

Total number of reported drug abusers declines but drug abuse among students and youths warrants concern

â€‹The Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) examined the local drug situation in the first half of 2020 at its quarterly meeting today (September 16). The total number of reported drug abusers was reduced compared to the same period in 2019. However, drug abuse among students and cannabis abuse among youths were noteworthy.

Although the latest figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) revealed that the total number of reported drug abusers in the first half of 2020 decreased as compared with the corresponding period last year, the figures might have been affected by the COVID-19 situation. For instance, reporting agencies might have come into contact with fewer drug abusers due to the pandemic, and might have taken more time to submit data of drug abusers to the CRDA. The Narcotics Division (ND) and ACAN will closely monitor the number of reported drug abusers in the second half of 2020 to arrive at suitable analysis of the drug situation in Hong Kong.

According to the latest figures of the CRDA, the total number of reported drug abusers declined by 7 per cent (from 3 703 to 3 459) compared to the same period last year. The number of reported drug abusers aged under 21 dropped by 2 per cent (from 277 to 271). Among them, students accounted for about 30 per cent and showed a slight increase when compared with the corresponding period last year, which calls for attention to the problem of drug abuse among students.

The number of reported cannabis abusers decreased by 5 per cent (from 333 to 317) compared to the same period in 2019. For reported drug abusers aged under 21, cannabis remained the most common type of psychotropic substance abused, accounting for about 50 per cent in the age group.

The number of newly reported drug abusers decreased by 27 per cent (from 881 to 640) compared to the same period in 2019, and 45 per cent of them were young adults aged between 21 and 35. The median history of drug abuse 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 4.8 years, compared with 5.5 years in 2019.

In the first half of 2020, the total number of reported psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) dropped by 21 per cent (from 2 293 to 1 818) compared to the same period last year. The total number of reported narcotic analgesic abusers went up by 11 per cent (from 1 854 to 2 052). Among the newly reported cases, the number of PSAs (at 574) remained significantly higher than that of narcotic analgesic abusers (at 81).

Heroin remained the most common type of drug abused among all reported drug abusers, with the number of reported abusers having increased by 11 per cent (from 1 853 to 2 050) compared to 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 24 per cent (from 863 to 660).

The CRDA figures for the first half of 2020 are available on the website of the ND (www.nd.gov.hk/en/index.htm).

The ACAN Chairman, Dr Ben Cheung, said, "We note that the majority of the reported young drug abusers aged under 21 were cannabis abusers. Young people should recognise that cannabis is a drug, and cannabis abuse can cause not only addiction but also severe damage to one's mental health. Anyone who encounters drug problems and would like to seek help can make use of the ND's instant messaging service 98 186 186 or 24-hour hotline 186 186."

The Commissioner for Narcotics, Ms Ivy Law, said, "The proportion of students among the reported drug abusers aged under 21 had increased. The ND and ACAN will take forward more anti-drug publicity initiatives targeting young people and students, such as making more use of popular approaches and online platforms in publicising the harmful effects of drugs, to encourage young people and students to resist drug temptations firmly."