

Headline **80pc with HIV, abusing drugs have jobs: DOSH**
Date **13 Jul 2011**
MediaTitle **Daily Express (KK)**
Section **Nation**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily (EM)**
Circ / Read **30,557 / 97,836**

Language **English**
Page No **7**
Article Size **198 cm²**
Color **Full Color**
ADValue **1,020**
PRValue **3,060**



80pc with HIV, abusing drugs have jobs: DOSH

Neil Chan

KOTA KINABALU: More than 80 per cent of drug abusers and those infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS have jobs, according to Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) Sabah/ Labuan Assistant Director Dr Avinash K. Chand.

To address this problem, the department is co-organising a programme with Novotel 1Borneo today in conjunction with Occupational Safety and Health Week.

"We want to introduce into various industries a code of practice for prevention and management of HIV and AIDS in the workplace and drugs and alcohol abuse.

"This is because close to 80 per cent of those living with HIV/AIDS and 80 per cent who are drug abusers in the workplace are employed.

"We will work with various agencies government and non governmental (NGO) to introduce this code of practice to officers or various industries.

"This is to promote an avenue where workers in an organisation can come to the management or safety and health committee without fear of being judged, or without being discriminated and exposed.

Dr Avinash said studies have shown that stress at the workplace and other factors can affect productivity and work quality. Of course, if you have a drug abuse problem you can be

a danger not only to yourself but also others in the workplace.

"So introducing this will be a guide not just for the workers on how they can go about to seek help for their problems but also a guide for employers on how to deal with it, for example counselling and what are the various NGOs they can refer their workers to for help," he said.

Dr Avinash said it is their sincere hope that more employers will take this on to enhance efforts at the macro level, while continuously, in a sense, taking care of their employees.

He said in a larger sense, drug abuse and HIV remains a global issue and can no longer be viewed as isolated from the workplace.

The reason is simple. Some 8 of every 10 people either infected with HIV, or who abuse drugs are currently employed.

Statistics released by the Statistics Department show that close to 80 per cent of addicts in Malaysia have jobs.

"The obvious reason then is the employment very often serves as a form of income to fund the habit in the case of drug abuse.

Of these the fields, general workers, sales, services, construction, agriculture, and fisheries contribute up to 79.6 per cent of that figure.

"As for people living with HIV, the disease per se should in no way affect the worker's ability and performance especially if under treatment and the infection has not progressed to AIDS.

"Of course there are many ways of dealing with these problems, e.g. enforcement, creating awareness etc.

"The big problem that arises pertains to how to ensure that the people affected, in this case the workers affected are not discriminated against, not stigmatised and most importantly, confidentiality has to be maintained at all times.

Dr Avinash said working with those

affected together with cooperative employers has shown to be more effective in ensuring that people living with HIV are more compliant to treatment and the rate of relapse for drug abusers is much less compared to counselling the drug abuser in isolation i.e. not involving the workplace. As for Sabah, the numbers remain low.

"Up to 2008, of the total of 12,352 drug users in the country, only 119 were from Sabah. That's less than 0.01 per cent of all drug users.

"This, however, is not to say that we should focus our attention on other states. We believe that adopting a policy for the workplace which is designed primarily around a particular workplace or business makes sense.

Dr Avinash said it makes economic sense – avoiding drops in productivity, absenteeism etc. It makes social sense – with the new in-thing for companies in Malaysia being Corporate Socially Responsibility (CSR) conscious.

Responsibility wise, employers should see that having such policies are not just meant to fulfil legal requirements, but also help to fulfil their social obligations, primarily to their employees.

As such we hope to see more companies in Sabah contact us with regards to this, he said.



Dr Avinash