

Research Outline Qualitative Information on Drug Abuse Situation in Hong Kong

Executive Summary

This study examines the complex issue of drug abuse, addressing rising trends and multifaceted impacts. With a significant increase in global drug users, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of drug abuse patterns, characteristics, and consequences within the Hong Kong context. Due to the extensive length of the generated report, the research team presents the findings in six different reports, allowing readers to access individual themes of interest.

The study aims to develop a framework for qualitative data collection on drug abuse, and use this framework to implement data collection. By adopting a five-stage framework of drug abuse as an evolving cycle, the research framework focuses on various stages of drug use, including onset, persistence, treatment, relapse, and desistance. In addition to examining patterns, characteristics, and consequences of drug abuse, the research team specifically investigates hidden drug abuse, cannabis use, drug dealing, and online drug dealing and subcultures.

The study employed a triangulation of methods, including a systematic literature review, individual and group interviews, and online ethnographic research. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the drug abuse landscape. The systematic review involved 334 records, while interviews (127 interviews) and online engagements (484 online engagements) provided in-depth qualitative data. The study included 127 participants: 20 frontline practitioners and law enforcers (11 males, 9 females) and 107 drug users and dealers, predominantly male (62.6%) and aged 20-29 (57%). 69% drug-using participants began drug use at age 19 or under, and 55.4% and 44.6% had an education level of secondary and or post-secondary education respectively, with varied employment statuses.

The findings demonstrated the multi-dimensional aspects of drug use, including the prevalent substances, health implications, generational patterns, drug accessibility, changing attitudes, and law enforcement challenges. By examining each stage of the five-stage framework, valuable insights were provided to policymakers and service providers to develop targeted strategies for prevention,

treatment, and support.

Detailed operations and factors for committing drug dealing had been outlined, highlighting the adaptability of these networks and the challenges for law enforcement in managing this entrenched issue. The results also underscored the transformation in drug transaction landscapes due to the development of online platforms, influencing both user behaviour and regulatory approaches. Meanwhile, cannabis use posed a continuous threat to Hong Kong's zero-tolerance policy by shifting perceptions towards drugs to be more acceptable, influenced by more public discussions.

The hidden trend of drug use was further investigated in the operation of private venues and the nature and patterns of those hidden drug users, suggesting a need for more focused interventions. Sexual minorities abused drugs for reasons and in patterns different from other drug users, urging more sensitive and informed approaches for their support and interventions.

Additionally, a manual for operating the interview guide and conducting qualitative research and analysis was constructed for researchers and practitioners to conduct qualitative data collection with drug users. This manual included comprehensive information on using the constructed interview guideline, the theoretical background, the rationale for qualitative research, and practical techniques for data analysis.

In conclusion, grounded in responses from drug abusers, dealers, and practitioners, the analysis examined the intricate relationship between drug use and Hong Kong's socioeconomic and cultural fabric to provide valuable insights. This study highlights significant trends, such as the troubling increase in early exposure among youth, the persistent drug subculture, technological impacts on drug use, hidden trends, and drug dealing issues. Despite rigorous law enforcement, drug users' adaptability and changing perceptions towards substances like cannabis underscore the need for continued research and policy efforts to address these evolving challenges and support for drug abusers.