

Chapter 3

DRUG SCENE AND DRUG TRENDS

- 3.1 The number of reported drug abusers in Hong Kong as recorded by CRDA has since 2008 revealed a continued downtrend, decreasing from 14 241 in 2008 to 6 725 in 2017. A more notable drop is observed in the number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21, from 3 474 in 2008 to 455 in 2017. The declining drug trend has reflected the effectiveness of the anti-drug strategy and the concerted efforts of the anti-drug sector and the community.
- 3.2 The above notwithstanding, the drug scene as evolving is presenting new challenges from time to time. Based on the CRDA statistics and views of WG and stakeholders collated during the Three-year Plan consultation process, the major challenges include the following –
- (a) people with “Ice” abuse problems;
 - (b) hidden drug abuse;
 - (c) a substantial percentage of drug abusers being young adults (aged 21 - 35); and
 - (d) specific groups with drug abuse problems, including drug abusers of EM and sexual minorities, and pregnant drug abusers/drug abusing mothers.

(A) Prevalence of “Ice” Abuse

- 3.3 Since 2015, the number of reported “Ice” abusers as recorded by CRDA has surpassed the number of reported ketamine abusers, with “Ice” having become the most popular psychotropic substance abused. The number of reported “Ice” abusers in 2017 was 1 727, around 26% of the total number of reported drug abusers. The prevalence of “Ice” abuse is also generally observed by anti-drug service providers.

- 3.4 Frontline anti-drug workers have pointed out that “Ice” abuse cases are generally more complicated, as “Ice” abuse can lead to various psychosis symptoms including anxiety, tension, delirium, hallucination and feeling of persecution which may lead to self-destructive or violent behaviour. Abusers with “Ice”-induced psychiatric problems are usually less aware of their drug problems and some can become emotionally agitated easily.
- 3.5 Some frontline anti-drug workers have come across more cases of cocaine and cannabis abuse. CRDA statistics have reflected that the number of reported cocaine abusers increased by 34% from 627 in 2015 to 839 in 2017, while for reported drug abusers aged under 21, an increased prevalence of cocaine and cannabis was observed. Some frontline case workers have raised that it may be more difficult to identify and engage cannabis and cocaine abusers as they may consider recreational/occasional use of these drugs acceptable.

(B) Hidden Drug Abuse

- 3.6 Hidden drug abuse has remained a concern, as suggested by the median drug history of 4.3 years of newly reported drug abusers in 2017, and the finding that most drug abusers (58% of the total number of reported drug abusers in 2017) take drugs at home or friend’s home only. Some may take drugs in entertainment venues operated in private premises which are difficult to be accessed by outsiders (e.g. upstairs cafés and video game parlours). Because of hidden drug abuse and the associated prolonged drug abuse problems, some abusers may have already suffered from serious, or even irreversible, health damages (e.g. psychiatric problems, cognitive impairment) when they surface to the help network. This imposes great challenges to T&R and aftercare services.

(C) Substantial Percentage of Newly Reported Drug Abusers Being Young Adults

- 3.7 A relatively high proportion of newly reported drug abusers being young adults (aged 21 - 35) has been observed (around 50% in 2015 to 2017). The vast majority have already left school. According to CRDA, among

the newly reported young adult drug abusers in 2017, 43% and 15% were full-time and casual/part-time workers respectively, while 31% were unemployed. The different profiles have posed difficulties in effective engagement and intervention for T&R purposes.

- 3.8 CRDA has also reflected that around 25% of the newly reported young adult drug abusers in 2017 were “married/cohabiting” or had “divorced/separated”. Apart from drug abuse, they may be pressurised by other problems straddling work, finance, family relationships and parenting. Meanwhile, some anti-drug workers have reflected that young adult drug abusers, particularly those with employment or more well-educated/well-off, often have low motivation to resolve their drug problems as they have the financial means to sustain their drug abuse.

(D) Specific Drug Abuser Groups

- 3.9 Many anti-drug service providers have suggested that the needs of the following specific drug abuser groups should be responded to –
- (a) EM drug abusers;
 - (b) pregnant drug abusers and drug abusing mothers; and
 - (c) drug abusers of sexual minorities.

EM Drug Abusers

- 3.10 CRDA has reflected that reported drug abusers include Nepalese, Vietnamese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, etc. While the total number of reported EM drug abusers declined from 880 in 2016 to 746 in 2017, this group constituted around 11% of the total number of reported drug abusers. Because of the differences in languages, cultures and religions, anti-drug work among EM groups is understandably relatively difficult. Moreover, some drug abusers have limited knowledge of the T&R services available and little understanding of the operations of service agencies.

Pregnant Drug Abusers and Drug Abusing Mothers

- 3.11 A number of frontline social workers have reflected that as more female drug abusers are young adults, they may have formed their own families

and/or in parenthood. These cases usually involve more complexities as the female clients may face difficulties in their family relationships or care of infants/children. Some pregnant drug abusers and drug abusing mothers may also be reluctant to seek help from social welfare service units for fear that, if their drug abusing habit was made known to the help network, they would eventually lose the rights of custody of their infants/children.

Drug Abusers of Sexual Minorities

- 3.12 Some anti-drug workers have reflected that some “Men having Sex with Men” (MSM) abuse drugs (e.g. “Ice”) during “Chem-sex” or “Chem-fun”. It is not easy to identify these cases as many abusers may not be ready to seek help. Besides, engagement and counselling work would need more focused efforts to take into account the specific MSM culture and sensitivities.

(E) Observation

- 3.13 The above issues have revealed that despite the downward drug trend, drug abuse cases may be complicated, and ongoing efforts are necessary to ensure the provision of appropriate T&R services to drug abusers with different backgrounds and needs. The services should be evidence-based, experience-based and outcome-focused, and operated in a seamless, comprehensive and holistic approach.