

## **DRUG TRAFFICKING AND**

The National Dangerous Drugs Control Board have found in several of their recent studies that the easier availability of certain drugs has become a key factor in the increasing abuse of drugs in Sri Lanka. In this report the drug most expansively dealt with is heroin as its use has become comparatively wide spread in Sri Lanka. One conclusion from this study is that drug trafficking generates vast profits which tend to undermine the economic and social order, spreads violence and corruption and endangers the political stability and security of some countries.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The abuse of a variety of drugs remains at a high level in most parts of the world and in some countries, including Sri Lanka, is on the increase. Health hazards are being aggravated by multiple drug use often in combination with alcohol.

Illicit cultivation and production of drugs involve a growing number of countries located in several regions of the world including the Near and Middle East and South-Asia. It has been found that illicit cultivation, production and trafficking in the above areas has inevitably led to abuse by the local population; the abuse increasingly affecting young people and thereby presenting a danger to the future of such countries.

Illicit activities are financed and operated by organised criminal syndicates often with international links and a dangerous development in several regions is the close connection between drug trafficking, the proceeds of which are used to finance other major criminal activities including the illegal traffic in fire-arms; subversion and international terrorism. Drug trafficking generates vast profits which tend to undermine the economic and social order, spreads violence and corruption and endangers the political stability and security of some countries.

The international community has already launched comprehensive counter attacks against illicit drug trafficking and abuse and stronger political commitments are being made at the highest levels of Governments. New initiatives regularly taken to promote effective and co-ordinated action and improving inter-regional co-operation, particularly at the operational level, is leading to a measure of success. The joint counter actions all proceed from the common conviction that effective and lasting progress can be made in any one affected country only if all countries co-operate.

The large quantities of opium and heroin which are being seized in neighbouring countries indicate the existence of extensive

# ABUSE IN SRI LANKA

illicit poppy cultivation and a substantial heroin manufacturing capacity. The increasing traffic in heroin and its easy availability has led to an escalation of the abuse of this drug in many parts of the Asian region including Sri Lanka.

## DRUG ABUSE

No nation has managed to avoid the negative consequences of drug trafficking and drug dependency which is jeopardizing the health of citizens and undermining economic and social institutions. The abuse of cannabis, opiates and other dependence producing drugs continues at epidemic levels resulting in both drug related deaths and crime. It particularly destroys the young, and thereby saps the future strength of many nations. Continued production leads to an abundance of supply, and availability being accepted as a key factor in the abuse of drugs; heroin use in particular is certain to become even more widespread.

## DURGS OF ABUSE IN SRI LANKA

### Cannabis

Cannabis is cultivated mainly in the Southern and South Western regions of the country, in jungle tracts at Thanamalwila, Hambantota, Monaragala, Wellawaya and Bibile. The total area under cultivation at present is estimated to be 200 acres. The harvested cannabis is invariably transported to Colombo and its suburbs by the financiers and individual buyers. Transport is by road, concealed in vehicles conveying regular merchandise such as vegetables from these areas.

The undermentioned table indicates the quantities seized and the number of persons arrested from 1980 to 1985, for cannabis related offences.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. arrested</u>	<u>Quantity seized</u>
1980	6,009	360,227 kg
1981	6,015	433,777 kg
1982	4,977	11,532 kg
1983	3,893	70,548 kg
1984	4,901	7,396 kg
1985	3,058	11,238 kg

Special eradication campaigns launched in 1980, 1981 and 1983 resulted in a reduction of the total area under cultivation. However, due to other national priorities, enforcement action since 1983 has considerably decreased.

There was an estimated 18,000 chronic cannabis users in 1981. It is now established that the quantity of cannabis produced in this country is in excess of the amount re-

quired for local consumption. Recent detections especially in the United Kingdom revealed that locally produced cannabis is illegally exported; mainly by sea, concealed in regular exports such as coconut oil drums and tea chests.

Detections also reveal that Kerala ganja which is of a higher potency than the local product is being brought into Sri Lanka

<u>year</u>	<u>No. arrested</u>	<u>Quantity seized</u>
1980	148	188 kg
1981	145	28 kg
1982	166	11.3 kg
1983	148	6.3 kg
1984	152	1.4 kg
1985	68	4.6 kg

from India, mainly by illicit transportation by sea, both for local consumption and in transit to Europe and North America.

During the past three years the wholesale price of local cannabis in Sri Lanka has ranged between Rs.40/- and Rs.120/- per kg. at source; Rs.100/= to Rs.250/= per kg. in Colombo and Rs.500/= per kg for better quality, meant for export.

### Hashish

The greater proportion of hashish in this country originates from either Pakistan or India and is usually brought in by non-nationals. The following table shows the detections from 1980 to 1985.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. arrested</u>	<u>Quantity seized</u>
1980	59	79 kg
1981	98	126 kg
1982	99	28.2 kg
1983	61	2.5 kg
1984	47	18.5 kg
1985	25	1.2 kg

### Psychotropic Substances

There have been few detections involving

the abuse of psychotropic substances. However, substance abuse is believed to be prevalent, mainly due to diversion from illicit sources.

### Opium

Illicit opium is smuggled in for distribution locally, from India, mainly by sea across the Palk Strait. Figures show a decrease in availability of opium in recent years. This reduction is due mainly to a

switch-over to heroin by opium abusers and new user preference for heroin due to its higher potency. The presence of security forces in the traditional landing areas in the North has also contributed in some measure to curb the smuggling of opium. The following table gives particulars of the arrests and quantities seized from 1980 to 1985.

During the period 1975-1979, of 3,000 persons who sought assistance in overcoming drug dependence, 40% were chronic users. In 1980, it was estimated that there were about 6,800 opium users in the country. The mean age of a hospitalised group of opium dependents was found to be 55 years and 95% of them were married. Between 1980 and 1985 there was a decline in the abuse of opium, which coincided with the rapid increase in the number of heroin abusers. Availability of opium is presently at a very low level.

Except for one clandestine heroin laboratory which was detected in 1981, there has been no evidence of conversion of opium into morphine and heroin in Sri Lanka.

### Heroin

India and Pakistan are the sources of almost all the heroin brought into this country. This drug originates in the "golden crescent" region which is the area within the boundaries of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, where the opium poppy is illicitly cultivated, and where it is claimed, enforcement of the law is difficult due to the terrain and lack of government control in tribal areas. The majority of traffickers are Sri Lankan couriers who travel by air and arrive in this country from ports in India and Pakistan. There has also been limited illegal transport of heroin by sea into this country by Sri Lankan merchant seamen. There have also been a few instances of non-nationals smuggling heroin into Sri Lanka, mainly by air; travel originating

again from ports in India and Pakistan. These couriers have been Pakistani nationals and West Europeans. Given below are the figures of arrests and quantities seized from 1980 to 1985.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. arrested</u> *	<u>Quantity seized (in kg.)</u>
1980	Nil	Nil
1981	08	0.277
1982	33	3.000
1983	263	5.260
1984	1,794	38.700
1985	3,339	18.250

\* includes non-nationals

Sri Lanka has been used as a transit point for movement of heroin especially to Western Europe. However, this trend has noticeably declined during the last two years, as couriers find it more convenient to move the drug direct from Pakistan or India. In both instances, whether for local consumption or in transit to Europe, heroin is usually smuggled in false bottoms and compartments of passenger baggage or concealed in articles carried by the passenger. Sri Lankan couriers have also been known to resort to concealment in body cavities.

An increasing number of Sri Lankans, the majority of whom belong to the Tamil ethnic group, have been arrested abroad for trafficking in heroin. The following table gives the number of Sri Lankans arrested for trafficking offences abroad.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. arrested</u>
1980	42
1981	82
1982	128
1983	231
1984	301
1985	315

When compared to the increase in arrests of our nationals abroad, the arrests of foreigners in Sri Lanka for drug offences, shows a marked decrease, partly attributed to the stringent penalties stipulated by the amended law. The following table depicts the number of foreigners arrested in Sri Lanka for drug offences from 1980 to 1985.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. arrested</u>
1980	88
1981	147
1982	139
1983	123
1984	54
1985	34

The ready availability of heroin in Pakistan and India has attracted a large number of Sri Lankans to act as couriers. Payment for the purchase of heroin is in foreign currency and there are instances

of gold being used as a barter commodity or sold to obtain funds for the purchase of heroin. Gold is smuggled out of Sri Lanka for this purpose.

#### HEROIN ABUSE

The abuse of heroin in Sri Lanka was detected for the first time in 1980. Heroin availability has increased since then and with it, the numbers abusing this dangerous drug.

#### Increasing availability/use.

At the outset, heroin use was detected in the city of Colombo and a few tourist resort areas. There is recent evidence that its use is occurring in other urban, semi-urban and in a few rural areas. Of growing concern, is a suspicion that heroin dependence has begun to spread to new developmental areas of the country.

During the latter part of 1985 the Board conducted a study on the drug abuse situation in the Hikkaduwa Assistant Government Agent's Division, in which many major tourist resorts of the area were located. The objectives of this study were to identify and assess the nature and extent of the current drug abuse situation in this affected area and also to assess the impact of tourism on the problem of drug abuse.

Some of the major findings of this study were:-

1. The population density is relatively high in this area and a household consisted of an average of 6 to 7 persons. The educational standards of the people were relatively low; 29 percent were found to have terminated their education at Grade 8 and only 8 percent had proceeded up to Grade 10. The land and other resources available for agricultural activities are relatively low. The more lucrative tourist industry

in the area occupied vast stretches of land traditionally used for beaching of fishing craft. This industry has also attracted the younger fisher-folk from their traditional occupation; which has contributed substantially to the decline of the fisheries industry.

2. Tourism is the major source of income of the majority of the people living in the Division. In addition to the income derived from lawful occupations connected with tourism, people engage in unlawful activities such as female and male prostitution and drug trafficking to increase their earnings. Since the Hikkaduwa economy is mainly based on tourism, the objective of the people is to maximise their earnings, especially during the tourist season by providing services legal or otherwise to this industry. In Hikkaduwa the drug abuse problem cannot be viewed in isolation since it is inter-connected with other social problems.
3. The most widely abused drugs in the area are heroin and cannabis. Association with tourists who are drug users have often led local youth to take to the drug habit, although many at present are being introduced to drugs by their peers. Heroin peddling in the Hikkaduwa area is almost totally in the hands of Sri Lankans.
4. There are a number of tour-guides who are themselves involved in male prostitution and the abuse of drugs, mainly to avoid losing a foreign client to a competitor.
5. As estimated 2,000 drug dependents reside in this area. Many drug dependents from neighbouring areas such as Ambalangoda and Galle visit Hikkaduwa to purchase heroin due to the relative lower price prevailing in Hikkaduwa.

#### Recent trends

Until recently opiate use was a phenomenon mostly prevalent among the middle-aged. It has now shifted towards the youth. Several surveys have indicated that heroin dependence is commonest among young people. Enforcement statistics indicate that persons most often involved in drug related offences are between 18 and 30 years of age. Experience with dependent persons who have sought treatment points to an involvement of an even lower age group.

A survey designed to assess knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding non-medi-

cal use of dependence producing drugs among 6205 students in Grades 8 to 12 in the Kalutara Education Circuit was conducted in 37 schools during the first quarter of 1985. This survey was centred in the National Institute of Health Sciences at Kalutara and reasons of accessibility and ease of operation led to the selection of this district. Besides, the Kalutara district shares several characteristics of Sri Lankan rurality and the urban scene. An added reason was the proximity to Colombo and the influences from tourism. This survey revealed that 1.2 percent had used dependence producing drugs at least once. The current users are all male students. Of the students who have used any drug at least once, 63.9 percent had used cannabis, 33.3 percent had used heroin and the balance 2.8 percent had used opium. The study also revealed that 38.7 percent of the students who have used drugs have done so out of curiosity and another 49.3 percent due to pressure by friends.

2.7 percent of the users had their first experience before the age of 12; 13.3 percent between the ages of 12 and 16 and the balance 84 percent after they were 16.

Of the total number of students surveyed 11.7 percent had used alcohol and 9.0 percent had used tobacco.

#### Extent of heroin abuse

Since 1980, about 6,000 persons have been arrested annually for drug related offences in Sri Lanka. Since the introduction of heroin to the drug scene in 1980, heroin related cases have increased almost tenfold between 1984 and 1985, to the extent that heroin detections which consisted of only 15 percent of the total number of all drug related detections in 1984 increased to 51 percent in 1985 during which year approximately 3,000 heroin related offenders were detected. In keeping with the internationally accepted figure of 80 users per 100 arrests, approximately 2,400 of those arrested would also be heroin users. Using the W.H.O. index of indentified to real as 1:10 the estimated number of heroin users for the year 1985 would be 24,000.

The average daily consumption of a heroin dependent is presently in the region of 500 mg. On this basis the estimated 24,000 heroin users would require a total of 12 kg. of heroin each day to maintain their habit. Daily expenditure on heroin by users in Sri Lanka exceeds Rs.2.5 million. Statistics indicate that the total quantity of heroin seized by Enforcement Agencies i.e. Police, Customs and Excise in 1985 is less than 1 percent of the estimated total quantity of heroin smuggled into the country

that year. Studies at international level prove that drugs seized world wide represents only 7 to 10 percent of the amount actually smuggled.

#### Social consequences

Sri Lanka is presently faced with problems experienced by many other countries associated with the illegal traffic and abuse of heroin. Heroin dependence is now known to be a factor responsible for social, family and personality disruption.

Many users had lost their jobs as a result of their dependence on the drug.

The average daily income often being less than what was needed to maintain the heroin habit, many dependents resorted to the sale of personal and family belongings resulting in adverse family relationships and circumstances.

Some of the dependents were involved in both petty and grave crime and 14 dependents of a sample of 100 were known to have past criminal records. A considerable number of addicts in employment had experienced inability to cope with their occupations, functioned at a lower level of effectiveness which was usually attributed to impairment of ability, a loss of interest, lack of motivation and sluggishness caused by the drug.

#### NARCO-TERRORISM

An increase in the involvement, abroad, of Sri Lankan nationals in drug related cases was first observed in 1982. Since then there has been a progressive increase of Sri Lankans arrested in foreign countries.

The number of Sri Lankans arrested in 1984 was 301 of which 80 percent were Tamils, and in 1985, 315 persons have been arrested according to the data available at the Police Narcotics Bureau. Of these over 90 percent are Sri Lankan Tamils. Sri Lankan Tamils have been arrested for drug trafficking mainly in Italy, France, Spain, West Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Investigations have established a definite link between heroin trafficking and the Tamil terrorist movement in Sri Lanka. This connection has been established both by documentary and other evidence gathered here and abroad during investigation, and on admissions made by those arrested. Most of them have been persons claiming political refugee status in countries of Western Europe whilst a few had claimed political refuge after arrest.

Sri Lankan Tamils are well established and organised in these countries and they

now handle not only the conveyance but almost the entire distribution of heroin smuggled by them into several European countries. They are known to have developed links with other criminal and terrorist organisations. According to the reports published by international agencies in February, 1986:-

The majority of Sri Lankans found themselves unemployed and were largely of low educational background making them even easier targets for the illicit trafficking organisations. This process continues and the number of Sri Lankans arrested in recent years bears witness to these facts. Almost 50 percent of these persons are in the age group 18 to 30 years. As a result of continued involvement in this type of drug trafficking, one time couriers have formed themselves into trafficking groups located in Spain, Switzerland, Italy and France. Sri Lankan couriers have established close contacts with drug dealers and criminal syndicates in Paris, Rome and Amsterdam and have become involved with Indians, Pakistanis, Iranians and Nigerians, nationals who have proved to be significant heroin traffickers. The majority of Sri Lankan couriers will be in possession of false and adapted passports with forged visa endorsements. They will also carry separatist political propaganda. It is expected that Sri Lankans and other couriers will move in a large quantity of heroin from India and Pakistan to Western Europe in Summer 1986.

While some of these Sri Lankan Tamils travel to India or Pakistan legally or illegally and then proceed with heroin to the West European countries, most of these traffickers first enter the European countries as political refugees and travel from there to India and Pakistan to pick up the heroin for the organisations established in the European countries. These organisations consist of Sri Lankan Tamils and other international criminal and terrorist organisations which handle details of travel, stay, documentation and financing and also help such persons to establish their claims for political refuge.

Investigations have also revealed connections with foreign based terrorist training centres and also the siphoning of part of the proceeds to international terrorist organisations in recompense for their support activities to the Tamil dominated drug rings.

*(From a National Dangerous Drugs Control Board report).*