

Hill tribe opium addicts : A retrospective study of 1382 patients

Charas Suwanwela², Somsong Kanchanahuta¹ and Yupha Onthuam²

¹ Narcotic Treatment Center for Hill Tribes, Chiangmai. The Center was supported by the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control.

² Institute of Health Research, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

ABSTRACT

A retrospective study of 1382 patients admitted to the Narcotics Treatment Center for Hill Tribes which was operated by the WHO/UN Thai Programme for Drug Abuse Control revealed a wide spread problem of opium addiction among the hill tribes. Among them, Karen was the largest group. The mean age on admission was 35 years. Males were seven times more frequent than females. 73% of them were head of the household. About two-third of the males and one-third of the females came from households with single addicts; the remaining had more than one addicts in each household. The mean duration of daily opium use before admission for treatment was 7.9 years. Over 99% of them were addicted to opium and there were nine heroin users in this series. The mean amount of opium used daily was 3.9 gms. for males and 3.2 gms. for females. About three quarters of them used salicylate analgesic with opium. Illnesses, in particular abdominal pain, were given as the most frequent cause of their addiction. Differences between the tribes were also noted.

Key words : Opium addicts, Hill tribes, social effect, Opium problems

Technical Report Number DH-5/78, 1978.