

Posted on 5 April 2015 - 09:17pm

Last updated on 5 April 2015 - 10:26pm

Alarming rise in drug abuse among youths an alarming trend

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PETALING JAYA: Drug abuse among the younger generation in Malaysia is becoming a grave concern with even children as young as seven years old are hooked on it.

The National Anti-Drug Agency Malaysia (AADK) prevention director, Abdul Rahman Hamid said the alarming upward trend recorded every year involves primary and secondary children and also students from institutions of higher learning.

"Although it is not as serious as those reported in some countries, it is definitely a worrying trend, and if proactive measures are not put in place to curb this upward trend, it will become a problem," he told *theSun*.

According to a research conducted by the AADK, the culprits are the small-time drug dealers.

"Although drug use is now rampant among schoolchildren and youths, there has been no cases recorded of students being drug distributors or traffickers," he added.

According to the AADK statistics, 15,408 youths were found to be addicted to drugs in 2013, with the number increasing to 15,897 last year.

He said the figure could just be the tip of the iceberg as there were many unrecorded cases.

Abdul Rahman said drug abuse cases among youths were mainly recorded in the Klang Valley, Kelantan and Kedah.

According to Abdul Rahman, the main contributing factor to the high incidence of cases in these three areas was the ready availability of drugs, adding that the high-risk locations are in the suburb areas.

Apart from peer pressure and exposure, Abdul Rahman also attributed neglect and lack of parental guidance as a factor for the increasing abuse among teens.

"The AADK will focus on these three states to address the issue before it becomes very serious," said Abdul Rahman, adding that the agency needed the cooperation of the education ministry, parents and the community to help overcome this problem.

Abdul Rahman said the AADK, with collaboration with the education ministry, plans to do random urine test on youths in these states, especially among students.

The most commonly used drugs by schoolchildren and adolescents are opiate, followed by methamphetamine, ganja, and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), and psychotropic pills, among others.

Meanwhile, Dr Tam Cai Lian, a senior lecturer in Counselling Psychology at the Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences of Monash University Malaysia, said peer influence and curiosity are the top contributory factors to drug abuse in the country.

"Malaysia is unlike other countries in the world where drug abuse is attributed to mainly family factors such as parental behaviour, family relationships, home atmosphere and economic standing," she added.

Tam said research showed that social pressure to belong, to be accepted, and to be part of a social group, especially in teenagers, prompt them to conform to their peer group, and start trying out drugs.

"That's how it usually begins," she added.