

Youth Drug Abusers: Barriers in Help-Seeking

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Abstract: The trend of drug abuse is increasing in Malaysia and a significant number of them are youths. Past studies discover that youths do not seek professional help or do not even seek help when they are abusing drugs. Thus, it is important to understand the reason behind them. This is crucial as drug abusers are always hiding their identity. The study aims to identify the barriers which keep the youth away from seeking help. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative approach to have in-depth understanding about the barriers faced by the young drug addicts in seeking help for treatment. The study is carried out in a drugs rehabilitation centre in Kuching area targeting the youths who are currently undergoing treatment in the centre. Majority of them are not admitted voluntarily. The sampling is identified using purposive technique. Instruments used for the study includes in-depth interview by using guided interview questions. The findings are analysed using content analysis to develop themes through the verbatim data. The study enquires about their experiences on drug abuse and their journey to the rehabilitation centre. Thus, the major finding indicates the barriers faced by them during the journey. Most of the respondents never had the intention to seek help until the family members took action. They had made drugs abuse behavior as part of their youth culture. Majority of the respondents are lack of awareness on the existing help system and concern on the legal action if they expose themselves. The findings of the study have implications on the community with the drug abusing youth in prevention and recovery policy.

Keywords: Drug abuse, youth, help-seeking, barrier, treatment

I. INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019), the drug problem is becoming viral globally and it is worrying as there is an estimated 271 million people of the global population had abused drugs. The World Drug Report states that there is more than one drug abuser in every 10 drug users (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). In year 2018, South-East Asia arises as the fastest growing market of methamphetamine in the world. Most countries from South-East Asia which includes Malaysia had reported methamphetamine as main concern in drugs treatment (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019; National Anti-Drugs Agency, 2019).

Drug abuse is known as one of the major issues for school youths. As cited in Sike et al. (2009), study shows that drug abuse is going viral among the youths that the youth in almost all the countries in the world had significant number in abusing drugs. World Drug Report (2015) states that the number of youth who engaged in drugs is increasing (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015) as they are using drugs to satisfy their need which includes to release stress or enhance enjoyment (United Nations, 2006). Khantzian, Mack, and Schatzberg (Abadinsky, 2018) find that often the youth

uses drug to cope with their psychological demand which includes stress, emotional pain, or developmental crisis. In America, studies have shown that the youths are at risk of getting into contact with drugs. The school is one of the parties that plays a primary role in detecting, identifying and preventing youth drug abuse (Council on School Health and Committee on Drug Abuse, 2007). The school counselors are the educators with drug abuse and mental health knowledge; thus, it is important for them to be able to detect and react immediately when they come across any youth drug abusers.

The trend of drug abuse among youth continues to increase in Malaysia (Mohamed et al., 2008) and the issue has been highlighted in many research conducted in the country (Chie et al., 2015; Tam & Foo, 2013; Mohamed et al., 2008). A research conducted in Selangor has found that it is common for secondary school students to experience depression and drug abuse can be one of the factors (Adlina et al., 2007). As there are connections between drug abuse and depression (Fergusson, Bode, & Horwood, 2009; Hamalainen et al., 2001; Glassman et al., 1990), some interventions need to focus on the early stage of drug abuse. On the other hand, Mohamed et al. (2008) find that there are not many research done in examining this field and thus the prevention programs are formulated from other sources such as government body, private organization and research through students (Samsudin et al., 2014; Vicknasingam & Mazlan, 2008). Meanwhile, Chemi et al. (2014) believe that the research on the outcome of drug abuse should be studied in details to ensure a more effective approach. Therefore, we can see that many research focused on the subject of drug abuse does not include the youth drug abuser's help-seeking process.

Besides that, from the past research mentioned above, these research focus mainly on Peninsular Malaysia. However, Sarawak as one of the states from East Malaysia also plays crucial role since Sarawak had recorded the highest number of drug abuse among the secondary school students in the country (Chieng, 2019). Statistic from National Anti-Drug Agency (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019) also shows that the drug abuse cases detected in Sarawak are increasing from year 2017 to 2019 (from 440 cases to 852 cases). There are several areas in Sarawak that had been highlighted as high risk areas such as Kuching, Samarahan, Sri Aman, Miri, Sibu and Bintulu (Bernama, 2019). Besides the urban areas, many youths from different ethnic groups were arrested in the rural areas of Sarawak because of drug abuse problems (Chieng, 2019). It is a rising concern that the drug abuse problems had also hit the youths in the rural areas which include villages in Bau, Serian, Kapit, Bintulu and Lawas (Jee, 2019). Thus, it is