

Heroin use in Sri Lanka between 1998 and 2002

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Heroin use is a major social problem in Sri Lanka that is associated with health law enforcement and socio-economic problems in the country. This paper describes the heroin use situation in Sri Lanka between 1998 and 2002 and changes in its trends in 2002 compared to that of 1998. A retrospective descriptive study was conducted using data from drug law enforcement, and drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation facilities in the island. The reliability of the data is dependent on the internal and the external factors that may have affected the data reporting during the period under study. Hence, the finding of this paper should be used in corroboration with other relevant information for decision-making.

The highest number of cases of drug related arrests, imprisonments and treatment were between 1998 and 2002 were heroin related. Males was the predominant group of heroin use while the male to female ratio of heroin related arrests had decreased to 26:1 in 2002 from 96:1 in 1998. The prevalence of persons arrested for heroin use was 587 per million populations in 2002, which had increased from 548 in 1998. Similarly, the prevalence of persons treated for heroin use was 219 per million populations in 2002, which had increased from 81 in 1998. While the number of persons arrested for heroin had increased by 8% the number treated for it had increased by 171% in 2002 compared to that of 1998. "Brown Sugar" heroin with an average purity of 46% di-acetyl morphine and an average street value of 2 million Sri Lanka rupees (U.S \$ 20,408) per kilogram was the street level heroin in Sri Lanka in 2002. Meanwhile, the number of cannabis related arrests had increased at a higher rate than that of heroin in 2002, and compared to that of 1998.

Highest number of persons had received treatment at Government residential treatment facilities for heroin use between 1998 and 2002. However, the persons treated at Non-Governmental treatment facilities and by allopathic practitioners had increased at a higher rate than that of Government facilities in 2002, and compared to that of 1998. Western province, Colombo district in particular, reported the highest number of person arrested for heroin use between 1998 and 2002 while Northern and Eastern Provinces reported considerable increase in number of heroin related cases between 2001 and 2002.