

DRUG ABUSE AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF PRISONERS IN STREET CRIMES

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ABSTRACT--This study was conducted to examine the profile of prisoners and their involvement in drugs and street crimes. The study was performed using quantitative cross-sectional survey design. A total of 282 prisoners who have been convicted of street crimes and drug-related offenses were selected as the respondents of the study. The study data were analysed descriptively. The findings show that majority of respondents in this study were aware that they were drug addicts (58.5%), needed money to buy drugs (51.7%), were actively involved in crime after using drugs (56%), committed crimes as their financial resources (53.9%), drugs influenced themselves to commit crimes (57.4%), used drugs before planning street crimes (55.3%), and did not commit street crimes without taking drugs beforehand (51%). The findings have implications for policy enforcement, prevention, crime and drug rehabilitation programs in Malaysia.

Keywords--drug, street crime, drug rehabilitation program, prisoner

I. INTRODUCTION

Drug issue is a global social matter that is difficult to be eradicated (Norruzeyati, Mohd Alif, Ahmad Shukri and Mohammad Rahim, 2019). Zarina, et al (2015) asserted that the treatment and rehabilitation programmes conducted do not seem to have a positive impact on government's efforts in reducing drug problems. The situation worsens when drug abuse is closely linked to other crimes (Nazira, Mohammad Rahim, Wan Shahrazad & Rozainee, 2019; Urbis Keys Young, 2004; White & Gorman, 2000). In Malaysia, drug addiction scenario and the involvement of drug users with other crimes have become major social issue and concern for many related parties. It is a national issue that covers the social, safety, economic, and human well-being aspects (Nazira et al., 2019). Many studies have associated drug problem with crimes. A study conducted by Zainudin and Norazmah (2011) found that drug

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use is one of the causes of an individual's involvement in delinquent and criminal activities. On the other hand, the effects of crime may lessen the moral values and threaten the harmony in the community (Mohammad Rahim et al., 2015). Meanwhile, Omboto et al. (2013) in his study mentioned that young offenders involved in drug abuse are often recruited by friends to commit crimes. They explained that some criminals commit crimes under the influence of drugs which negatively affect the well-being of society (Omboto et al. 2013). Whereas Richman (2006) in his study discovered that the communities living in areas related to many drug issues are often exposed to criminal problems. These criminal issues have negative implications for public insecurity on home and personal properties (Marzilla, Rosniza, & Zaini, 2019) and affect the mental and physical well-being of an individual (Farahah, Wan Shahrazad and Mohammad Rahim, 2019).

Criminal offenses are usually committed by drug addicts in order to buy more drugs as well as their financial resources (Gottredson et al., 2008). Dorsey and Middleton (1994) in their study explained that most of the individuals involved in crime admitted their actions as their way to gain financial resources and to meet their drug needs. They also pointed out that individuals under the influence of drugs often commit violent activities and disturb the public. Some examples are including rape and robbery. Andres (2008) stated that drug distribution activity will become more serious when the income from the activity greatly contributes to other major crimes. High drug demand has led to an increase in drug trafficking activity which will develop to other criminal issues, such as human trafficking and suicide. Whereas Azman and Mohd Al-Ikhsan (2010) discussed that drug abuse is the root cause of an individual's involvement in various type of crimes such as robbery, theft, extortion and others that will strongly give negative implications in terms of domestic, community, and the country as a whole.

According to a guideline issued by the U.S. Department of Justice (1994), any use, storage, production, and any drug-related matters are considered as crimes. The handbook also stated that drugs have close relationship with crimes, particularly when the drug usage has the effect of encouraging the drug addicts to act in violent and unlawful manners. They also mentioned that crime occurs when drug addicts are forced to commit crimes like robbery to cover the cost of buying drugs. Besides, drug distribution activity has caused possible violent crime, as the drug dealers or distributors compete against each other to conquer more drug trafficking locations. According to a study by Stevens, Trace and Bewley-Taylor (2005), most of the crime incidents occurred due to drug abuse matter. However, they stated that the association between drug use and crime is complex because most criminals are drug addicts. Hence, they explained that most drug addicts commit crimes to cover the cost of buying drugs. According to them, drugs can negatively affect the brain and cause cognitive impairment to the person's feelings in acting violently.

On the other hand, MacCoun, Kilmer and Reuter (2003) gave different views on the implications of drug use. According to them, drug use can contribute to the development of aggressive attitudes among drug addicts. This aggressive attitude will encourage drug addicts to commit crimes. MacCoun et al. (2003) also added that a drug addict's exhibited aggressive attitude is occurred consciously or unconsciously. This means that a drug addict may not be able to fully control his or her exhibited behaviour. In addition, the involvement of drug addicts with crimes

is also due to the pressure and financial need to cover the cost of buying drugs, hence contributing to the crime. According to Carpentier (2007), crimes are linked with drug abuse when drug addicts are forced to commit crimes in order to meet their addicting habits. According to Carpentier (2007), drug addiction is a part of a drug addict's lifestyle, or seems to be his or her career. Drug addicts have to spend and cover the daily costs of buying drugs and will do anything to gain money for that purpose. The chronic effects of psychoactive substances will also lead to the emergence of aggressive and violent behaviours among drug addicts. It also gives the impression that the drug addicts do not have the ability to make rational decisions, become paranoid, have cognitive impairments and unstable emotional state which can lead to committing crimes in the society. Carpentier (2007) in his study also explained that economic factors are contributing to crime and drug abuse. He explained the high prices of drug sales have caused the individuals to involve themselves in drugs and crime abuse. These criminal offenses occur when drug addicts are forced to make money to cover the drug costs.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As drug is a contributing factor to crime and gives negative impacts on people's well-being, this study aims to examine the profile of prisoners and their involvement in drugs and street crimes based on Malaysian context. The results of the study are expected to provide new inputs and assist stakeholders in strengthening policies, conducting prevention programs, drug enforcement and rehabilitation and reducing the crime rates of individuals.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey study using quantitative cross-sectional survey design and descriptive analysis. According to Chua (2006), descriptive analysis is a statistic used to describe the characteristics of variables. Meanwhile, cross-sectional design is a method that involves collecting data on a single sample from the studied population at a single point of time based on the existing respondents' attributes (Malhotra, Sham, & Crsip, 1996).

Research Instruments

This study used questionnaire method to obtain research results. In order to obtain data on drug abuse and its relationship with crime, a scale developed by Fauziah et al. (2015) using 8 question items was used. The reliability value of the scale is 0.952. This study uses four-point Likert scale in which the choices are arranged accordingly; (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree and (4) strongly agree.

Research sample and population

In this study, research population refers to street crime prisoners who have been convicted due to the following crimes: (1) robbery, (2) individual unarmed robbery and (3) group unarmed robbery. They are comprised of various races and are currently undergoing sentence and rehabilitation at the selected Malaysian Prison Department (JPM) in Peninsular Malaysia. The sample size of the respondents involved in this study is 282 people.

The Process of Collecting Questionnaires

Prior to the data collection stage, the researcher obtained permission from the Director General of JPM to conduct research at four selected prisons in Peninsular Malaysia:

1. Kluang Prison, Johor
2. Pengkalan Chepa Prison, Kelantan
3. Kajang Prison, Selangor
4. Tapah Prison, Perak

The researcher then contacted and made an appointment with the Prison Chiefs of each chosen states to set the exact date for performing data collection work. The questionnaire was distributed randomly after obtaining permission from JPM. The consent form for participation in the study was also distributed to the respondents before distributing the survey questionnaires. During the data collection stage, the researcher was assisted by the counselor and prison officers in carrying out the data distribution and collection works. The counselor and prison officers involved in this study were briefed on the method of data collection by the researcher. Then, the counselor and prison officers grouped the street crime prisoners in a hall according to their numbers, and then they were separated into two groups: (1) prisoners who could read and (2) who could not read.

The purpose of dividing the respondents in two groups was to facilitate the process of completing the questionnaire among the respondents. Respondents who could read answered each question on a questionnaire form by themselves while being supervised by counselors, prison officers and researcher. For respondents who could not read on their own, counselor and prison officers were placed in their group to help in reading each questions to them. This method was done to ease the answering process. At the same time, the researcher also monitored the respondents during the answering process, hence it enabled them to ask directly if they are any unclear questions. In order to obtain the correct number of questionnaire forms, the researcher examined each sheet on the questionnaire during the form collection process. This is to ensure that each respondent fills out the questionnaire properly and completely. If there were any incomplete forms, the researcher will return it to the respondents and ensure that they answer the incomplete questions with the assistance of the counselor and prison officers.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the 'Statistical Package for the Social Science for Windows' (SPSS for Windows). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the frequency, percentage and average of each item for the purpose of achieving the research objectives.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile and Background of the Respondents

Majority of the respondents who participated in this study are in the youth age group, which are between 19 to 39 years (83%), Malays (69.9%), single (59.9%), and have secondary education level (SRP and SPM) (60.3%). Besides, majority of the respondents had permanent employment before being imprisoned (45.7%) for street crime offenses and had a monthly income of less than RM1000 per month (48.6%). Some respondents mentioned that their mothers' (32.6%) and fathers' (26.2%) education level are at the primary school level. Besides, about 63.1 percent of the respondents' mothers are unemployed or housewives, while 46.8 percent of the respondents' fathers have permanent jobs. Regarding the marital status of respondents' parents, the findings show that most of the respondents' parents are still living together. In addition, 36.9 percent of the respondents lived in village housing areas and 56.4 percent of them have a number of siblings between one to five people. Majority of the respondents (77%) admitted that there were no other family members that involved in drugs. Only 23 percent admitted that their family members were involved in drugs, such as brothers (12.8%), siblings (4.6%), fathers (1.4%), and uncles (1.4%). The respondents participated in this research were also among those who had received formal religious education back in school (72.3%).

Drugs and Involvement with Street Crimes

From a total number of 282 prisoners serving their prison sentences due to street crimes, it is found that 228 respondents (80.9%) were recorded to be involved in drug abuse and street crimes. The results indicated that only 54 respondents (19.1%) were not recorded to be involved in drug abuse while committing their street crimes. Majority of the respondents (58.5%) admitted that they had not only been involved in street crimes, but they were also drug addicts at that time (item 1 – Table 1).

Table1: Percentage of drug abuse and its relation to street crimes (n=282)

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Percentage (%)						
1.	I am a drug addict	8.5	13.8	41.1	17.4	3.25
2.	I need a lot of money to buy drugs every day	10.3	18.8	32.6	19.1	3.18
3.	I was actively involved in street crimes after using drugs	6.0	18.8	36.9	19.1	3.27
4.	I commit a crime because I want to make	6.7	20.2	34.8	19.1	3.24

	money in order to buy drugs					
5.	Drugs influence me to commit crimes	7.1	16.3	38.3	19.1	3.27
6.	I will use drugs when I commit a crime	7.8	17.7	35.8	19.5	3.24
7.	I would not commit a crime if I did not take drugs beforehand	8.9	20.9	29.9	21.6	3.21
8.	Drugs are not the cause of my crime	20.2	28.4	21.6	10.6	2.80

Meanwhile, 57.4 percent of them admitted that drugs are among the factors that influence them to commit street crime (item 5), and 51 percent of them agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that they will not commit street crimes if they do not take drugs beforehand (item 7). The findings of this study are in line with studies conducted by several previous researchers regarding the relationship of drug abuse activities with crimes (Zainudin & Norazmah, 2011; Omboto et al., 2013; Gottredson, Kearley & Bushway, 2008). According to Stevens, Trace and Bewley-Taylor (2005), most of the crimes were derived from drug abuse issue where they had to earn extra money to cover the cost of buying drugs. Moreover, 51.7 percent of respondents in this study admitted that they were involved in street crimes due to high financial needs to buy drugs on a daily basis (item 2). Most of the respondents involved in this research (53.9%) admitted that they committed street crimes in order to gain money to buy drugs (item 4). The results of this study are in line with a study conducted by Chiam Heng and Chan Siok (2011) on 63 teenagers with misdemeanor record and were placed at the Tunas Bakti School. The results of his study found that there is a significant relationship between the property criminal behaviour with drug offenses. Majority of the teenagers who were involved in criminal offenses like theft were due to factors in generating money to buy drugs.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicated that 56 percent of the respondents also admitted that they had begun to actively engaged in street crimes after taking drugs (item 3). Most respondents (55.3%) admitted that they would use drugs beforehand when committing crimes (item 6). This condition indicates that drug use has a negative effect and influences an individual to commit a crime. A study conducted by Dorsey and Middleton (1994) discovered that individuals who took drugs were more likely to commit crimes like rape and property robbery as a result of drug abuse. They also mentioned that individuals who consume and use drugs often fail to control their behaviour and are influenced to commit violent activities unconsciously.

Taking drugs while committing crimes poses a serious threat to the safety and well-being of the community. This study also indicated that 48.6 percent of respondents admitted that drugs were one of the main causes of their crimes (item 8). According to a study performed by Azman and Mohd Al-Ikhsan (2010), it is clear that drug abuse is one of the root cause of an individual's involvement in various types of crimes such as robbery, theft, extortion and other crimes. This situation may lead to further destruction in the household, society, and also country. They

also pointed out that drug abuse among individuals can threaten the security and well-being of the country. MacCoun, Kilmer and Reuter (2003) stated that drug use is associated with aggressive attitude. Such aggressive attitude can induce drug addicts to consciously or unconsciously engaged in any criminal behaviour.

In summary, the study discovers that drug abuse is one of the factors that drives most respondents to be involved in street crimes. Therefore, campaigns and drug prevention programs need to be coordinated to help in overcoming the drug addict problem in the community. It aims to prevent more criminal incidents as a result of uncontrolled consumption and use of drugs.

V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the results of this study show that most drug addicts are also individuals involved in street crimes. The involvement of individuals with drugs and street crimes is due to their insistence on getting sufficient financial resources to cover the expenses of buying drugs on a daily basis. The results of the study may have strong implications towards the continuous efforts of the Ministry of Home Affairs and other related agencies in organising activities and prevention programs to overcome drug issue and street crimes among the society. This is because the involvement of individuals with drugs can increase street crime rates and threaten the well-being of the community. Besides, non-profit organisations and volunteer movements in preventing drug abuse and crimes among the younger generation need to be activated. Other than that, a zero-drug-in-family campaign should be established to ensure that no one in every family is involved in taking drugs. Early prevention programs and campaigns also need to be taken into consideration by the relevant agencies. The agencies may collaborate with the family institutions in addressing this drug issue more thoroughly. The involvement of a family member in drug abuse may greatly influence the other family members. This is dangerous as it may lead to other street crimes, such as theft and robbery in order to get more money to buy more drugs. Therefore, cooperation among the community is strongly needed to deal with drug and street crime issues. At the same time, it can assist related stakeholders in creating a conducive and safe environment without drug influence or criminal offences.

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