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## Neighbourhood drug rehab centres a boon and a bane



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Among the mothers worried about the presence of the AADK-run drug rehabilitation centres are Nor Farizah (second from left) and Nori Nadia (third from left) who feel that the authorities should do more to get rid of drug pushers.

# Neighbourhood drug rehab centres a boon and a bane

Addicts and their family welcome facility but residents fear negative impact

Story and photos by GRACE CHEN  
gracechen@thestar.com.my

RAHMAN Hassan, 57, is a patient at the Kerinchi Cure and Care Service Centre in Pantai Dalam, Kuala Lumpur, undergoing treatment for heroin addiction.

The centre, run by the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK), is located on the first floor of a row of shophouses in a housing estate.

Though the facility is just seven minutes away from his home in Kerinchi, Rahman has chosen to stay in because he wants to kick the habit for good.

"Many of my friends are addicts. If I stay home, they will keep asking me to join them. When I am here, they cannot bother me," he said.

The former bus driver and father of five checked into the rehabilitation centre two months ago after his 19-year-old daughter told him her university course-mates teased her about having a junkie for a father.

"She was very careful with her words when she told me. But I knew what I had to do," he said.

He admitted that he had known about the Kerinchi Service Centre for several years, and it was his first choice as it was close to home. It was also easier for his children to visit him, which they had done four times in the last two months.

Admittance to the centre is voluntary, and the officers have allowed Rahman to take time off in between counselling and treatment sessions to go back and see his family due to his positive progress. This also allows him to attend to family emergencies such as when one of his children had a



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fever.

The setting up of drug rehabilitation centres in areas where people live and work started in 2007.

For drug-dependent individuals who want to turn over a new leaf, these facilities allow them to seek treatment on their own accord without having to cut off their families and loved ones.

When asked about the close proximity of the centre to residents, Datuk Yusri Ahmad, 60, chairman of the joint management body at the nearby Lembah Pantai Kondo Rakyat, said he did not see any issue as patients like Rahman did not give any trouble. He knows this firsthand as the restaurant where he has breakfast daily is just below the facility and he feels it has been good for the community.

Not only has it created awareness of the dangers of drug abuse, it has allowed affected family



Yusri says patients of the Kerinchi drug rehab facility have never given any trouble to the residents.

members access to information on how to address drug issues in the early stages, said Yusri.

He believes this helps to prevent the problem from escalating, as there will be fewer opportunities for early intervention if the centres are far away.

However, some residents whose neighbourhoods have been chosen as locations for these facilities, have mixed feelings. They want to see drug addicts take the road to recovery, but are not comfortable with so many of them congregating in their neighbourhood.

The residents are of the opinion that wherever there is a large group of addicts, the pushers will follow and endanger the community.

One such example is Sri Selangor, a people's housing project in Jalan San Peng, Kuala Lumpur.

At the commercial complex, a methadone clinic operates on the same floor as a kindergarten and a community rehabilitation centre for the disabled. At Block 9 on the ground floor is a daycare facility for recovering addicts. Set up in 2013, both are run by AADK.

Lelawati Abdul Rahim, 55, who runs a food stall at the commercial complex, feels it is not right that a methadone clinic is just metres away from a kindergarten.

It does not sit well with her that young children should be exposed to such elements. Much to her relief, the kindergarten has since fenced up its entrances and a security guard is stationed at the complex.

But Nori Nadia Shahir, 32, who lives in the same block as the AADK-run daycare centre in Sri Selangor, is well aware that such facilities are necessary. She had lost a cousin to drug addiction.

"His mind was so damaged by drugs, he could not recognise us. If anyone of us tried to go near, he would run off. We asked his parents to send him for rehabilitation but his mother said no because back then, the facilities were far away and she heard that they were very rough with inmates.

"So they let him be. One day, he wandered off and did not come back. We do not know what has become of him," said Nori.

She added that if there was a centre nearby back then where his family could seek help without fear of persecution, her cousin could have been saved.

Peer counsellor Ramli Omar, 57, who works at the Sri Selangor Cure and Care Service Centre, said that if the community was serious





Grilles are installed at the kindergarten in the Seri Selangor commercial complex.



A doctor at the Sri Selangor methadone clinic measuring out dosages for patients.



Ang and his deputy Mastor Salleh say the presence of rehabilitation clinics have helped clear the streets of Chow Kit.



The Cure and Care Service Centre at ground floor, Block 9, in the Sri Selangor flats.



The Kerinchi Cure and Care Centre in Pantal Dalam is located next to a restaurant.



Ramli (second from left) who works at the Sri Selangor Cure and Care Service Centre, says if the community is serious about overcoming the drug problem, they must get rid of the stigma.

about surmounting the drug problem, it must be rid of the stigma. "They must give the patients emotional support, encourage them with positive words and not treat them like outcasts," he said.

AADK medical officer Dr Ravi Ramadah said there were currently five drug rehabilitation facilities in Kuala Lumpur, the Cure and Care Centre in Sungai Besi being the first facility to be set up in the country. The decision for their locations was made based on data which identified them as hotspots at that time.

Isolating rehabilitating drug addicts from society will make it hard for reintegration later. Studies done by AADK show lower chances of relapse when patients are able to undergo treatment with constant

support from loved ones and family.

"From our observations, family members may stay away in the beginning stages of a patient's treatment. This is because they are also experiencing a degree of frustration with the patient. However, many eventually cool down and make efforts to be part of the patient's recovery," he added.

Dr Ravi said community empowerment also played an important role.

"If a rehabilitated patient is not accepted by his community, there is higher likelihood that he will fall back into his drug habit. It becomes a vicious cycle," he explained.

As for the Sri Selangor centre, he assured the community that the

patients are under the competent care of Dr Rusdi Abd Rashid, who started his career with Universiti Malaya in 1999. He specialises in psychiatry and is a member of the International Society of Addiction Medicine.

Tiong Nam Kuala Lumpur Area Traders Association chairman Ang Khoo Lock agreed with Dr Ravi, adding that drug rehabilitation facilities in the Chow Kit area had played a part in cleaning up the back lanes, once infamous for being a popular spot for drug addicts to sleep off their high.

Ang hopes these centres will continue as drug addiction has far-reaching consequences that can affect families, especially young children. He pointed out the area's problem of street children as an example.

Essentially, AADK has two types of facilities: drug rehabilitation institutions and community-based service centres or known as caring community houses.

Arrested drug users are required by law to undergo treatment at institutions called Cure and Care centres. Security is strict and inmates cannot be detained longer than two years. Addicts can also volunteer to go for institutionalised treatment.

There are 22 such Cure and Care Centres in Malaysia.

Those volunteering to be institutionalised do so at the Cure and Care 1Malaysia centres.

Currently, there are 12 such voluntary admittance centres run by AADK nationwide.

## Residents urge authorities to flush out drug pushers

COMMUNITIES where drug rehabilitation facilities are located, want authorities to muscle in on drug dealers operating in their areas. They say that otherwise all effort put into the treatment for drug addicts will come to naught.

At Sri Selangor, Kukun Tetangga (KT) members are complaining that the dealers are not only selling to locals, but foreigners as well.

"We know the police raid the area frequently but after a month or so, the pushers are back again," said KT Sri Selangor A chairman Aziah Mat Piah, 50.

Resident Nor Farizah Baharudin, 46, is angry that drug pushers are not sparing the community's children. While at the playground, her 14-year-old son was approached by a stranger who asked if he wanted to buy drugs.

"My neighbours tell me many of these pushers are women. Many of them do not stay long in one place as they fear getting caught. But as soon as one leaves, someone new takes their place," she said.

Sri Selangor KT secretary Jayawati Md Isa, 61, feels the only solution is for the community to unite.

The residents in her

community agree the drug trade thrives because of apathy and fear of repercussions. For instance, two of the people interviewed called this reporter later to ask that their names and photographs be omitted as they did not want any trouble.

Jayawati feels it is not possible to put things right overnight. Meanwhile, she hopes parents will be more vigilant with their young.

"I do not allow my grandchild to wander around or mix with strangers because of the risks," she said.

Lembah Pantai Kondo Rakyat chairman of joint management body Datuk Yusri Ahmad said residents had reported seeing drug addicts using the flats' stairways to satisfy their habits. He had to call in the authorities over a few incidents.

"I hope the relevant authorities will come up with better strategies to flush them out and prevent the culprits from giving enforcement officers the slip," he said.

He cited a case he knew of from 10 years ago, where an enforcement officer went undercover for a month in the area. When the police raided the place, they rounded up 10 suspects, including a drug pusher.