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Methadone therapy seen to help rehabilitate drug users

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KUALA LUMPUR: Drug addicts on methadone therapy are said to be four times less likely to commit crime than those who do not have the treatment.

Malaysian AIDS Foundation chairman Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman said preliminary findings from a study of 150 ex-addicts in Kajang Prison showed that only 2.2% of prisoners on methadone therapy had returned to prison, compared to 8.8% of those without the treatment.

"International studies had shown

that methadone therapy has helped to reduce the crime rate," she told a press conference at the Enabling Environment in Harm Reduction through Advocacy seminar yesterday.

She said the therapy also reduced a person's drug use and helped to improve his health and well-being. It also reduced deaths associated with drug use and improved social functioning, she added.

Dr Adeeba said a 38-year-old user had recently sent a mobile phone text message to her about how his life had been transformed after using

methadone.

"His parents could not believe that he now holds a full-time job and has been sending money back to them," she added.

She said users needed at least two years for their condition to stabilise.

However, for hardcore heroin users, they might have to use methadone for the rest of their lives, she added.

Malaysian AIDS Council president Tan Sri Zaman Khan said cases of HIV infections which originated from needle-sharing had dropped from 55.2% in 2009 to 47.4% last year.