

Can Drug Dependency Treatment Reduce Problems?

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ABSTRACT

During the 1990s, the abuse of illicit stimulants, spread rapidly throughout Thailand. In the latter half of the 1990s, the proportion of stimulant(MA) abusers expanded dramatically and it is estimated that it superceded the number of heroin dependents.

In the last 10 years (1993-2002), the new drug dependent treatment population reporting stimulant dependency were below 19 years of age, about 25-45% were students while 1-3 were unemployed. Inhaling fumes from heating stimulant tablets was the main route of administration in more than 90% of all cases. However, some used more than one drug, about 2-9% the second drug used was injected. New cases of heroin dependents in treatment ranked second in the treatment population. Even though the age on admission was 20-29 years old, 70% started using heroin before they were 19 years old. More than a half of new case users injected heroin.

The national HIV prevalence surveillance system has conducted serum testing annually on Intravenous drug users(IVDU). Sampling from all drug dependence treatment units, especially heroin users clearly indicated that HIV prevalence remained at a high level of about 40-50% throughout the latter half of the 1990s. HIV prevalence specific to stimulant and other drug abusers in treatment remains fairly low-less than 10%, but altogether the rate is still increasing. Evidence from qualitative studies among sex workers and seamen reported that they used MA. Common findings were their belief and direct experience that it could stimulate sexual desire, markedly increase fun and eliminate shame and shyness in the case of commercial sex.

Although the number of treatment centers has increased and treatment methods have been adjusted, the service still requires further development. The emerging trend of increased recreational stimulant use concurrent with increased availability and diversity of illicit stimulants indicate an important expansion of the role of substance abuse in HIV transmission in considering the long-term, this new development may be even more critical than that encapsulated by the role of IVDUs in view of prevention and the impact of HIV/AIDS as a severe indigenous communicable disease.

Key words:

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