

# High relapse rate among addicts

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Addicts sometimes hide drugs in fire hydrant storage closets. (Right) Some of the vagrants on Kuala Lumpur streets are drug addicts.

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KUALA LUMPUR'S low-cost government housing schemes are hotbeds of drug addiction.

These old flats have become the hunting grounds of drug pushers, with National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK) data revealing that high-risk areas are those with the most number in some of these areas.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, eight hotspots identified in the city were Batu, Wangsa Maju, Setiawangsa, Bandar Tun Razak, Cheras, Titowangsa, Lembah Pantai and Sepatuh.

In these areas, 53 focal points where drug addiction was concentrated were identified and these were mostly low-cost government housing schemes.

Bandar Tun Razak had the highest number of focal points, namely at people's housing projects (PPH) and public housing projects (PA).

## Targeting focal points

The location and accessibility of these high-rise buildings have made them become transit points for drug pushers selling heroin, stimulants (amphetamines and other types of designer drugs).

AADK said 1,705 people in the city were caught for drug addiction between January and April this year.

"At least 60% of the addicts stay in the focal points where poverty, crime and drugs are prevalent," said AADK deputy director-general (Operations) Dato Dr Muhammad Sade Mohamed Anas.

"The addicts are mostly males between the ages of 19 and 40."

"According to a study by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, they usually exhibit antisocial behaviour, suffer from stress or anxiety and are usually influenced by their peers," he noted.

Due to this, Muhammad Sade said there was a demand for drug pushers to sell heroin and other types of designer drugs in these hotspots and drug pushers were part of a syndicate.

"They (drug dealers) get students and youths to peddle drugs for them in their residential areas, and these youngsters will supply drugs to addicts in PPHs."

"Due to the height of the pandemic, pushers even used the services of delivery companies and social media to distribute drugs," he added.

## Fragile state

Firdaus (not his real name), 32, returned to his childhood home in Kuala Lumpur five years ago after undergoing drug rehabilitation at the Narcotics Addiction Rehabilitation Centre (Puspan) in Dengkil, Selangor.

Although he managed to stay sober for a couple of years, Firdaus soon relapsed when his friends who were still living in the same flats would drop by for a chat.

# High relapse rate among addicts

Anti-drugs agency wants the rehabilitated to integrate into new environment rather than return to former settings

**EXCLUSIVE**



PA Sri Kota in Bandar Tun Razak is one of the flats notorious for drug-related activities. — Photos: BAVANI M, YAP CHEE HONG and SAMUEL ONG

"They never talked about drugs, and merely chatted about the past."

But just the sounds of his friends' motorcycle engine revving up triggered memories of the addiction and being at the place where he had previously engaged in drug activities led him to relapse.

"No one put the drugs in his hands. His relapse was triggered by the people around him, the sounds and the flats acted as triggers."

"It happens all the time - even the clinking of a spoon can trigger a relapse."

"The people who engaged in these activities are also potential triggers," said Muhammad Sade.

## Targeting hotspots

In 2019, AADK embarked on a programme in the high-risk areas of Sepatuh and Lembah Pantai.

By the end of 2021, 14 addicts were nabbed and sent for rehab while about 52 drug pushers were arrested by the police.

Now, of the eight hotspots (see hotspot map), two areas - Setiawangsa and Lembah Pantai - were declared "green" last April.

AADK said these areas have had no recent drug arrests. Two areas still in the red are Batu, Wangsa Maju, Titowangsa, Sepatuh and Bandar Tun Razak, while Cheras has been marked "yellow" - which means drug addiction cases are declining in focal points there.

"We have expanded the programme to Bandar Tun Razak and Cheras."

"The indicators used to gauge progress are the number of new (addiction) cases, relapsed cases and complaints received regarding persons under supervision and (increased) community participation."

"Our strategy is to maintain the recovery rate, nip new cases in the bud and increase cooperation between government agencies, NGOs as well as communities," said Muhammad Sade.

AADK has outlined a four-phase approach, with Phase One being "cleaning and outreach", Phase Two on "prevention, treatment and rehabilitation", Phase Three focuses on "enforcement and risk

reduction" while Phase Four is about "monitoring, evaluation and activation of community centres".

Treatment for those suffering from drug addiction is available at Puspan centre.

There are 30 facilities nationwide, with three in Dengkil, Sepang and Seremban in Selangor while one Puspan centre is located in Sungai Besi, Kuala Lumpur.

## Treatment and rehabilitation

During AADK operations, mandatory urine tests are performed to distinguish addicts from vagrants.

"If they test negative (for drugs), we let them go."

"Those who test positive will be taken to the centres for treatment and rehabilitation," said Muhammad Sade.

At Puspan, they receive treatment for two years, after which they will be released back to the community under strict supervisory.

This supervision will continue for another three years, whereby recovering addicts will have to

# Poverty, crime fuel addiction in public housing schemes

ROOFTOPS, underutilised parking bays, storage rooms, balconies and fire hydrant storage areas at housing schemes in Kuala Lumpur are among spaces where drug-related activities take place.

Previously addicts used to head to secluded areas outdoors but now it is happening within high-rise housing schemes.

"We noticed this happening during the movement control order when people's movements were restricted, thus the addicts couldn't go out."

"So they moved to areas in the building that most people didn't have access to," said Cheras drug rehabilitation committee chairman Mohd Zamuddin Anwar.

"The doors to these areas are usually locked but they will break the lock to gain access," he said.

He added that most people's housing projects (PPH) and public housing projects (PA) have reported vandalism at these spots.

Mohd Zamuddin said the top three housing schemes in Bandar Tun Razak and Cheras which had been identified as red zones or risky areas were PPH Taman Mula, PPH Dera, Tun Razak and PA Sri Kota.

"These are high-density areas



Zamuddin says access to spaces favoured by drug addicts has been barred.



Mohd Feisal says regular patrols have stopped youngsters from loitering in some areas.



Noorimah says efforts to break the cycle of drug abuse should start at home.

with populations of between 8,000 and 10,000, where poverty and crime fuel drug addiction."

PPH Taman Mula Residents Association chairman PPH Taman Mula, Mohd Feisal Abdul Manaf said with regular patrolling, they have managed to stop youngsters from hanging out at underutilised parking areas.

"Before this, youngsters would be loitering there and we would find cigarette butts all over the place."

"They also use empty units but these have now been sealed," he said.

PA Sri Kota flats chairman Noorimah

said poverty, peer pressure and stress were factors that have made the area a drug den.

"I guess these kids succumb to addiction as they see it as a way to escape from their problems."

"We are doing everything we can to break the cycle of drug abuse but we need to educate par-

ents to identify signs of addiction," she added.

PPH Dera Tun Razak Rukun Tetangga chairman Ngaimin Buang said in the past, addicts were seen taking drugs under staircases or at abandoned units, but the drugs now looked like ordinary pills or cigarettes, making detection even more difficult.

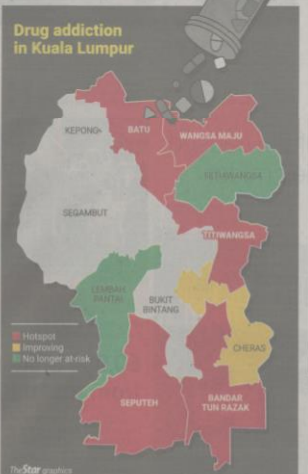
"We advise parents to observe their children's behaviour closely and check their belongings for such substances," said Ngaimin.

"There is only so much we can do through regular patrols. Prevention must start from home," added Noorimah.

Zamuddin said community leaders were working with AADK to reduce addiction rates in public housing schemes.

Zamuddin, who is also a council member of the Narcotics Addiction Rehabilitation Centre (Puspan), said although Cheras and Bandar Tun Razak were deemed high-risk areas, the situation was improving.

"We are working with AADK residents' associations, Rukun Tetangga, joint management bodies and other groups which have programmes to beat drug addiction."



Muhammad Sade: Relapse rate for rehab individuals is around 28%.

report for regular urine tests every two to three months as well as weekly counselling sessions.

"If they fail to show up, they will be arrested and sent to jail."

"What is the relapse rate?"

"Unfortunately, the relapse rate for these individuals is around 28%," said Muhammad Sade.

Based on the UEM study, the majority of relapse incidents are triggered by people or things associated with drug abuse.

"This is why we usually try to integrate recovering addicts into a new environment."

"We cannot lose hope. Some of our best motivators and recovery coaches are former addicts who are now successful people in the community," he said.

Current data shows that AADK is treating over 50,000 people for every drug user or addict known to authorities - four others remained undetected.

"Some 123,139 drug users and addicts were detected last year, thus based on the ratio, at least 492,556 others are not receiving treatment."

Muhammad Sade added that the agency was working with schools through a programme called Sayangi Hidup Elk Dettia Selamanya (Shield).



TheStar graphics

Source: AADK



A door that leads to the top floor of a parking lot at PPH Taman Mula is locked to prevent the space from being used for illicit activities.