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Measures must be taken to help former addicts

It is shocking to hear that the National Anti-Drugs Agency recorded 127,606 drug addicts between 2013 and last year. The Malays recorded the highest number with 100,240 addicts (78.5 per cent).

The ugliest part is that 88,597 were new addicts, while 39,009 were repeat offenders. One of the fundamental principles of criminology is that a small proportion of individuals commit a large proportion of the crimes. Data from Marvin Wolfgang's famous Philadelphia cohort study suggested that around five per cent of offenders account for 40 per cent of crimes.

There are two explanations for the high instance of repeat offenders.

FIRST, impulsive individuals, with weak social attachments to others, tend to get into trouble more frequently; and,

SECOND, people exposed to more crime opportunities take advantage

of drug users.

Malaysian AIDS Council policy manager Fifi Rahman recently stated that the biggest obstacle to reducing drug dependency in Malaysia was the criminalisation of users and the lack of support services for preventing relapses.

The government allocated RM79 million from 2013 until last year for the rehabilitation and treatment of addicts. The programme has obviously not been effective.

Some have argued that jailing drug users is not the answer. In most cases, offenders released from prisons become repeat offenders. The problem is magnified in prison because non-users and new addicts are exposed to hardcore drug addicts and pushers. Non-users may pick up the habit and small-time users may "upgrade" themselves to drug pushers. Some go to the extent of joining crime syndicates.

It is difficult to overcome addiction because of the stigma and discrimination from society. A study conducted by Tam Cai Lian and Foo Yie Chu showed that in Malaysia, peer influence and curiosity were the contributing factors to drug abuse.

More scientific studies should be conducted to identify the main contributing factors. Drug addiction could be due to socio-economic problems, demand and supply, weak enforcement, integrity issues, border issues, lack of preventive measures, globalisation and technology that enable drug trafficking syndicate to smuggle drugs into the country. If demand keeps increasing, there will be no end to drug trafficking.

Since drug is a global problem, it involves transnational syndicates. They have good contacts, networking and connections in Malaysia.

According to the police, between 2009 and last year, the main drug rings were from Nigeria, Iran and China. Drug mules were sent to countries in South America. The Nigerians were the first to recruit Malaysian women as drug mules, with 185 being detained between 2012 and last year.

To address this problem, the nation needs well-trained law enforcement officers with high integrity and intelligence capabilities. However, gathering reliable information is no easy task. None of the parties involved bring the matter to the authorities. We need to pay more attention to local and international syndicates, and bring them to justice. Law enforcement agencies should exchange information on drug trafficking.

In terms of rehabilitation, addicts need job opportunities if they are to survive and kick the habit. Employ-

ers should avoid the misconception that employing ex-addicts is dangerous. Britain's State Secretary for Work and Pensions Stephen Crabb has stated that ex-drug users can make the best workers. He has outlined new schemes to help welfare claimants with drug and drinking problems secure jobs. Venturetech, a company in Houston, the United States, is using the Internet to advocate for the hiring of job seekers typically rejected by employers, ex-offenders and those in recovery from substance abuse. This is a good move to prevent repeat offenders.

We need to find some light at the end of the tunnel for this great evil in our society or we will suffer the consequences. We need to wake up and fight.

DATUK AKHBAR SATAR, director, Institute of Crime And Criminology, HELP University