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Faithfully



The drug problem – this is our fight

IT IS shocking to hear that last year, the National Anti-Drug Agency recorded a total of 30,847 drug addicts compared to 26,668 in 2015. The number of new addicts increased from 20,281 to 22,925. It is estimated that currently Malaysia produces an average of 70 new drug addicts daily, and the figure does not include the “dark figures”.

The ugliest part of this issue is that out of the total reported cases between 2013 and 2015, 88,597 were new addicts, while 39,009 were those who returned to their old habit.

The latter are called repeat offenders. One of the fundamental principles of criminology is that a small proportion of individuals commit a large proportion of crime. Data from Marvin Wolfgang’s famous Philadelphia cohort study suggest that around 5% of offenders account for 40% of crimes.

There are two explanations for the high incidence of repeat offenders. First, impulsive individuals with weak social attachment to others tend to get into trouble more frequently than less impulsive and more attached individuals. Secondly, people exposed to more crime and disorder opportunities take advantage of such drug users.

Based on Universiti Utara Malaysia’s research findings

on the economic cost involved in drug abuse in 2009, the government had spent RM8.65 bil in direct and indirect costs to tackle drug issues. However, the programme has obviously not been effective, going by the numbers.

‘Doing time not the answer’

Some have argued that jailing drug users is not the answer to the problem as, in most cases, the offenders continue with the habit after being released from prison. In fact, while serving sentence in prison, non-addicts or new addicts mix with old drug addicts and pushers and as a result the habit gets worse. Many small-time drug users “upgrade” themselves to become pushers or dealers and in fact, some even join the syndicates in the underground economy.

The National Anti-Drug Agency has identified 2,000 schools nationwide as being at high risk of student involvement with drugs. The agency’s (prevention) director Abdul Rahman

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Hamid stated that of the total, students at 400 of the schools, mostly secondary, were involved with drugs. He explained that affected students were mostly males aged between 14 and 16, and the schools were mostly found in farming and fishing settlements.

There should be more studies conducted scientifically to find out the main contributing factors to this social malaise, such as socio-economic problems, demand and supply, weak enforcement, and integrity and border issues. The lack of preventive measures, and the use of globalisation tools and technologies enable syndicates to smuggle drugs into our country. Drug trafficking is lucrative for Malaysian cartels, generating billions of ringgit in annual income.

According to the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, a total of 21 high-ranking narcotics police officers were nabbed last month under the nationwide Ops Kabaddi to weed out corrupt officers. They were suspected of being on the payroll of major drug rings, and being involved in protecting and allowing distribution by drug syndicates.

Corruption is one of the main reasons why drug trafficking is still rampant even though war has been waged against it for a long time. However, the Inspector-General of Police has warned that the police are not going to compromise in their fight against drugs.

To address this problem effectively, our government needs well-trained law enforcement officers with high integrity and good intelligence procurement capabilities. However, gathering reliable information is not an easy task as many of the offences are "victimless", in the sense that the

parties involved do not have any interest in bringing the matter to the authorities.

All relevant law enforcement agencies should work together and exchange information on drug trafficking. In fact,

combating the trafficking and sale of illicit drugs also requires international cooperation on top of strong national policies on prohibition and enforcement.

In terms of rehabilitation, addicts need family support and a greater helping hand from society. The most important place for this drug war to be fought is in the home. The main players are the mother, father, grandparents and other family members.

The role of family

Many parents think schools should handle the issue of drug abuse prevention. But even if schools introduce drug abuse education, no matter how good, it must be supported by a very strong anti-drug message in the home. Parents should spend quality time with their children, respect their feelings and opinions, and teach them about the bad effects of drugs so that they get the correct information and are given a strong warning of the dangers.

Cooperation from all quarters is vital to ensure a society free from the threat of drug abuse and youth grow up to be a competitive and successful generation.

As for the role of employers, they should avoid the misconception that employing people who have been through rehab is overly risky and dangerous. The Work and Pensions Secretary in

the UK stated that ex-drug users can make the best workers. He has outlined new schemes dedicated to getting welfare claimants with drug and drink problems into employment.

In fact, Venturetech, a company in Houston, US, is using the internet to advocate the hiring of those jobseekers typically avoided by employers, ex-offenders and those in recovery from substance abuse. This is a good move to prevent repeat offenders and give them hope for a fresh start.

In Malaysia, the possession of drugs is a serious offence with the penalty of capital punishment. It is governed by the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 that regulates the import, export, manufacture, sale and use of opium, dangerous drugs and related materials. Even such a deterrent sentence does not seem to be working to reduce the problem.

We need to find some light at the end of the tunnel to rid ourselves of this great evil in our society or we will all suffer the terrible, personal and national consequences. We need to wake up and fight. It is a fight we are all in, like it or not, for the sake of our country and future generations.

FocusM

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