DRUG ABUSE AMONG FILIPINOS: The Situation

The National Household Survey on the Nature and Extent of Drug Abuse in the Philippines conducted by the Dangerous Drug Board (DDB) in 1999 estimated 3.4 million current users of illegal drugs among the country’s total population of about 75 million. Of this number, 1.8 million were regular users and 1.6 million occasional users of illegal drugs. Two years earlier, in 1997, the Intelligence Group of the Philippine National Police estimate was 1.7 million users.

The Board is conducting another survey to update its figures.

Current users are classified as those who have used drugs during the six months before the conduct of the survey. Regular users are those using drugs at least once or twice a week for the previous six months. Occasional users are those who have used drugs once or twice a month for the past three months.

Methamphetamine hydrochloride, or shabu, and marijuana, are the most popular drugs of choice among these users, followed by cough syrups and inhalants.

There is no exact figure of Filipino children confirmed as drug users. Trends however, show an alarming rise in their number based on those who were confined in rehabilitation or residential centres. According to the DDB, those aged 19 and below made up 18.49 percent of total patients in 1998, rising to 22.13 percent in 2001. The majority of patients of these centres for the same period are from the 15-29 age group (61%).

Drug use is also prevalent among street children. Inhalants, such as rugby, are the substance of choice among these children because it is cheap and readily available. According to the National Program on Street Children being implemented by the Department of Social Work and Community Development, about 90,000 kids living on the street were provided with various assistance in 2001, including counselling, treatment for drug abuse, and livelihood training for their parents.

Records show that, in 2002, the number of barangays (the basic political unit) with households having members who are drug abusers stood at 8.68 percent – or 3,645 of the country’s total of 41,945 barangays. Metropolitan Manila, the Philippines’ socio-economic and political centre, has the highest number of drug-affected barangays among the country’s 15 regions with 20 percent – or 332 of its 1,694 barangays. Next on the list is the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARRM) with 18 percent, or 214 drug-affected barangays out of 1,172.
DRUG ENFORCEMENT AND PREVENTION: A BRIEF HISTORY

From the 1970s to 2001

In 1972, Republic Act 6425 otherwise known as the “Dangerous Drugs Act of 1972” was approved. This law created the Dangerous Drug Board as the policy-making and coordinating agency as well as the national clearing house on all matters pertaining to law enforcement and control of dangerous drugs, drug abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug dependents, training, research and information activities on drug abuse.

Drug-abuse was not as serious as it is now, with about 20,000 recorded cases of drug abuse, with marijuana as the substance of choice.

In 1999, former President Joseph Ejercito Estrada issued Executive Order No. 61 on January 15, 1999 creating the National Drug Law Enforcement and Prevention Coordinating Centre (DEP Centre). This Centre aimed to orchestrate and consolidate drug law enforcement and prevention efforts of national government agencies, local government units, and non-government organizations to attain a more effective anti-drug abuse campaign.

The DEP Centre initiated a citizen’s movement called Mamamayan Ayaw sa Droga (MAD), or Citizens Against Drugs. Created in July 1999, and launched with an all-out offensive against illegal drugs through a massive people’s march in Manila, accompanied by an extensive information campaign nationwide, using broadcast and print media. It, however, applied with the Commission on Elections as a party list candidate for the 2001 elections – an unfortunate move as it failed to garner the necessary votes to gain a seat in Congress. It has, since then, faded from popular consciousness.

Emerging from where MAD left off, another popular anti-drug abuse movement called the Kilos Laya Laban sa Droga (KILL Droga) or Free Movement Against Drugs was launched nationwide. Apolitical in character, KILL Droga was able to muster a membership of about 600,000 by July 2002 from all over the country.

To complement the efforts of KILL Droga, the government initiated Operation: Private Eye which tapped the citizenry as its eyes and ears in information gathering and reporting. As of July 31, 2002 about 27 informants were awarded almost PhP3 million for having reported illegal drug use in their communities.

Earlier, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo had signed Letter of Instructions No. 1 on July 4, 2001, creating the National Anti-Drug Program of Action (NADPA) to sustain efforts to control drug abuse. Print materials were published and distributed to the various local governments for use during their anti-drug trainings and seminars.

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RA 9165: A New System

On July 4, 2002, Republic Act 9165 – otherwise known as the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act, was signed to law, establishing a Philippine Drug Enforcement and Prevention System. This law expanded the membership in the Dangerous Drugs Board and mandated it to focus on policy-making and strategy-formulation in the anti-drug effort.

RA 9165 also attempts to rationalize the entire anti-drug effort by putting into place a structure that would coordinate all activities and programs covering the entire drugs supply and demand reduction cycle.

Thus, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) was created as the main implementing arm of the system. To integrate and unify enforcement of drug laws, it absorbed the various anti-drug enforcement groups such as the defunct DEP Centre, the Narcotics Group of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) Narcotics Division, and the Bureau of Customs Drug Interdiction Unit. The PDEA will be assisted by existing law enforcement agencies such as the PNP, the NBI and the Bureau of Customs, among others.

To implement RA 9165, a National Anti-Drug Strategy and Program of Action was put into place. This Strategy groups anti-drug operations into three “prongs”: (a) supply and demand reduction campaign; (b) development and reform package; and (c) people empowerment campaign.

Supply and demand reduction campaign consists of prevention and control measures to eradicate, or minimize, the production, processing, trafficking, financing, retailing and consumption of dangerous drugs and related substances. The major agencies involved here are all the law enforcement agencies of government and selected agencies.

These agencies include the Department of Health which accredits licenses and regulates drug testing laboratories as well as the treatment and rehabilitation centres for drug dependents. The Department of Justice prosecutes drug cases and supports the enforcement of RA 9165. The Department of the Interior and Local Governments supervises and monitors local government units in the anti-drug campaign aside from providing enforcement efforts through its attached agencies such as the PNP.

The Department of National Defense, through the Armed Forces of the Philippines, assists the PDEA in the conduct of anti-drug operations. The Anti-Money Laundering Council conducts anti-money laundering operations against drug syndicates and financiers with the support of the PDEA and other law enforcement agencies. The Department of Finance, through the Bureau of Internal Revenue and the Bureau of Customs will conduct financial investigation and interception of drug shipments in airports and seaports.

The development and reform package involves programs intended to minimize the risk factors and deficiencies in the environment that breed or abet the drug problem in society. The government agencies involved here include the Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. These will enlist school heads, supervisors, teachers and student councils through instruction and education in both public and private schools at all levels. The Department of Foreign Affairs will promote cooperation to strengthen the anti-drug campaign on the international front.

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The people empowerment campaign refers to the conduct of “motivational enlightenment, organization and mobilization of many people” so they can participate in the Program. Involved here is the Department of Social Welfare and Development which will mobilize families toward drug awareness and prevention. In the private sector, the Department of Labour and Employment will oversee the mobilization of workers. Government workers, in turn, will be the concern of the Civil Service Commission.

INITIATIVES IN DRUG ABUSE: PREVENTION AMONG CHILDREN

Demand reduction initiatives among all age groups, including youth, consisted of three approaches, according to the DDB. The first approach is primary prevention for non-users. With the Board as the lead agency, involved here are the Departments of Education, Labour and Employment; The Commission on Higher Education; and other government and non-government agencies. The mass media – both broadcast and print, also play an important role here.

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency conducted its own prevention education and information campaign for non-users from August 1 to December 31 2002. For this period alone, it held a total of 5,647 meetings and seminars nationwide in cooperation with schools, church groups, and local government units.

The second approach is secondary prevention for “experimenters” and casual drug users. The Department of Health is the lead agency here, with support from the Department of Social Work and Community Development, the local government units and the Philippine National Police.

The third approach is tertiary prevention for addicts and recovering persons. The Department of Health is also the lead agency here, supported by all law enforcement agencies, local governments and non-government organizations.

The NDEP: Early Years

The primary approach for non-users, especially among children, is a major concern under the National Drug Education Program (NDEP) of the Department of Education. In support of RA 9165, the Department issued an order emphasizing the role of the educational system in the implementation of Article III relating to the random drug testing of secondary or high school students and Article IV calling for the participation of the family, students, teachers and school authorities in the enforcement of the Act.

This role has been incorporated into the NDEP which was set up in 1992 by virtue of Republic Act 7624 entitled “Integrating Drug Abuse Prevention and Control in the Intermediate and Secondary Curricula as well as in the Non-Formal, Informal and Indigenous Learning System and for Other Purposes.” The NDEP was first known as the Comprehensive School-Based Drug Abuse Prevention Program. Its creation came on the heal of the 1989 prevalence survey conducted by the Department which showed that 9.89 percent of respondents from high school and colleges and universities admitted that they had used drugs.

The Program, due to lack of funds, did not create much impact. In 1995, interest in the NDEP was revived through Memorandum Order 388 which called for the “Institutionalisation of the NDEP in All Schools.” Regional directors of the national public school system were directed to plan, implement and evaluate the program at all levels and to provide the necessary financial and material support to ensure continuous operations.
The Dumaguete City Division of Schools in Region 7 and the Negros Oriental Division were chosen as models for the implementation of the NDEP. Drug abuse prevention activities such as classroom teaching of concepts, guidance and counselling, scouting, training of concerned implementers, parents and local leaders formed the major components of the Program.

In 1997, the Department issued Memorandum Order 499 calling for the “Strengthening of the NDEP in Schools.” This acknowledged the continuing pervasiveness of drug abuse among the youth and the fact that lack of resources had hampered the effective implementation of the Program. It thus reiterated the need to “allocate funds for the production of existing modules and teaching aids for drug education,” and the intensification of anti-drug abuse information campaigns. It also called for greater involvement of Parents-Teacher-Community Associations in the drug abuse prevention efforts.

With support from the DDB, the Department – in 1997 and 1998, was able to publish several “Support Instructional Materials on Drug Abuse Prevention for Integration in the Elementary Curriculum” for all elementary grade levels. It also published a resource pamphlet entitled “Drug Education Core Areas and Messages for All Levels of Education and Specific Target Groups.” It even published the “Drug Abuse Prevention Integrated Scouting Kit,” a resource book for the Boy and Girl Scouting Movement. These publications served as resource guides for teachers and school supervisors in integrating drug education in existing subjects and extra-curricular activities.

In Science and Health, for example, lessons on drugs, drug abuse and the forms and uses of drugs were included as a part of various subjects. Values formation, including the importance of drug-free lifestyles, was incorporated in other subjects such as Geography, History and Social Studies (Sibika).

To ensure the uniformity in the teaching of concepts on drug abuse and its ill effects, core messages were identified and incorporated according to the specific levels in elementary, high school and college. These core messages consisted of five major subjects: drugs; dangerous substances; smoking, alcoholism; and prevention and control.

The subject of prevention and control focuses on reasons why people turn to drugs and dangerous substances; the alternatives to drugs; the laws penalizing drug use and trafficking; responsibilities of parents, families, barangay leaders, and other personalities in the prevention of drug abuse; and the resources or agencies that could be sought for assistance.

The NDEP Now

Under the current set-up, the NDEP has gone beyond the classroom and its structured learning processes to the larger environment by encouraging greater parent and community involvement in the drug abuse education and prevention process. The Program has five components: (a) curriculum and instruction; (b) co-curricular and ancillary services; (c) teacher and staff development; (d) parent education and community outreach; and (e) research, evaluation and monitoring.

In the Basic Education Curriculum, drug education is part of the learning area of Makabayan (Nationhood), from Grade 1 to 6, and also in the high school level. Teachers and their supervisors are trained on the use of strategies and resource materials on drug abuse to enhance their communications expertise on the subjects.
From July to December of 2002, the Department trained a total of 377 teachers, nurses and school health and nutrition personnel on Skills on Drug Abuse Prevention in nine of the country’s 15 regions.

Informal education approaches are also being implemented to support existing knowledge imparted in the classrooms. Ancillary services such as counselling or related help are also being strengthened to help drug experimenters and students considered to be high risk probable users cope with their problems. Informal learning, the NDEP states, “occurs in diverse forms, in many places and under varying circumstances and involves all kinds of people.”

Guidance centres, school clinics, security posts, student organizations, scouting and other youth clubs as well as student projects are being harnessed as informal channels of drug-abuse information dissemination. Moreover, to safeguard students from drug abuse, random drug testing shall be initiated among public and private high schools.

Other Prevention Initiatives

While the NDEP is the sole and major organisational effort of the government aimed at drug abuse education and prevention among children, especially in the schools, there have been similar efforts – though sporadic and scattered, targeted at children at risk, such as those coming from poor families and communities as well as street children. Most of these efforts are undertaken by non-government organizations at the community level.

Among the non-government organizations active in drug abuse prevention efforts are those supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)/World Health Organization (WHO) Global Initiative on Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse.

These organizations include Addictus Philippines, Inc., Bidlisw Foundation, Inc., Childhope Asia Philippines, Foundation for Adolescent Development, Inc., Foundation for Drug Information and Communication, Higala Association, Inc., Kahayag, Kaugmaon Centre for Children's Concerns Foundation, Inc., Kauswagan Community Development and Social Development Centre, Kapatiran Komunidad People’s Coalition (KKPC), METSA Foundation, Inc., Person’s Enrichment Through Encounter and Response (PEER), and the Philippine Red Cross Youth Department.

These organizations have their own projects usually involving one to four barangays in various cities nationwide, with support from the Global Initiative. These projects engage in training core groups of volunteers who would eventually implement outreach and street education activities.

For example, Childhope Asia Philippines – an organization that provides and organizes street-based education and shelter for street-children and community-based projects for children, is training children to become peer trainers and to be actively involved in mobilizing other children in the community through networking, training and outreach.

Other projects involve parent and community members in advocacy sessions. Schools and other institutions are being tapped in child education efforts. Among various initiatives a partner organization, is coordinating the development of street and theatre performances on drug abuse issues with schools.

Youth centres are being encouraged to provide interesting and relevant recreational activities for youth at risk. Parents' core groups are also being established and included in study sessions and a ‘Quality Parenting Workshop’.

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