

Illegal opiate consumption in Thailand : Population and pattern of use

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ABSTRACT

The earliest document on opium dependence in Thailand is the criminal Law dated back to the 14th century. There is more than sufficient evidence that the condition still prevails in many provinces at present. In 1959, the first heroin dependence epidemic started subsequent to the opium ban legislature. Another major heroin dependence epidemic appeared in about 1968-1969 and continue until the present time. Two short duration of increase morphine dependence in localized area were also noted between 1970 and 1979. The statistics of the treatment service in 1978 and 1979 demonstrated that the opiate dependence population spreaded through the entire country.

It is evident that the long standing in indigenous opium dependence in the past has grown into a complex and heterogenous pattern of opiate dependence. Such and extensive problem can hardly be covered in totality by the statistical records and research studies currently available. The rapid evolution of the opiated dependence pattern also imposes an additional difficulties on the attempt to define the extent of the problem. Hence, the following presentation does not claim to be an exhaustive review on the current status of the national opium consumption but rather be whatever known to the author. All the data referred to in the material which do not carry reference were taken from research studies of the Drug Dependence Research Center, Institute of Health Research Chulalongkorn University.

The reservation which has been expressed on the legitimacy of the estimation of the opiate consumption does not implicate unfeasibility. A cautionary note is necessary because the nature of the true meaning of the estimation is far from simple. The estimation could actually arrive at few target numbers i.e. the maximum, minimum or simply a vague approximation. Specific objective on the application of the result is needed as a guideline to make the assumption for the computation. Each target number requires different assumption and computation. The final number contains a degree of deviation specific to the reliability of the basic parameter used in the derivation. The full meaning of the number embraces the actual figure and its deviation. The substance of the material already presented probably covers a comprehensive range of basic data commonly needed for computing the estimation

of the opiate consumption in Thailand. Nevertheless it should be reiterated that regardless of the derivation, the estimate will contain an ill define deviation of considerable magnitude. No computation or estimate is offered in the report because it is considered appropriate to leave the task to the ingenuity of the user of the number to choose the best approach that will yield result suitable to the specific objective of the application.

Key words : Opiate consumption, Pattern of use, Opium, Thailand

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