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Random drug tests for students

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COLLECTING DATA: Exercise to gauge depth of problem



Sarawak Social Development Minister Tan Sri William Mawan (left) responding to questions during a press conference at Wisma Bapa in Kuching yesterday. Pic by Ghazali Bujang

KUCHING: SARAWAK is to start having students in secondary schools and institutions of higher learning tested randomly for drugs next month.

Even though statistics from the National Anti-Drugs Agency (AADK) shows that the majority of drug users in the state are aged 18 and above -- well after they had left school -- "we cannot assume" students do not use drugs, state Social Development Minister Tan Sri William Mawan said yesterday.

Mawan, after chairing a state Anti-Drug Action Council meeting at Wisma Bapa here, said the tests were to collect data "to gauge the depth of drug use" among them.

He said the police would be roped in to assist in the exercise.

"Once we know the extent (of the problem), we can then look into ways to mitigate it."

The AADK statistics also showed the number of drug addicts in the state had not increased, but the number of "drug abusers" had.

He described these drug abusers as those who dabbled in drugs occasionally, like when they were depressed or aping what their peers were doing.

The number of drug abusers was expected to increase, he added.

In 2010, Mawan said 585 people were monitored by the police and other drug enforcement agencies under the Orang Kena Pengawasan (OKP) programme after they were caught for abusing the substance.

The number jumped to 758 last year, an increase of 173, he added.

The majority of them involved teenagers over 18 and the drug most commonly used was syabu.

Mawan denied that the number of new treatment centres being opened, such as the Cure and Care 1Malaysia clinic, mini cure and care service centres, and community caring houses was a reflection of a growing drug problem in the state.

"It's just part of the government's social contribution."

On the Cure and Care 1Malaysia clinic, and mini cure and care service centres, Mawan said the response from addicts and abusers, which drug agencies termed as "clients", throughout the country had been positive.

He said up to March, 13,521 drug addicts had voluntarily sought treatment at the eight Cure and Care 1Malaysia clinics and four service centres nationwide.

Sarawak has two Cure and Care 1Malaysia clinics -- one here, which started operation in February last year, and the other in Miri, which started operation in November.

The Miri clinic was a mini cure and care clinic upgraded into a Cure and Care 1Malaysia clinic.

The Kuching clinic had 74 clients last year.

Three more mini cure and care clinics are to be opened this year -- in Limbang, Sibuluan and Sri Aman.

They will be located at vacant government quarters.

Also, one more community caring house is to be opened, at Kampung Judan in Mukah, in addition to the two already operating here and in Bintulu.

To date, 339 addicts are undergoing rehabilitation at the community houses.