

Survey Report on Student Drug Use in Macao 2018

Abstract

The main objectives of this study are to investigate drug abuse among school students in Macao, to identify the social and personal factors related to drug abuse, and to explore the impact and harms of drug abuse. Four similar surveys were conducted in 2000/2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014. The design of this study maintains the main features of the previous surveys, but provides some improvements. In order to enhance the depth and breadth of the research, this survey adds enrichment and improvement on the contents of the questionnaire. New items adopted in the questionnaire include many theory-based standard survey questions that are often used in the studies of drug abuse, such as the reasons that drug users seek or not seek treatment, the causes that drug users try or not try to stop taking drugs, the access to drugs and its difficulty level, and the relationship between drug abuse and mental health as well as the relationship between drug abuse and delinquent behavior. In addition, the new design improves the questions concerning drug abuse education and prevention. A total of 10,079 questionnaires were collected, including 622 online questionnaires. Among the collected questionnaires, 2,375 were from senior primary schools, 3,426 were from junior secondary schools, 3,041 were from senior secondary schools, and 1,237 were from tertiary education institutions.

The survey found that in 2018, the proportion of students using illegal drugs in Macao was 2.92%, which was slightly higher than the 2.48% in 2014, but the change did not reach a statistically significant level. That is to say, the overall proportion of students using illegal drugs in Macao did not show a discernible change from 2014 to 2018. Among all the illegal drugs mentioned in the questionnaire, the rate of abuse was highest in marijuana (1.48%), pills (1.47%), happy water (1.35%) and ice (1.31%). Compared with 2014, the proportion of young people who used happy water and pills more than doubled, and the proportion who used ice increased from 0.76% to 1.31%, an increase of nearly three-quarters, while the proportion who used marijuana did not change significantly. In terms of grade distribution, tertiary students had the highest rate of drug abuse, followed by senior primary school students, senior secondary school students and junior secondary school students. Compared with 2014, the rate of drug abuse among tertiary students increased from 2.40% to 4.98%, which is more than doubled. No significant change was found in other grades. The most common places of drug abuse were abusers' own homes, discos/bars, hotels/guesthouses, and public toilets. The most common reasons for drug abuse are curiosity, looking for fun, using with friends, using with family members, thrill-seeking, and relieving boredom.

There are many factors associated with drug abuse. The respondents who had no access to antidrug information had a higher rate of drug abuse than those who had the access; cigarette smoking, e-cigarette smoking, drinking and getting drunk were positively correlated with the frequency of drug abuse; the percentage of friends who smoked, drank or abused drugs was positively correlated with drug abuse of the adolescent students. School students born in Hong Kong, Macao and other places (e.g., United States, Japan, Malaysia and Spain), and those who lost both parents or had both parents unemployed reported higher rates of drug abuse.

With regard to antidrug education, the analysis results show that students of different grades had significant differences in their access to antidrug information. Tertiary students had more contact with antidrug messages in terms of both type and level of access than the respondents of other grades, while senior secondary school students had more access to antidrug talks that teach antidrug information than those of other groups. It is noteworthy that as a group, senior primary school group had more students with no contact with antidrug information. In terms of the type of antidrug information exposed, most of the students from senior primary schools, junior secondary schools, senior secondary schools and tertiary education institutions received one to five types of antidrug information.

Regarding treatment service utilization, only a small number of drug abusers (17.77%) sought treatment. Similarly, only a small number of them (26.5%) tried to stop using drugs. The common reasons not to seek treatment or stop using drugs were mainly the belief that drug abuse is not a criminal act, the feeling that one can control the addiction, and the lack of physical discomfort.

Most adolescent students in Macao held a disapproving attitude towards drug abuse and believed that drug abuse harms the human body in various degrees. More than 82.84% of adolescent students expressed some level of disapproval of drug abuse. More than 96% of the adolescents believed that using illegal drugs, regardless of frequency, could cause physical or other harms. The type and frequency of participating in antidrug activities had a significant impact on attitudes and perceptions of drug abuse. Generally speaking, the adolescents with exposure to more kinds of antidrug information at higher frequency were more likely to object to drug abuse than those with exposure to fewer kinds of antidrug information at lower frequency. In addition, they were also more likely to recognize the harms of drug abuse.

Adolescent drug abuse was significantly and positively correlated with mental health, aggression, delinquent behavior and crime victimization. These results suggest that drug abuse

might significantly increase the risk of mental illness and aggression, the frequency of delinquent involvement, and the probability of crime victimization.

The effective prevention and control of adolescent drug abuse in Macao is a multi-faceted task. First of all, drug abuse education and prevention should focus on the family to strengthen the parents' supervision and discipline of the adolescent, so as to reduce the chances of the adolescent using illegal drugs at home. Second, special attention should be paid to tertiary students, senior primary school students and male students, and more efforts should be put into the prevention of drug abuse among these groups in the future. Third, drug abuse prevention workers and educators should strengthen the adolescents' awareness of marijuana, pills, happy water and ice, which are more frequently abused, thereby increasing their vigilance and reducing the risk of drug abuse. In addition, they should help young students curtail their curiosity about illegal drugs and prevent them from trying to use illegal drugs for the sake of curiosity and having fun; adolescents should be helped to establish a good social network to avoid the bad influences of drug-abusing friends. In addition, it is also necessary to help the adolescents properly deal with problems in life and school to avoid drug abuse due to excessive pressure. Finally, the relevant government departments should strengthen the oversight of entertainment venues such as bars, disco and hotels, and step up monitoring of these places. At the same time, it is also necessary to pay attention to adolescents who may use illegal drugs in public places such as public toilets, streets, K houses, and snooker rooms, and strengthen supervision; it is necessary to increase outreaching services and antidrug communication, and engage timely with the adolescents who abuse drugs.