

Analytical Overview of Drug-related Arrests in Sri Lanka - 2024

Research Division

National Dangerous Drugs Control Board

Drug-Related Arrests

Drug-Related Arrests by Drug

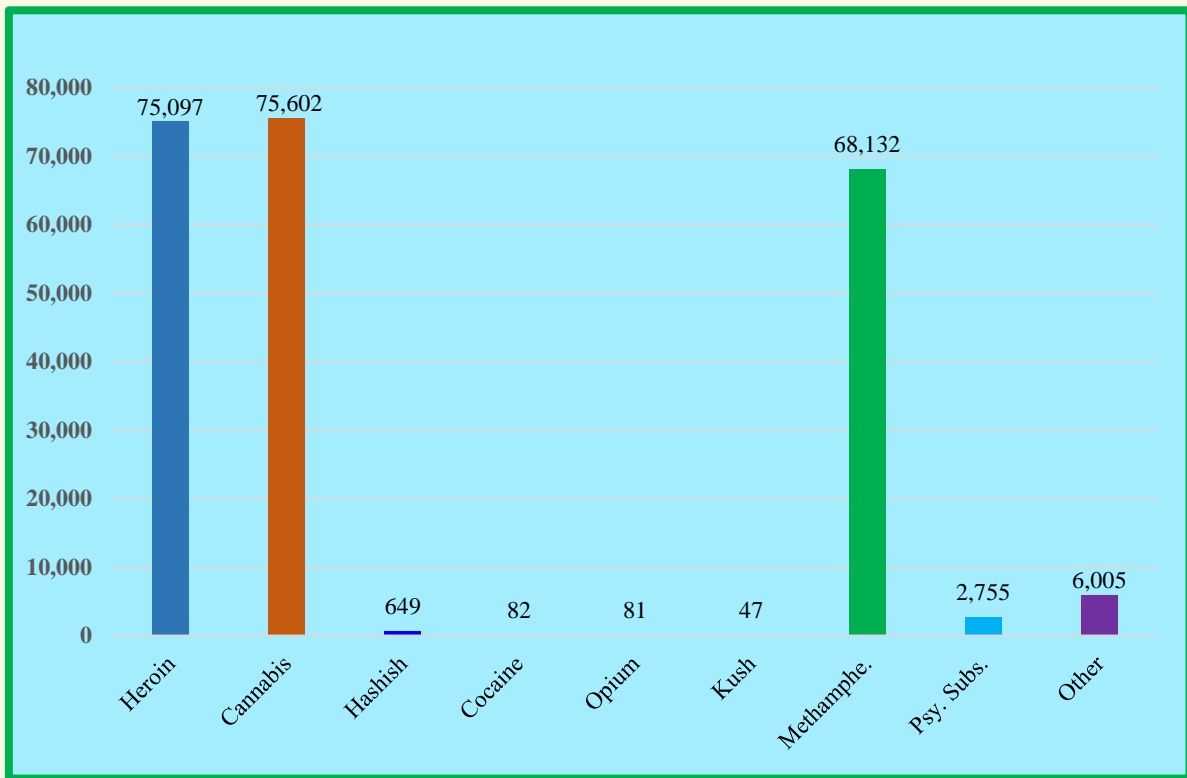
In 2024, a total of 228,450 individuals were arrested for drug-related offenses across the island. Of these, heroin-related offenses accounted for 75,097 individuals, representing 32.9% of the total. Cannabis-related offenses led to 75,602 arrests, making up 33.1% of the total, indicating its widespread use and cultivation. Methamphetamine-related arrests numbered 68,132, comprising 29.8% of the total, reflecting growing concern over the rise of synthetic drugs. Additionally, 82 individuals were arrested for cocaine-related offenses, and 649 were detained for offenses related to hashish. These statistics underscore the broad spectrum of drug issues facing the region and highlight the extensive efforts by law enforcement to address them.

Table No: 1- Drug-related Arrests by Drugs

Type of drugs	Number of arrested persons	%
Heroin	75,097	32.9
Cannabis	75,602	33.1
Cocaine	82	0.0
Hashish	649	0.3
Opium	81	0.0
Kush	47	0.0
Methamphetamine	68,132	29.8
Psychotropic substances	2,755	1.2
Others	6,005	2.6
Total	228,450	100.0

Source: Police Narcotics Bureau, 2024

Graph No: 01 – Drug-Related Arrest by Drugs (Number of persons)



Source: Police Narcotics Bureau, 2024

In 2024, the total number of arrests for drug-related offenses saw a notable increase compared to 2023, marking an emerging trend in the country. This upward trend in drug-related arrests underscores growing concerns about the prevalence of drugs and highlights the efforts of law enforcement authorities to combat drug trafficking and abuse.

Emerging Concern: Rise in Kush-Related Arrests

An emerging trend in 2024 is the increasing number of arrests related to the use and distribution of Kush, a synthetic form of cannabis. A total of 47 individuals were arrested across the country for offenses linked to Kush, reflecting a concerning rise in the presence and circulation of this potent and often unpredictable substance. The relatively recent appearance of Kush in local drug markets signals a shift in substance use patterns, particularly among youth and urban populations.

Unclassified Threats: Increase in Psychotropic Substance Abuse

In addition to the main categories of drugs commonly reported, there is a noticeable and concerning increase in the use of other psychotropic substances across the country. A considerable number of individuals were arrested in 2024 for offenses related to the misuse of controlled medicines and synthetic drugs that fall outside the primary classifications, such as heroin, cannabis, and methamphetamine. These substances include prescription medications like tramadol, diazepam, and other psychotropic pills, as well as emerging synthetic compounds that are not yet fully regulated. Although these cases are not separately categorized in the main statistical tables, field reports and enforcement data indicate a rising trend in their abuse, particularly among young adults and vulnerable populations.

Shifting Trends: Methamphetamine Joins Major Drug Categories

Methamphetamine-related arrests in 2024 have reached levels nearly equal to those of cannabis and heroin, marking a significant shift in the country's drug abuse landscape. While cannabis and heroin have traditionally been the most commonly abused substances, the sharp rise in methamphetamine usage has propelled it into the category of major drug types. With 68,132 arrests linked to methamphetamine, just slightly behind cannabis (75,602) and heroin (75,097), the data reflects a growing trend in the use and trafficking of synthetic stimulants.

Table No: 2 - Drug-Related Arrests by Districts

District	Heroin	%	Cannabis	%	Methamphetamine	%	cocaine	%	hashish	%	Psychotropic Substances	%	Opium	%	Kush	%	Others	%	Total
Anuradapura	1,511	39.1	1,627	42.1	520	13.5	0	0.0	3	0.1	112	2.9	0	0.0	1	0.0	87	2.3	3,861
Polonnaruwa	385	19.3	1,225	61.3	332	16.6	0	0.0	7	0.3	9	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	41	2.1	1,999
Badulla	727	18.4	2,525	63.9	468	11.9	1	0.1	11	0.3	92	2.3	1	0.0	0	0.0	124	3.1	3,949
Monaragala	108	6.6	1,378	83.8	148	9.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	0.4	1,645
Batticaloa	222	10.5	853	40.2	853	40.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	21	1.0	6	0.3	0	0.0	168	7.8	2,123
Ampara	145	9.8	1,203	81.1	80	5.4	1	0.1	1	0.1	18	1.3	0	0.0	1	0.0	35	2.4	1,484
Trincomalee	142	11.6	483	39.4	460	37.5	0	0.0	2	0.2	98	8.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	41	3.3	1,226
Galle	2,431	38.1	2,382	37.3	1266	19.8	0	0.0	29	0.5	7	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.0	266	4.2	6,382
Matara	1,322	35.9	1,679	45.6	365	10.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	314	8.5	3,680
Hambantota	1,063	24.7	2,629	61.2	490	11.4	0	0.0	3	0.1	30	0.7	0	0.0	1	0.0	83	1.9	4,299
Colombo	46,182	36.5	34,778	27.5	41833	33.0	12	0.0	302	0.2	565	0.4	61	0.1	21	0.1	2832	2.2	126,586
Kalutara	1,697	28.4	1,967	32.9	2108	35.3	1	0.0	19	0.3	105	1.8	0	0.0	5	0.1	70	1.2	5,972
Gampaha	6,934	28.9	4,942	20.6	11487	48.0	3	0.1	34	0.1	510	2.1	0	0.0	2	0.0	42	0.2	23,954
Mannar	54	13.4	157	39.1	110	27.4	0	0.0	3	0.7	57	14.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	21	5.2	402

District	Heroin	%	Cannabis	%	Methamphetamine	%	Cocaine	%	Hashish	%	Psychotropic Substances	%	Opium	%	Kush	%	Others	%	Total
Jaffna	455	22.1	1103	53.5	125	6.1	1	0.0	0	0.0	320	15.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	59	2.9	2,063
Mullativu	19	6.2	239	76.8	48	15.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.6	311
Kilinochchi	42	18.2	158	68.4	21	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	4.3	231
Vavuniya	133	16.6	395	49.4	207	25.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	33	4.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	31	3.9	799
Kegalle	444	28.7	653	42.3	322	20.8	0	0.0	5	0.3	55	3.6	0	0.0	1	0.1	65	4.2	1,545
Ratnapura	628	19.9	1,604	50.9	820	26.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	97	3.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.1	3,151
Matale	759	22.4	1,825	53.9	601	17.7	0	0.0	6	0.2	56	1.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	142	4.2	3,389
Nuwara Eliya	456	19.9	679	29.6	118	5.1	1	0.0	37	1.6	114	5.0	0	0.0	7	0.3	882	38.4	2,294
Kandy	2,710	37.0	2,948	40.3	1147	15.7	0	0.0	24	0.3	217	3.0	0	0.0	5	0.1	264	3.6	7,315
Kurunegala	2,490	35.9	3,204	46.2	999	14.4	0	0.0	9	0.1	56	0.8	7	0.1	0	0.0	170	2.5	6,935
Puttalam	1,700	37.0	2,281	49.6	353	7.7	0	0.0	7	0.2	3	0.0	6	0.1	2	0.0	247	5.4	4,599
Not specified	2,338	28.3	2,685	32.5	2,851	34.5	62	0.8	147	1.8	173	2.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8,256
Total	75,097	32.9	75,602	33.1	68,132	29.8	82	0.0	649	0.3	2,755	1.2	81	0.0	47	0.0	6,005	2.6	228,450

Source: Police Narcotics Bureau, 2024

Table No: 3 – Drug-Related Arrest by Provinces

Province	Heroin	Cannabis	Methamphetamine	Hashish	Cocaine	Psychotropic Substances	Opium	Kush	Other	Total
North Central	1,896	2,852	852	10	0	121	0	1	128	5860
Western	54,813	41,687	55,428	355	16	1,180	61	28	2,944	156,512
Southern	4,816	6,690	2,121	32	0	37	0	2	663	14,361
Central	3,925	5,452	1,866	67	1	387	0	12	1,288	12,998
Northern	703	2,052	511	3	1	413	0	0	123	3,806
Eastern	509	2,539	1,393	3	1	137	6	1	244	4,833
Sabaragamuwa	1,072	2,257	1,142	5	0	152	0	1	67	4,696
North Western	4,190	5,485	1,352	16	0	59	13	2	417	11,534
Uva	835	3,903	616	11	1	96	1	0	131	5,594
Not specified	2,338	2,685	2,851	62	147	173	0	0	0.0	8,256
Total	75,097	75,602	68,132	82	649	2,755	81	47	2.6	228,450

Source: Police Narcotics Bureau, 2024

***Other drugs - Babul, Madanamodaka, Hans, Panpara**

According to arrest statistics, the Western Province has the highest prevalence of drug-related incidents in the country. In addition to the Western Province, the Southern and Central Provinces also exhibit high prevalence rates of drug-related activities.

Seized Quantity of Drugs (Kg)

From January to December 2024, law enforcement agencies across the island reported significant seizures of various illicit drugs. A total of 832.360 kilograms of heroin was seized, highlighting the substantial presence and distribution of this narcotic. Cannabis seizures were even more pronounced, with authorities confiscating 8,359.501 kilograms, indicating its widespread cultivation and use. Additionally, 1,364.254 kilograms of methamphetamine were seized during this period, underscoring the growing concern over synthetic drugs in the region. These figures reflect the extensive efforts of law enforcement in combating drug trafficking and abuse.

Table 4 - Seized Quantity of Drug (Kg)

Drug	Seized quantity (kg)
Heroin	832.360
Cannabis	8,359.501
Cocaine	23.407
Hashish	291.973
Kush	2.863
Opium	0.102
Methamphetamine	1,364.254
Psychotropic substances	0.315kg Capsules: 1,407,237 Tablets: 1,319,874
Other	116.776

Source: Police Narcotics Bureau, 2024