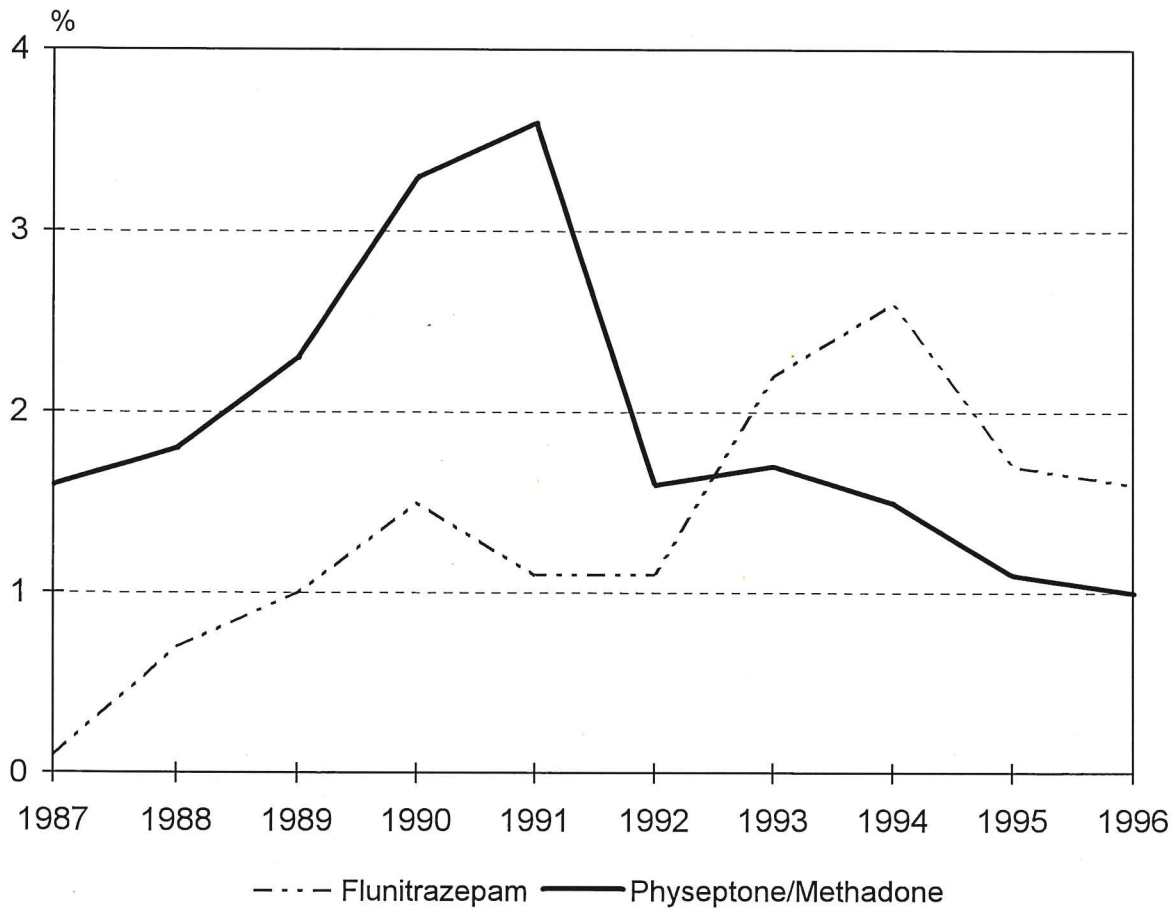
6.5 There were changes in the abuse of some other drugs over the past decade, including flunitrazepam, triazolam, amphetamines, methaqualone and physeptone/methadone. There were an upward trend in the abuse of triazolam and amphetamines and, on the contrary, a downward trend in the abuse of methaqualone. The proportion of flunitrazepam abusers was higher in the latter half than that in the first half of the decade. The proportion of abusers of physeptone/ methadone increased in the first half but decreased in the latter half of the decade. (Charts 6.4 - 6.5)

Chart 6.4 : Abusers of triazolam, amphetamines and methaqualone, 1987 - 1996



Note : Figures for triazolam were not available before 1989.

Chart 6.5 : Abusers of flunitrazepam and physeptone/methadone, 1987 - 1996

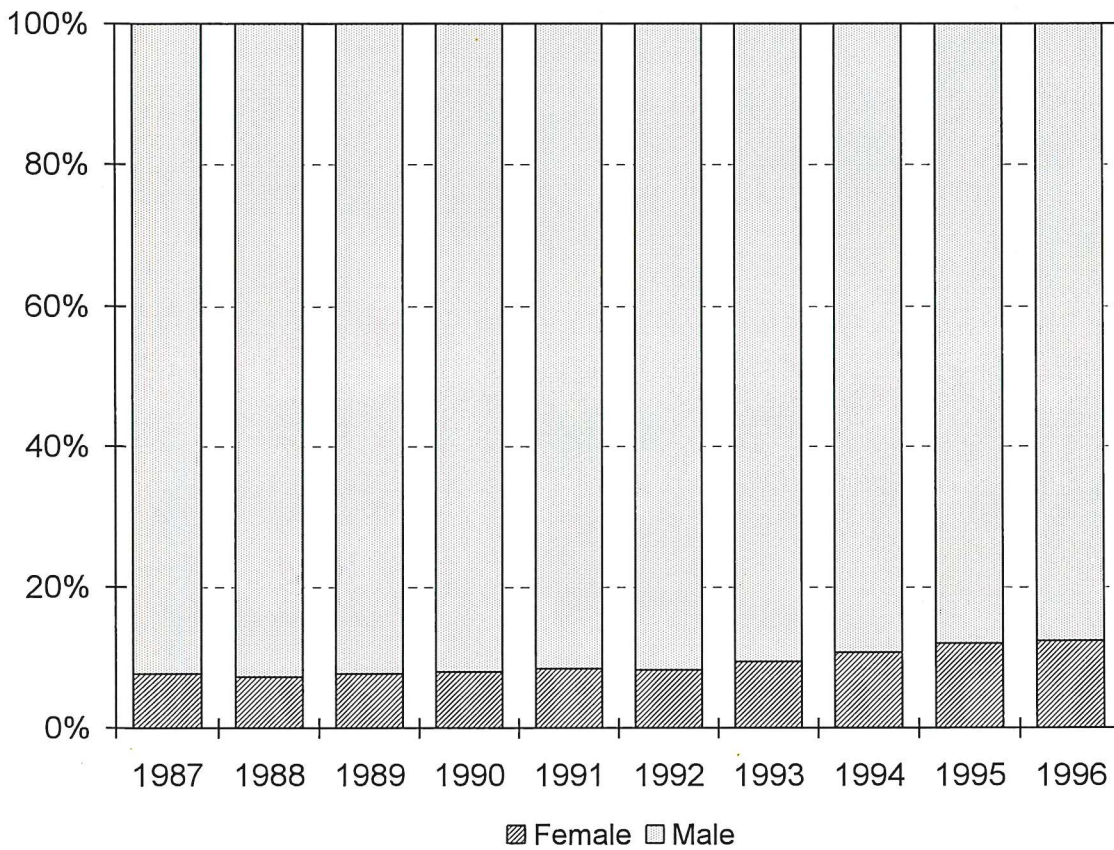


Sex and age

6.6 Over the past decade, a great proportion (over 85%) of the reported individuals were male. However, the proportion of female drug abusers increased gradually from 7.7% in 1987 to 12.3% in 1996.

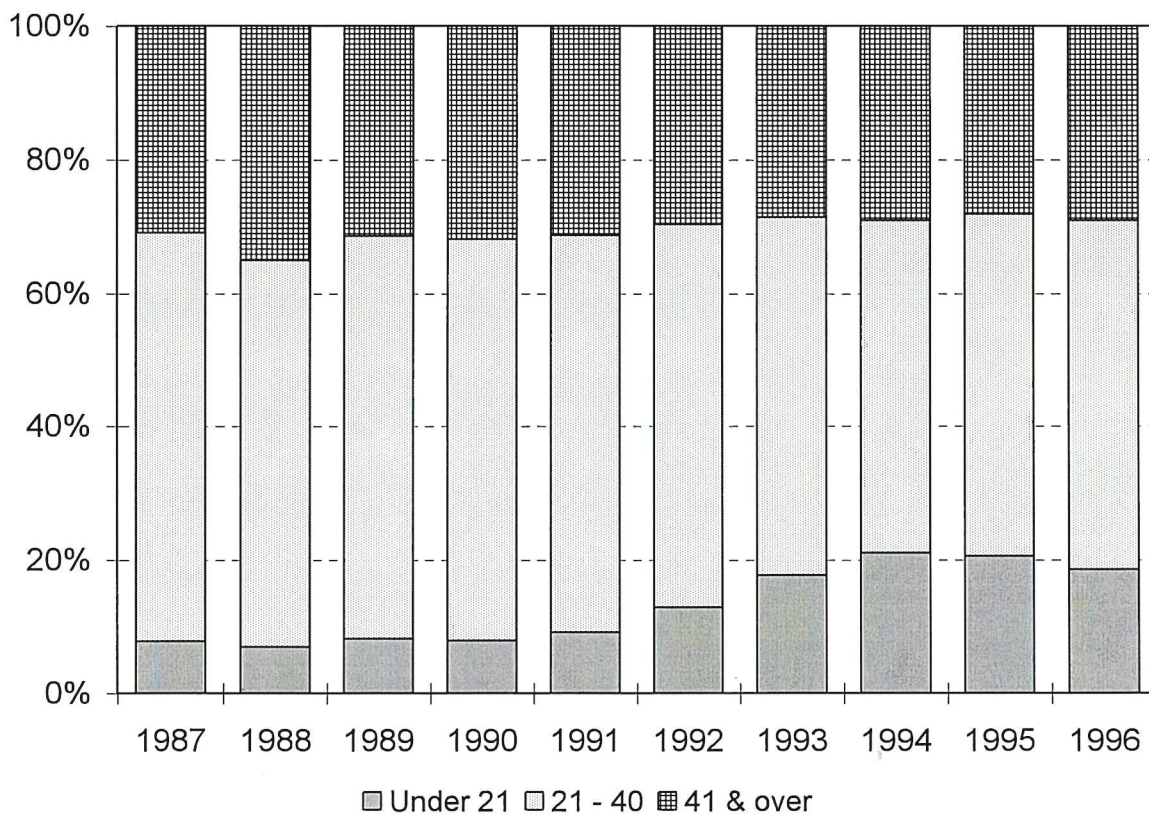
(Chart 6.6)

Chart 6.6 : Reported individuals by sex, 1987 - 1996



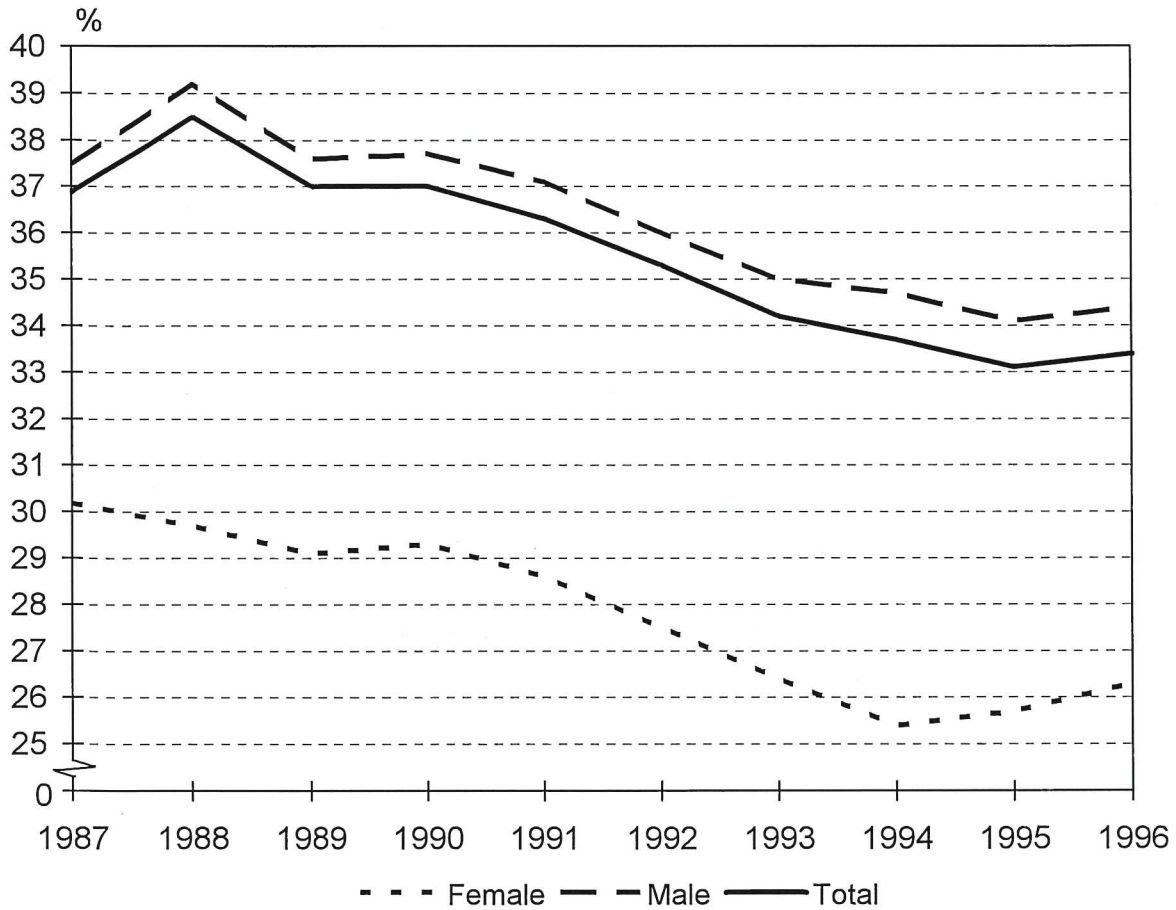
6.7 The proportion of reported individuals aged over 40 decreased slightly from 30.9% in 1987 to 29.1% in 1996, while the proportion of those aged under 21 increased gradually from 7.9% in 1987 to 18.6% in 1996. There was also a decrease in the proportion of those aged 21 - 40, from 61.2% in 1987 to 52.4% in 1996. (Chart 6.7)

Chart 6.7 : Reported individuals by age, 1987 - 1996



6.8 The decade saw a decrease in the age of drug abusers reported to the CRDA. The mean age of reported individuals dropped from 36.9 in 1987 to 33.4 in 1996. In comparison, the mean age of male drug abusers was higher than that of their female counterparts. (Chart 6.8)

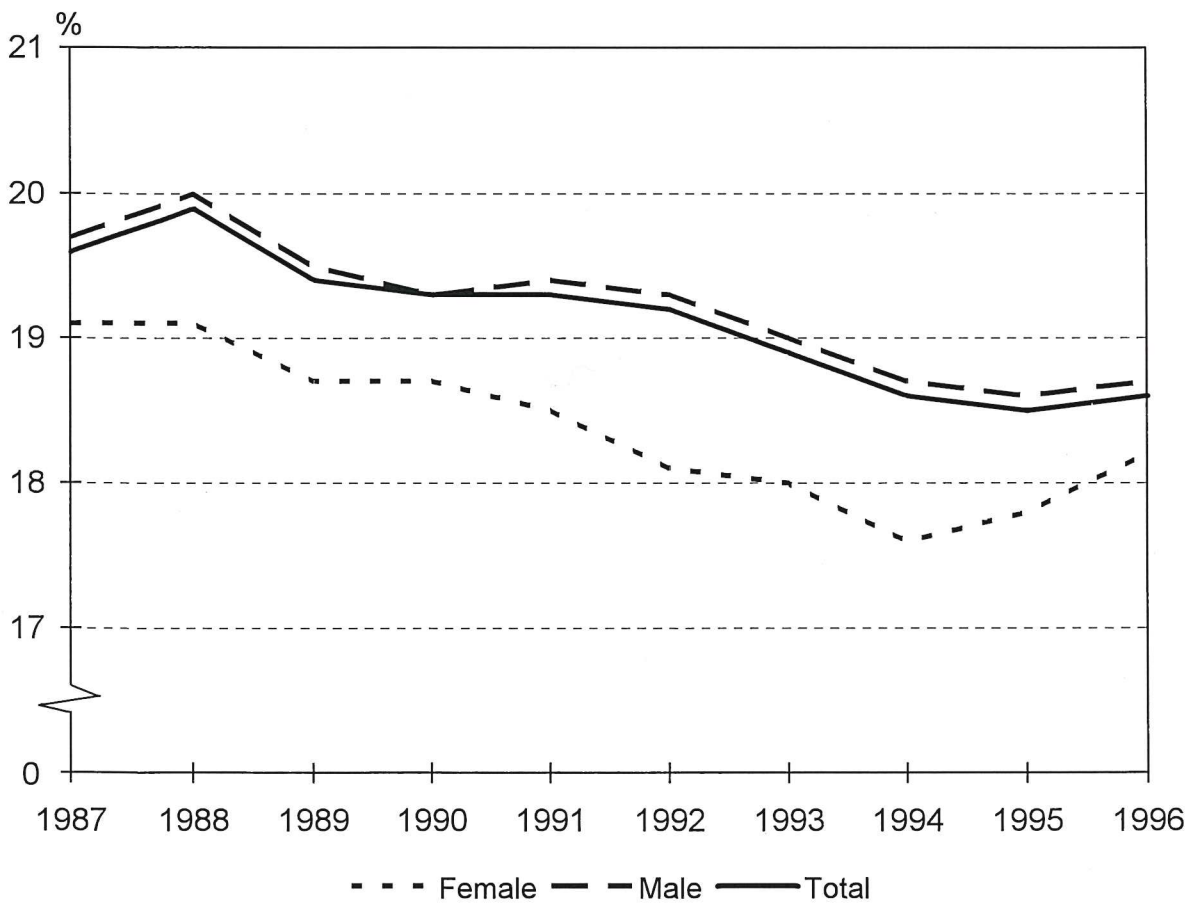
Chart 6.8 : Mean age of reported individuals, 1987 - 1996



Age of initial drug abuse

6.9 Over the past ten years, there was a gradual decrease in the mean age of initial drug abuse among reported individuals, from 19.6 in 1987 to 18.6 in 1996. On average, female drug abusers had started drug use at an age slightly lower than that of their male counterparts. (Chart 6.9)

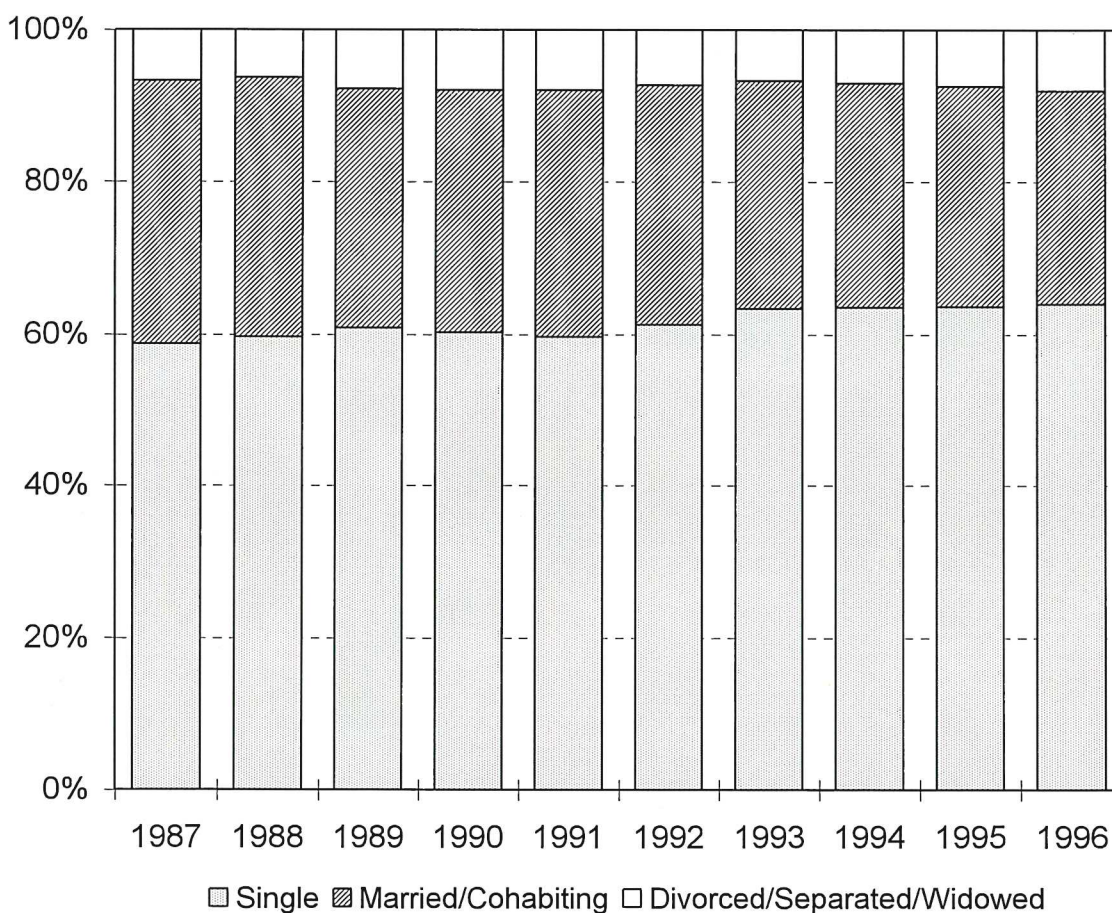
Chart 6.9 : Mean age of initial drug abuse of reported individuals, 1987 - 1996



Marital status

6.10 In the past ten years, more than half of the reported individuals were single and the proportion of these single drug abusers increased slightly from 58.8% in 1987 to 63.9% in 1996. The proportion of those who were married or cohabiting decreased slightly from 34.6% in 1987 to 28.0% in 1996 while the proportion of those who were divorced, separated or widowed increased slightly from 6.7% in 1987 to 8.1% in 1996. (Chart 6.10)

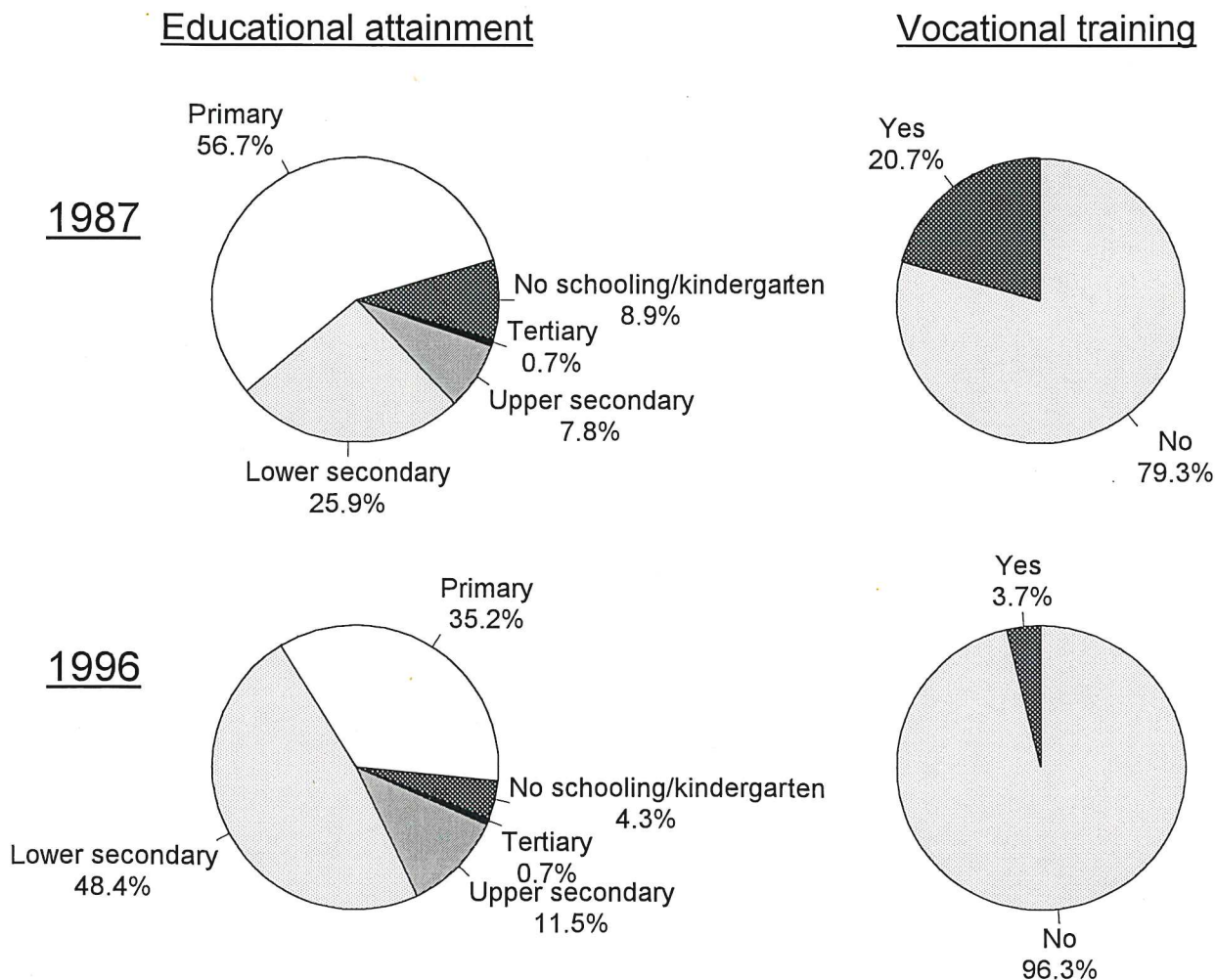
Chart 6.10 : Reported individuals by marital status, 1987 - 1996



Educational attainment/vocational training

6.11 The educational attainment of reported individuals was much higher towards the end of the decade. The proportion of reported drug abusers who had received lower secondary education increased significantly from 25.9% in 1987 to 48.4% in 1996 and the proportion of those who had received upper secondary education increased from 7.8% in 1987 to 11.5% in 1996. The proportion of those who had received tertiary education remained very low in 1996. On the other hand, the proportion of those who had received primary education decreased significantly from 56.7% in 1987 to 35.2% in 1996 and the proportion of those who had not received any education decreased from 8.9% to 4.3% over the decade. There was also a large decrease in the proportion of reported individuals who had received vocational training, from 20.7% in 1987 to 3.7% in 1996. (Chart 6.11)

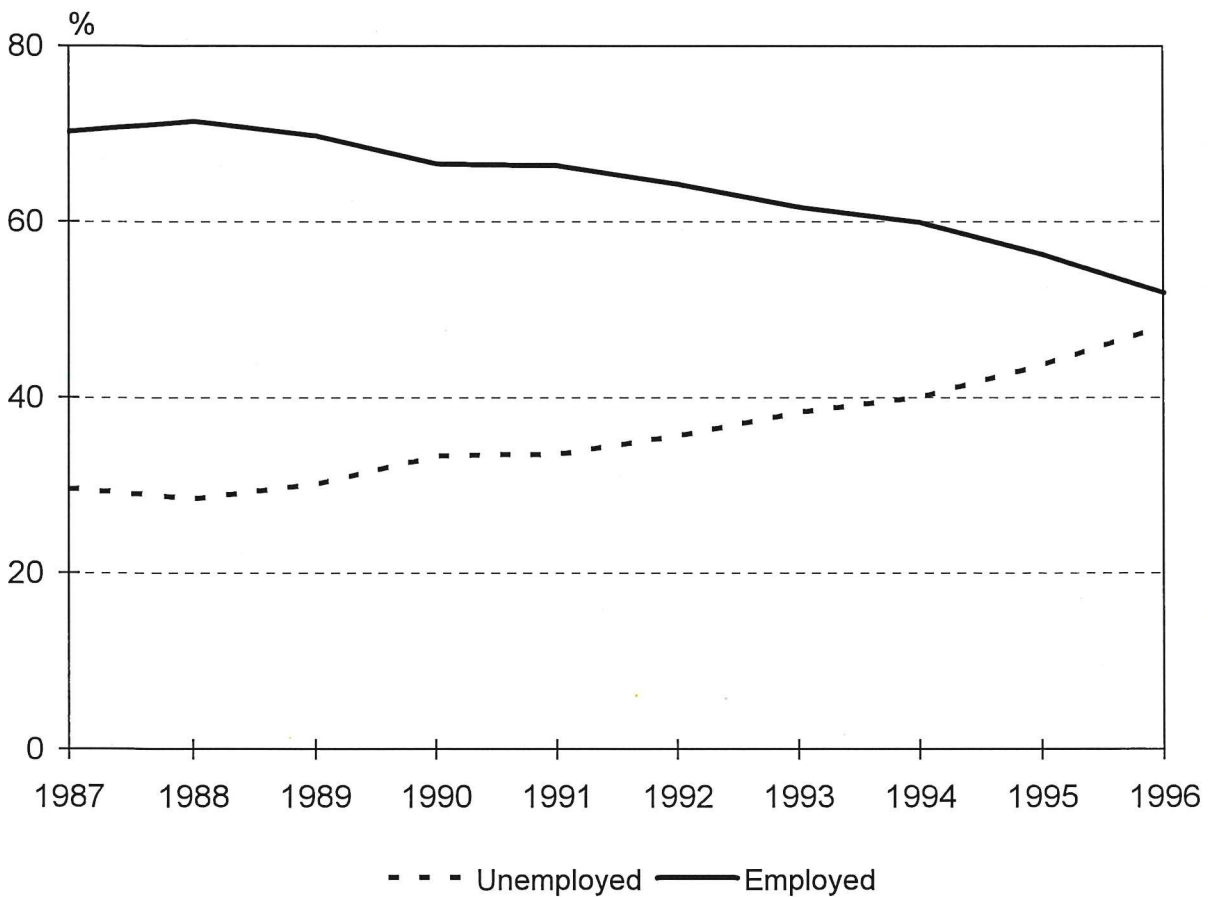
Chart 6.11 : Reported individuals by educational attainment/ vocational training, 1987 and 1996



Employment status

6.12 More than half (over 51%) of the reported individuals were employed at the time of report in the past ten years. However, the proportion of these drug abusers who were employed decreased gradually from 70.3% in 1987 to 51.9% in 1996. (Chart 6.12)

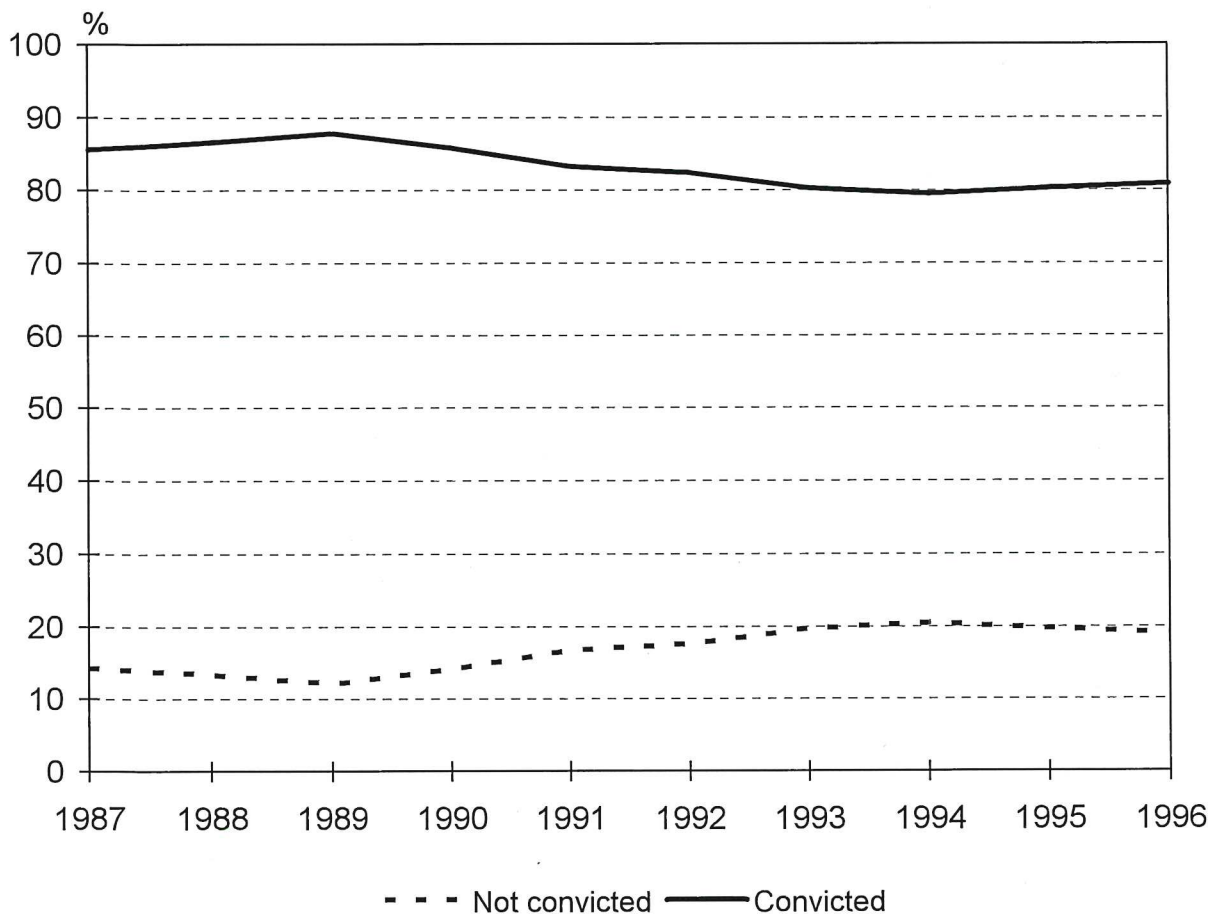
Chart 6.12 : Reported individuals by employment status, 1987 - 1996



Previous conviction

6.13 Over 79% of the reported individuals had admitted previous convictions. The proportion of reported individuals who admitted previous convictions rose slightly from 85.7% in 1987 to 87.9% in 1989, then declined gradually to 79.5% in 1994 and rose again to 80.9% in 1996. (Chart 6.13)

Chart 6.13 : Reported individuals by previous conviction, 1987 - 1996



District of residence

6.14 Among the 18 districts of residence, Kwun Tong was found to have the largest proportion of reported individuals throughout the decade, followed by Sham Shui Po, Wong Tai Sin and Yau Tsim Mong. Those districts with a smaller proportion were Islands and Sai Kung. Similar to the newly reported persons, the proportions of reported individuals in all districts of the New Territories, except Kwai Tsing, increased in 1996 when compared with 1987. On the other hand, the proportions of those in the districts of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon all decreased in 1996 when compared with 1987. (Table 6.2)

Table 6.2 : Reported individuals by district of residence, 1987 - 1996

District of residence	1987 %	1988 %	1989 %	1990 %	1991 %	1992 %	1993 %	1994 %	1995 %	1996 %
Hong Kong Island	18.1	17.1	17.1	16.4	15.4	16.3	16.1	16.5	16.2	15.0
Central & Western	3.1	2.8	3.0	3.1	2.4	2.7	2.3	2.7	2.4	2.1
Wanchai	3.9	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.0	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.9	2.4
Eastern	7.2	7.0	6.4	6.0	6.0	6.5	6.5	5.9	6.1	6.2
Southern	3.8	3.7	4.4	4.1	4.0	4.4	4.6	5.2	4.8	4.3
Kowloon	55.9	54.9	53.8	52.8	51.2	47.4	45.0	42.8	43.9	44.3
Yau Tsim Mong	11.3	11.0	10.1	10.5	10.6	9.3	8.1	7.3	8.0	9.2
Sham Shui Po	11.9	11.7	11.5	11.4	11.2	10.6	9.3	8.9	9.5	9.3
Kowloon City	6.4	6.2	6.0	5.6	5.5	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.5
Wong Tai Sin	11.5	11.4	11.3	11.2	10.7	10.0	10.0	9.6	8.8	9.3
Kwun Tong	14.9	14.8	14.9	14.0	13.2	12.8	12.9	12.3	12.9	12.0
New Territories	26.0	28.0	29.0	30.8	33.3	36.3	38.9	40.8	39.8	40.7
Kwai Tsing	7.0	7.8	7.4	7.2	6.9	7.5	7.4	7.3	4.9	5.1
Tsuen Wan	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.8	4.1	4.0	5.7	5.3
Tuen Mun	2.8	3.3	3.8	5.7	6.8	7.9	8.5	8.8	8.6	8.8
Yuen Long	4.3	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.6	4.6	5.3	6.0	5.9	6.0
North	2.7	3.0	2.9	2.7	3.0	3.2	3.3	3.7	3.8	3.7
Tai Po	1.9	1.9	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.7	2.8	3.3	3.7	3.9
Sha Tin	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.9	4.4	4.5	5.0	5.2	5.4	5.2
Sai Kung	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.1	1.8
Islands	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.9
Number of reported individuals with known district of residence	16400	14729	13980	14041	14102	13981	16473	19047	18695	19165