

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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Release No.: 20/APR 59 - 59 - 18
06-2/89/04/15

**SPEECH BY DR SEET AI MEE, MINISTER OF STATE
(COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT) AND (EDUCATION),
AT THE SEMINAR FOR TEACHERS ON "DRUG AND INHALANT ABUSE
PREVENTION" AT THE CRYSTAL BALLROOM,
HYATT REGENCY HOTEL ON SATURDAY, 15 APRIL 1989 AT 11.00 AM**

All of us, parents, teachers and the public, need to be regularly reminded of the menace of drug and inhalant abuse. I am therefore particularly pleased that the Singapore Teachers' Union and the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association have jointly organised this Teachers' Seminar to:

- ° create greater awareness among teachers on the seriousness of drug and inhalant abuse, and
- ° encourage teachers to implement ongoing preventive measures to combat the drug and inhalant abuse problem.

Those who fall prey to drug and inhalant abuse suffer damaging consequences. Various deterrent measures and legislation have been introduced to tackle this problem. But these, though necessary, are not sufficient in themselves to deal with the problem.

The Intoxicating Substances Act passed in 1987 makes inhalant abuse an offence by law. In spite of this, an increasing number of new addicts are being initiated into the drug scene each year. In the past months, the number of first-timers admitted to the Drug Rehabilitation Centres has risen.

The other disturbing fact is that many of the abusers are school drop-outs - young people who cannot cope with the academic mainstream. As at 31 December 1988, only 7.62 per cent drug supervisees had completed formal schooling. The rest were pre-mature school leavers, with 67.8 per cent having had only primary education.

The typical drug and inhalant abuser's profile also includes maladaptive behaviour. Teenage drug and inhalant abusers are often those who are unable to cope with their anxieties, frustrations and disillusionments. Lacking self-esteem, trust, communication skills and assertiveness, they easily succumb to negative social pressures and drug taking.

Dealing effectively with drug and inhalant abuse, therefore, requires more than methods of drug control and legislation. While the two methods are necessary, their effect is mainly in making the procurement of drugs more difficult, and, in punishment of offenders. Such methods do not and cannot solve the problem.

Together with control and legislation there is need for preventive programmes. The key to prevention lies in ensuring that our young people are nurtured in a healthy environment and are adequately equipped to meet challenges in life.

With trends towards both parents working, many youths have little, or are without, parental supervision at home and for many of them, time spent with teachers at schools exceeds that spent with parents at home. Schools and teachers therefore have a significant and central role to play in preventing young people from turning to drugs.

Although drug and inhalant abuse is currently not a serious problem among our pupils, teachers cannot afford to be complacent. It is essential that as teachers you have knowledge of the subject and are aware of the role you can play in reducing the incidence of drug and inhalant abuse.

As teachers, you are in constant and, often, prolonged contact with your pupils. You are therefore in a position to observe and detect changes in performance and behaviour of your pupils. You can learn to understand them and the reasons why some turn to drugs.

In addition to making classroom learning interesting, constructive and meaningful, as teachers, you can find ways of anticipating the problem, and providing alternatives like, forming youth and interest groups which can be personally satisfying, and challenging to the pupils.

You can also actively work on helping pupils build up healthy self-images, communication skills, good values and decision-making skills. Effective preventive education lies in your ability to develop positive images and strong feelings of self-worth in pupils.

As you help them gain greater insights into their own values systems and help them adopt positive attitudes, you can, and will, be instrumental in steering them away from self-destructive activities, including the deadly snare of drug and inhalant abuse.

If we are to blunt the edge of the drug and inhalant abuse problem, and to contain it, much will depend on those who are in contact with youth - parents,

relatives, friends - ie, the whole community. Schools and teachers play vital roles as the efforts of, and resources provided, by the government and SANA require the co-operation and support of schools and teachers.

A caring teacher makes the difference between the success and failure of preventive programmes. A concerned teacher provides that first line of defence; the person a troubled potential school drug abuser can turn to when he/she has problems and is in need.

I am glad that effort is being made today at this Seminar to update our teachers with the necessary information on the harmful effects of drug and inhalant abuse, hence equipping them for their task in preventive education.

It is my hope that the seminar today will lead to not only a greater awareness of the situation, but also, greater tri-partite cooperation between the government, SANA and our schools in the fight against drug and inhalant abuse.

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