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White collar junkies

White-collar JUNKIES

EXCLUSIVE

Three in 10 drug addicts undergoing rehabilitation are professionals

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PETALING JAYA: More than 30% of drug addicts undergoing rehabilitation are professionals, including lawyers and motivational speakers. This is a marked increase as professionals made up only 5% of the number five years ago, according to Pengasih Malaysia founder and chairman Datuk Mohd Yunus Pathi. "Previously, you only see homeless people or Fel'da children sent for rehabilitation. Now, there are more professionals, said Mohd Yunus, adding that more drug users are taking syabu (also known as ice or crystal meth). Professionals, students and businessmen are among those who have resorted to drugs to unwind from their stressful lifestyles, ignoring the health and social perils that come with it. "They consume syabu just before a presentation in front of an audience, giving motivational talks or attending court." Mohd Yunus also revealed that the majority of syabu addicts undergoing rehab at Pengasih centres have at least a diploma.



CIVIC-MINDED ... Passers-by assisting Customs officers to apprehend one of five suspected drug traffickers at the Sandakan Airport in Sabah yesterday. The five were attempting to slip away with four luggage bags containing drugs.

TURN TO PAGE 03 ▶

'Ice made up 45% of drugs consumed'

► FROM FRONT PAGE

He said "ice" made up 45% of drugs consumed last year, with heroin and yaba (pil kuda) at 27% and 11% respectively.

Pengasih is a non-governmental organisation formed in 1987 and operated entirely by former drug users, with nine rehab centres nationwide and over 3,500 beneficiaries.

Its rehabilitation programme lasts 12 months, with participants signing up voluntarily.

Mohd Yunus said more drug addicts are turning to syabu as it has less physical withdrawal effects compared with heroin.

He said it is becoming more popular as it boosts confidence, energy and alertness, and keeps users motivated throughout the day.

"Everybody wants to achieve so much ... they end up using syabu," he said, adding that syabu addicts are harder to spot than those on heroin. Syabu poses grave dangers to the body, especially the brain and can lead to paranoia.

In recent years, police have intensified enforcement to curb the rising number of users but the demand and popularity of the drug is keeping the menace alive.

"The main demand for syabu is at nightspots where many of those who patronise these places are professionals or those in good careers," said federal police Narcotics Crimes Investigations Department director Comm Datuk Seri Mohamad Salleh.

"It is not cheap and costs more than other drugs but these users can afford it. Depending on its supply and demand, it can range between RM40 and RM50 for a single dose."

Mohamad said nationwide, police conduct checks and raids daily on entertainment centres randomly and based on tip-offs but it was an uphill task to put an end to the scourge.

"It should be a concerted effort to eradicate this menace, from all relevant agencies such as the local councils and the National Drug Agency. Then, we will see significant progress.

He said investigations showed that apart from drug pushers who pose as patrons, staff of entertainment centres were also involved in peddling syabu to their customers.