

Headline	Change mindset, give junkies a chance		
MediaTitle	Daily Express (KK)		
Date	30 Apr 2017	Color	Black/white
Section	Comment&Analysis	Circulation	25,055
Page No	20	Readership	75,165
Language	English	ArticleSize	298 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 614
Frequency	Daily (EM)	PR Value	RM 1,842



Change mindset, give junkies a chance

IT is shocking to hear that the National Anti-Drug Agency recorded a total of 127,606 drug addicts between 2013 and 2015. According to race, the Malays make up the biggest number with 100,240 drug addicts (78.54pc) from the total during the period.

The ugliest part is that out of this, 88,597 were new addicts, while 39,009 returned to their habit. This is called repeat offenders.

One of the fundamental principles of criminology is that a small number of individuals commit a large proportion of the crime. Data from Marvin Wolfgang's famous Philadelphia cohort study suggest that around 5pc of offenders account for 40pc of the crime.

There are two explanations for the high number of repeat offenders. Firstly, impulsive individuals, with weak social attachment to others tend to get into trouble more frequently than less impulsive and more attached individuals.

Secondly, people exposed to more crime and disorder opportunities take advantage of such drug users.

Malaysian Aids Council (MAC) policy manager Fifa Rahman recently stated that the biggest obstacle to reducing drug dependency in Malaysia was the criminalising of users and the lack of support services to prevent relapse. The Government had allocated a total of RM7.9mil from 2013 until last year for the rehabilitation and treatment of drug addicts. The programme has obviously not been effective.

Some have argued that jailing drug users is not the answer to the drug problem. In most cases the offenders released

from prisons did not stop their drug habit and became repeat offenders. In fact, in prison itself, the non or new drug addicts mix with drug addicts and pushers and the habit comes about or gets worse.

Many small timer drug users "upgrade" themselves to become drug pushers or dealers. Some even join the syndicates in the underground economy.

It is difficult for addicts to overcome the habit because of the stigma and label society places on them. Most recovering addicts put off treatment due to social humiliation or fear of social consequences and legal restrictions. A study conducted by Tam Cai Lian and Foo Yie Chu indicated that in Malaysia peer influence and curiosity were the contributing factors to drug abuse.

More studies should be conducted scientifically to find out the main contributing factors. It can be due to socio-economic problems, demand and supply, weak enforcement, integrity issues, border issues, lack of preventive measures, globalisation and technologies enabling drug trafficking syndicates to smuggle drugs into our country. If demand keeps increasing, there will be no end to the drug trafficking.

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

According to the police, from 2009 to 2015, the main drug rings were from Nigeria and China but sending drug mules to South American countries. The billion-dollar industry involved some 30 syndicates from two dominant players – the Iranians and Nigerians. The Nigerians recruited Malaysian women as drug mules,

with 185 being detained between 2012 and 2015.

To address this problem, the nation needs well-trained and high integrity law enforcement officers and good procurement of intelligence capabilities. However, gathering reliable information is no easy task.

Many of the offences are victimless, where none of the parties have any interest in bringing the matter to the authorities.

We need to pay more attention to local and international syndicates to bring them to justice. All relevant law enforcement agencies should work together and exchange information on drug trafficking.

In terms of rehabilitating addicts, they need jobs to survive and kick the habit.

Employers should avoid the misconception that employing people who have been through rehabilitation is overly risky and dangerous. The Work and Pensions Secretary in Britain stated that ex-drug users can make the best workers.

He has outlined new schemes dedicated to getting welfare claimants with drug and drink problems into employment. In fact, a company in Houston in the United States is using the Internet to advocate for the hiring of those jobseekers typically avoided 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 all suffer the national consequences. We need to wake up and fight.

Datuk Akhbar Satar
Institute of Crime & Criminology,
HELP University