

Drug Abuse Situation in Sri Lanka

The total number of persons of drug related arrests was 18,743 in 2009. 68% of those arrestees were aged 30 years or more and 30% of them were in their twenties. The man to woman ratio of drug arrests was 29:1. Of the drug-related arrests, 29% was for heroin, 71% was for cannabis. Most of the drug-related arrests, 48% was reported from the Western Province followed by the Southern province (13%) and the Central province (10%). The Colombo district reported 34% of the drug arrest followed by the Gampaha (8%) district and the Kandy district (7%). The prevalence of drug related arrests were 93 per 100,000 population in 2009. The prevalence of drug related arrests above 14 years was 125 per population of 100,000 in 2009. Among the persons arrested for drug offences, 81% of them were Sinhalese.

Cannabis

Cannabis is the only drug that grows, and it is grown illicitly, mostly in the dry zones of the country in the Eastern and Southern provinces. The estimated land area under cannabis cultivation is nearly 500 hectares. Little labour and other inputs are needed to grow cannabis compared to other cash crops and it has very few natural predators. Scenes of cannabis cultivations suggest that modern agricultural methods were used for this as well. A more potent variety of cannabis with more flowering tops had become popular among the young drug users in recent times.

Of the drug related arrests, majority were for cannabis (13,300) in the year 2009. Highest number of cannabis cases (23%) was reported from Colombo district followed by Gampaha and Hambantota districts. The Police Narcotics Bureau seized the largest quantity of cannabis and was followed by the Colombo North police division and Sri Lanka customs. Cannabis grows in the rural areas and it is brought to Colombo and other provincial towns for more profit. Often public transport was used to traffic in cannabis in order to avoid detection. Among the drug users arrested in the recent past a major increase in cannabis related arrests has been noted. There was no indication of cannabis being exported from or imported to the country during the year. The quantity of cannabis seized island-wide was 84,605 kg. The Western province reported 38% of the cases followed by the Southern and the Central Provinces. The number of persons of cannabis related arrests had decreased by 34% in 2009 compared to that of 2008. The prevalence of cannabis related arrests was 66 per population of 100,000 and it was 89 per population of 100,000 for those above 14 years of age in 2009.

The present trends indicate that over last decades the incidence of abuse of cannabis has come to constitute substantial problem in Sri Lankan society. The trend reflected a significant increase of cannabis users in the country. The cannabis related arrests were rapidly increased during the period of year 2005 to 2007. It was 16,265 in year 2005, 34,728 for 2006, 33,848 for year 2007. But cannabis related arrests had decreased from year 2008. Number of persons arrested for cannabis had decreased by 34% in year 2009 compared to that of 2008.

Cannabis without the narcotic content was used in the manufacture of Ayurveda (indigenous) medical preparations. The Ayurveda medical practitioners and the Ayurveda Drugs Corporation were the largest consumers of it. 205 kgs of cannabis were used for Ayurveda medicinal purposes in 2009. The Ayurveda Drugs Corporation, with consumed the total quantity of 191 kg used it mostly for the production of *madana modakaya*, *suran vidura vatee*, *kameshwari modakaya*, *ranahansa rasayanaya* and *buddharaja kalkaya*.

Heroin

Before 1980s, its use was restricted to a few locals who had traveled abroad and to some foreign tourists. Heroin use became more common among other social strata from early 80s. Thereafter the number of users had increased. Even though, its use was initially confined to Colombo city and few provincial towns, now it had spread to remote towns and rural areas as well. It has also become a major health and social problem in the country, cutting ethnic, religious and geographical lines.

Drug Law Enforcement agencies world-over on average seize about 10% of the drugs trafficked in. Based on the heroin seizures between 2005 and 2009, the estimated street level supply of heroin in Sri Lanka was 763 kg per annum or nearly 2 kilograms per day. This quantity was sufficient for a day's supply of 45,000 heroin dependents. Heroin was smuggled into the island by fishing boats or by couriers posing as tourist. Most of the heroin in the country was from India or Pakistan. The drug is mainly smuggled via South India to the Western coast of Sri Lanka using fishing boats. In 2009, 34 kgs of heroin were seized and 5,431 persons were arrested. Among the arrestees 5% were women. Majority of the arrestees were drug users who had been in possession of a few milligrams of heroin for personal use. The prevalence of heroin related arrests in 2009 was 27 per population of 100,000 and it was 36 per population of 100,000 for those above 14 years of age.

There is no significant increase of heroin related arrest or heroin users in the country. Last five year data shows that heroin related arrests were decreasing. In year 2005, 11738 persons were arrested and 5431 persons were arrested in year 2009. Heroin related arrests had decreased by 54% compared to the year 2005.

Opium

Opium is used in the Ayurveda (indigenous) medical pharmacopeia and the government makes it available to Ayurveda Medical Practitioners through Government Hospitals. 124 kgs of opium were used for medical purposes during the year 2009. Approximately 533 gram of opium was seized during the year. The number of arrests made was three. The seizures of opium were from Colombo, Anuradhapura and Batticaloa districts.

Price and Purity

The average street price per kilogram of heroin in 2009 was 3 million in Sri Lanka Rupees (approximately U.S. \$ 26,086) for locals. The average street price of heroin had decreased by 33% for the locals in 2009 compared to that of 2008. But when compared to that of 2005 the street price of heroin had increased from 1.8 million to 3.2 million in 2009. The average street price of a kilogram of cannabis was Sri Lanka rupees 12,000 (approximately U.S. \$ 104) for locals. The price of cannabis has decreased for locals in 2009 compared to the year 2008 by 40%. The average street price of opium per kilogram for locals was 0.9 million (approximately U.S. \$ 7,826) during 2009.

The average di-acetyl morphine content, of street level heroin in Sri Lanka was 40% in 2009. It has increased by 10% compared to 2008. Diazepam, lactose, sucrose, acetaminophen and caffeine were the commonly used adulterants of heroin. The National Narcotic Laboratory of the NDDCB is testing street level heroin sample on a monthly basis. According to the tested sample during the last five years there were no significant changes on average purity level of heroin. In 2005 the average purity level of heroin was 38.5% and it was 40.29% in 2009.

Method of Drug Administration

Among the heroin users, Inhalation ("chase the dragon" - Chinese) is the preferred mode of intake. Cannabis and Hashish were smoked. The opium users mostly ate it. Of the drug users, many smoked tobacco and a few consumed alcohol.

Psychotropic Substances

Dependence of psychotropic substances is not any significant degree in Sri Lanka. Dependence on one or more of these substances stems either from medical use, or to evade withdrawal symptoms when heroin is not available in the market. Some of these are (willingly or unwillingly) incorporated in seemingly innocuous medicinal preparations. Although these substances are prescription controlled, some of these substances are freely available in the illicit market. During the last five years amphetamine was seized and only 4 persons were arrested for psychotropic substances related offences.

Precursor Chemical

Precursor is nothing but a chemical out of which synthetic narcotic drugs can be manufactured through chemical processes. The precursors are generally used in industry and chemical manufacture units for licit purpose. The traffickers divert this precursor chemical illegally for production of illicit drugs.

Sri Lanka does not manufacture any precursors, whatever substance is needed for use in the pharmaceutical or industrial sector must be imported. Most precursor chemicals imported to Sri Lanka are either industrial or pharmaceutical purposes. The main precursors imported into the country in the last few years are acetic anhydride, acetone, ephedrine, ergometrine, hydrochloric acid, methyl ethyl ketone, piperonal, potassium permanganate, pseudoephedrine, sulphuric acid, toluene. Out of these precursors through chemical precursors synthetic heroin and cocaine can be produced. Other synthetic highly addictive drugs that can be produced are, Methaqualone, LSD, MDA/MDMA, Amphetamine, Methamphetamine and Phencyclidine tablets.

Convention against illicit traffic in Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substances, Act 1 of 2008 was enacted to cover these 23 precursor chemicals in year 2008. Act gives effect to the UN convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, 1988 convention and SAARC convention. Although Sri Lanka does not manufacture any precursors, a clandestine laboratory was seized in Kosgama, in Awissawella district in 2008 and this is new emerging trend has to be eradicated.

Drug Trafficking

Seizures of drugs by law enforcement agencies are one of the main indicators used to assess the level of illicit drug trafficking. Sri Lanka is also a transit point for drug trafficking and traffickers act as couriers of drugs from Pakistan and India to Europe and the West through Colombo / Male.

Through out the past five years, heroin seizures and arrest information highlight that south west asian heroin (brown sugar) mainly smuggled from India and Pakistan and mostly originating from the golden crescent region. During the last five years 43 foreigners were arrested in Sri Lanka for drug offences including 20(50%) Pakistanis, 9 Indians (21%), 04 Maldivians, two British and 8 from other countries. 12 foreigners were arrested in Sri Lanka in year 2009. They were Pakistani, Indian and Nepalese. They were arrested for trafficking of 7.501 kg heroin and 448 gm of Cocaine.

A total of fourteen Sri Lankan males were arrested for drug offences in abroad in year 2009. Most of them were arrested in South Korea, followed by India and Abudabi. They were arrested for trafficking of 3.451kg of heroin, 2.798 kg of cannabis and 08 amphetamines tablets.

Treatment and Rehabilitation Services

The government and non government organization are providing residential care treatment & rehabilitation services for drug dependants in Sri Lanka. Drug Dependant Persons (treatment and rehabilitation) act Number 54, 2007 has been enacted to implement compulsory treatment which will commence shortly. The National Dangerous Drugs Control Board (NDDCB) operates four residential treatment centers and outreach programme for drug dependents. The centers of the NDDCB located in Colombo, Kandy, Galle and Urapola provide residential care and treatment and rehabilitation services for drug dependants. They also function as preventive and outreach arms of the Board.

The programme of these centers includes individual and family counseling. It is included detoxification, physical exercises, mental relaxation, indoor and outdoor activities, Psychotherapy, education in coping with skills and motivation to develop healthy lifestyles.

The prison department in collaboration with the NDDCB has specialized programmes for drug dependant prisoners.

The reported number of persons treated for drug use Island-wide was 2,975 in year 2009. Among them 2,387(80%) from the treatment centers of National Dangerous Drugs Control Board and 522(18%) from Prisoner Diversion Scheme of the Dept. of prisons. 65(2%) was reported from the NGO's. Majority (60%) of them were from Colombo district. 74% of them were aged 30 years or more. Treatment admission has decreased rapidly within the last five years. In 2005, 3285 drug dependants were admitted to the treatment centers and it was 2,975 in year 2009. The data revealed that it has decreased by 9% compared to 2005.

Imprisonment

The total numbers of convicted prisoners were 37827 for year 2009. Among them 13,319 cases of narcotic drug related imprisonment were reported in 2009. The prevalence of narcotic drug related prison admissions was 86 per population of 100,000 and it was 79 per population of 100,000 for those above 14 years of age. Majority of them were for possession of small quantities of drugs. Among them, 52.6% was for heroin and 47.3% for cannabis and 0.1 for opium. Majority of the persons were Sinhala-Buddhist, followed by Islamic- Moors and Hindu-Tamils.

HIV and AIDS

Injecting drug use is one of the causes of HIV/AIDS transmission. Sharing needles and injecting equipment with infected blood facilitate its spread. The slight increase in the number of injecting drug users was noted in recent times. One Sri Lankan case of HIV and AIDS due to injecting drug use had been reported so far.

The first HIV positive case in Sri Lanka was report in 1987. According to official reports, up to 2009 the number of, HIV positive cases were 1,196, which include 707 males and 489 females. Among the reported, 137 cases were new. The number of male and female cases had increased by 13% and 9% respectively. The total number of AIDS cases reported that up to 2009 were 309. The total number of AIDS related deaths up to 2009 was 202 while 16 deaths occurred in 2009.

Law Enforcement

The Police Department including Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB), the Excise Department, Sri Lanka Customs and the Navy conducted drug law enforcement operations during 2009. The Drug Law Enforcement sub committee of the National Dangerous Drugs Control Board (NDDCB) co-ordinate the policy planning and drug law enforcement activities in the island. The department of prisons continued its rehabilitation programmes for drug dependant prisoners in collaboration with the NDDCB.