

KELY sounds drug warning

Young professionals could soon comprise the largest proportion of drug abusers, a support group warned as it urged Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor to consider harm reduction measures to curb this "hidden drug abuse problem."

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Young professionals could soon comprise the largest proportion of drug abusers, a support group warned as it urged Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor to consider harm reduction measures to curb this "hidden drug abuse problem." Citing figures from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse, KELY Support Group's executive director Sky Siu Ka-yan said in an interview with The Standard that it makes it challenging for the group, which caters to 14- to 24-year-olds, to reach out to the 20- to 30-year-olds already out of school. Registry figures showed that of the 758 newly reported drug abusers in the first half of the year, 29.5 percent are aged 26 to 35 compared to 43 percent aged 25 or below. But the mean age is 30, compared with 28 or 29 since 2014. Some 16.9 percent of 3,236 previously reported cases are aged 26 to 35 in January to June this year, and 10 percent are 25 or below while the mean age is 44. KELY, which does not receive government subvention, has been partnering with event organizers to implement their SOS KELY campaign at large outdoor events in Hong Kong to help ensure that young people enjoy them safely. But tragedy struck during the Road to Ultra electronic music festival on September 16 at the West Kowloon Cultural District Nursery Park. Chow Wai-ho, a 27-year-old headhunter, was allegedly given a bottle of liquid at the festival before falling ill and dying at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Two men and a woman were left in critical condition. As of yesterday Tai Hoi-ching, a 21-year-old woman, was still listed as critical in hospital, Lo Man-sui, 22, was in satisfactory condition and Lai Siu-hung, 29, is listed as serious. Siu said for the second year, her group was allowed a booth staffed by seven to eight people who worked in shifts by the entrance of Road to Ultra from noon to midnight giving out harm reduction information and helping people who were left distressed for various reasons. "This year we have noticed that there's potentially a lot more drug use at some of these events as we have seen with this particular incident," she said. The drugs include marijuana, ecstasy, ice and cocaine. It is not only about resources but recognizing that "we need to strengthen support for young people," she said, adding that harm reduction could be an additional option to zero tolerance to drugs. "We are concerned that if you have a very heavy hand in drug taking and you go and do a lot of things to condemn people who are using drugs at these events, [it] might push users to be even more hidden. In Hong Kong we are already facing a hidden drug use problem." Young people could be taught "to chill" - take a 30-minute break when they feel something bad while dancing for hours.