

ILlicit Drug Abuse and Human Immunodeficiency Infection in Thailand

Vichai Poshyachinda, Usaneya Perngparn, Vipa Danthamrongkul

Institute of Health Research, Chulalongkorn University

ABSTRACT

A review of the statistics and surveys of drug use conducted within the last 3 years demonstrated few significant change of illicit drug abuse pattern. First of all the epidemic of Yaba, an illicit stimulant tablet containing methamphetamine and caffeine as the principal active ingredient that started about a decade ago in particular among the student and the wage labour population seemed to shift focus on the latter population. While the epidemic in the student population slowed down with an increasing trend only in the Southern region. The national household survey in 2001 yielded an 'ever used Yaba' estimate of 3.5 millions persons. Use during the last 30 days constituted 490,000 persons. The new trend that deserves attention is the gradual spread of ecstasy and ketamine use. Available statistics indicate a rapid country-wide spread. Evidence suggests recreational use as the main driving force. Occasional use is the most common practice. However, practically all type of illicit drugs at present including ganja, heroin and Yaba are being used for recreational purposes.

The status of human immunodeficiency viral (HIV) infection among the drug abuser population has been closely monitored by annual seroprevalence survey. The injecting drug users (IDUs) entering the drug dependence treatment service all over the country was sampled at first twice yearly then since 1995 the IDUs were sampled once in June. The HIV seroprevalence from 1995 to 2001 in Bangkok and all regions ranged between about 30-56%. The HIV seropositive percentage in all areas was fairly stable except the Southern Region that showed continuous rise from 40.3% to 56.2%. The registry of the HIV/AIDS cases of the Ministry of Public Health showed that in 2001 the HIV infected male and female IDUs constituted only 5.6 and 0.4% of all reported cases respectively decreasing from 9.7 and 1.1 % in 1992 respectively. However, the non-injecting heroin and Yaba user that entered Northern Drug Dependence Treatment Centre in 2001 showed 13.7% HIV seropositive. Obviously, non-injecting drug users most likely constitute a high-risk group that deserves attention and intervention.

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WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Drug Dependence
Drug Dependence Research Center
College of Public Health Sciences
Chulalongkorn University

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