Dominant Drugs in the Philippine Market

Drug user profile indicates that majority of drug dependents in the country are poly-drug users or users who use several types of illegal drugs. More often than not, the abuse is done mainly for pleasure. There are also cases where illegal drugs are used by individuals to cope with the demands of their work, like those working in graveyard shifts, or working for long hours and the like. The availability of illegal drugs encourages them to take illicit drugs.

Methamphetamine hydrochloride or shabu remains to be the most abused drug in the country, followed by marijuana or cannabis sativa and methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) or ecstasy. Ecstasy, well known for being a “party drug,” which is commonly used in parties and nightlife, is considered as the most expensive drug in the market.

Solvents and other inhalants are also a preference and are usually abused by street children.

Drug Trafficking Trends

Illegal drug trafficking is the most prevalent and by far the most pervasive illegal drug activity in the Philippines. It is subdivided into 4 activities, namely: transportation of dangerous drugs and controlled precursors and essential chemicals (CPECs), manufacture, distribution, and use thereof.

Street-level pushing is still the most widespread distribution activity. This is the way drug syndicates bring dangerous drugs to clients at the barangay level. At the street level, drugs are retailed to make them affordable.

Drug traffickers never cease to find various ways to hide their illegal transactions. Bank-to-bank transactions or wireless transfer is the preferred mode of payment in illicit transactions.

There is a noted use of package deposit counters in grocery stores and hotel lobbies as well as jail and prison facilities as venues for drug transaction.

The use of recreation centers and other similar establishments still prevails due to the convenience of such locations for drug transactions and money-laundering activities.

Furthermore, there is an alarming increase in the use of minors as couriers, runners and drug peddlers. It also appears that drug traffickers are targeting children of considerably younger age bracket. In fact, there was one incident in 2012 where a one-year-old baby was used to conceal shabu being trafficked.

Drug-manufacturing syndicates establish multiple kitchen-type laboratories in various locations for different phases in the production of illegal drugs. Each location is designed and intended for one phase of production to avoid detection from authorities.

African Drug Syndicates (ADS) continuously utilize displaced Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and willing individuals who posed as tourists to be couriers of illegal drugs. This trend is likely to continue because people are easily enticed by the huge amount of money involved.
Critical Areas in the Philippines

Fig. 1. Shabu laboratories dismantled and Marijuana plantation sites eradicated

Clandestine laboratories dismantled in Caloocan, Malabon, Muntinlupa and Paranaque

Marijuana plantation sites eradicated in the areas of Davao Oriental, Sulu, South Cotabato, and Compostela Valley

Marijuana plantation sites eradicated in the areas of CAR, Ilocos Sur, Isabela, and Nueva Ecija

LEGEND
- Clandestine Laboratories
- Marijuana Plantation Sites

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New Trends in Illegal Drug Activities

As of 2012, the surfacing and abuse of “poppers,” a kind of inhalant, and substances such as mephentermine have also been monitored.

Another new trend utilized by drug syndicates in their drug trafficking activities is the use of chemicals not listed as dangerous drugs to produce amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), such as methylephedrine and sodium hydroxide.

The agency is also monitoring the mixing of shabu with other drugs and substances to produce a new concoction of ATS, one of which is “milkshake”, a concoction of shabu and Nubain.

Other new emerging trends on trafficking and abuse of drugs and illegal substances are closely being monitored, assessed and studied by PDEA.

Street Prices of Dangerous Drugs

As per monitoring of the Agency, the prices of illegal drugs in the country vary depending on the area and/or place of transaction, mode of payments and quality of illegal drugs. The average prevailing prices of various drugs in the country as of 2012 are as follows:

Table 1: Types of dangerous drugs with corresponding price

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Dangerous Drugs</th>
<th>Average Price in Php</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methamphetamine hydrochloride or shabu</td>
<td>7,500 per gram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis sativa or marijuana</td>
<td>60 per gram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>5,400 per gram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine (MDMA) or Ecstasy</td>
<td>1,700 per tablet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critical Areas and Periods

The National Capital Region remains to be the main hub in the manufacturing of shabu in the country. Manufacturing activities are done in residential areas, posh villages, apartments and condominiums. Marijuana cultivation is still largely concentrated in Northern Luzon, particularly in high-altitude and mountainous areas.

The onset of summer season, where there is an influx of tourists, causes the increase in demand of illegal drugs in vacation spots, particularly in posh and exclusive resorts and club houses. Enrolment and holiday seasons are also considered as critical periods since people have extra money to spend.

Drug Routes

Drug syndicates are taking advantage of the country’s vast and porous coastlines for smuggling activities. Similarly, airports, seaports, and free ports/economic zones are also being utilized as transshipment and drop-off points of illegal drugs that are smuggled into the country.

Based on the noted movements of the drug couriers, syndicates use more than one drug courier per transaction and recruit mostly Asians. As their modus operandi goes, one courier will be tasked to pick-up the illegal drugs in a specific point and then meet with another courier in a transit country to turn-over the said drugs for final distribution to its intended market in Asia.
Drug Syndicates

The advent of globalization results in a more liberal movement of people and commerce, an opportunity being capitalized upon by drug syndicates. They recognize no boundary or jurisdiction, and their main motivation is profit.

There are two identified transnational drug groups operating in the Philippines: the African Drug Syndicate and the Chinese or Filipino-Chinese Drug Group.

African Drug Syndicate

The African Drug Syndicate (ADS) is dominated by African nationals who facilitate the smuggling of dangerous drugs into the country for local distribution. They usually use human drug couriers who will smuggle drugs into a country of destination in exchange for a huge amount of money. This strategy enables them to carry out their illicit drug activities without the risk of being caught themselves. Based on the records of the Task Force Drug Couriers (TFDC), ADS usually employ women as couriers.

Chinese/Filipino-Chinese Drug Syndicates

The Chinese/Filipino-Chinese drug syndicates dominate the country’s illegal drug trade by undertaking bulk smuggling and manufacturing of illegal drugs. Bulk smuggling and manufacturing activities ensure the abundant supply of illegal drugs in the market. Usually, their activities are largely concentrated within their group, with the inclusion of very few and well-selected locals.

Further, Chinese/Filipino-Chinese drug groups are also responsible for the establishment of clandestine laboratories and illegal chemical warehouses in the country.