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Japan: stimulant epidemics past and present

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ABSTRACT

Japan experienced a serious stimulant epidemic during the period from 1946 to 1956 and has been experiencing a second one since 1970. Over the years, a series of drug control measures have been put into effect by the Japanese Government. In 1953, the Japanese police system was reorganized, centralized and made more efficient. Law enforcement efforts were intensified, supported by the criminalization of stimulant abuse with the enactment of the Stimulant Control Law in 1951 and subsequent amendments to it that were rigorously enforced, resulting in more arrests, indictments and relatively harsh penalties for stimulant offences, as well as an increase in the number and volume of confiscations.

In 1951, 26 per cent of those arrested for stimulant offences were under the age of 20. About half of those arrested were stimulant-addicted. The number of arrests increased threefold from 1951 to 1954. The amount of seized stimulants also increased considerably during that period. In 1954, there were about 550,000 chronic stimulant users and 2 million ex-users.

From 1980 to 1985, the number of stimulant arrests was relatively stable, levelling off at about 20,000 annually. About half of those arrested were recidivists. In 1985, a record high of nearly 300 kg of stimulants were seized.

In 1960, heavy usage of sleeping pills among young persons began in Tokyo; this was considered a foreshadowing of a period of youth drug abuse in Japan. In 1967, there was an outbreak of inhalant use among young people; since 1975, about 40,000 people have been arrested each year for inhalant-related offences.

Overview of the stimulant problem in Japan

During the period from 1946 to 1956, there was an explosive stimulant epidemic in Japan. In 1954, there were approximately 550,000 chronic users and 2 million ex-users of stimulants. Increased law enforcement efforts, supported by the criminalization of stimulant abuse with the enactment of the Stimulant Control Law in 1951 and its amendments in 1954 and 1956, permitted relatively harsh penalties and have been credited with largely terminating the epidemic. The number of persons arrested for violating

provisions of the Stimulant Control Law decreased from 55,000 in 1954 to 271 in 1958.

From 1957 to 1969, the situation with regard to stimulant abuse was relatively stable: approximately 500 persons were arrested annually for stimulant-related offences.

Heroin-related offences peaked in 1962, when 2,394 persons were arrested for such offences.

In 1960, there was heavy usage of sleeping pills among young persons in Tokyo; this was considered to be a foreshadowing of a period of intensified drug abuse among juveniles. In 1967, a glue-sniffing epidemic started among young persons; about 40,000 juveniles were placed under arrest and in protective custody for sniffing glue or paint thinner.

Since 1970, Japan has been experiencing a second stimulant epidemic. From 1970 to 1974, the number of persons arrested for stimulant-related offences doubled each year. In 1973, a harsh criminal penalty was introduced through the amendment of the Stimulant Control Law; this was considered to have had a significant impact on the stimulant problem in the country, although that effect lasted only one year.

Over 10,000 persons were arrested in 1975 for stimulant-related offences. Since 1981, arrest figures have remained at around 20,000 each year.

The first epidemic of stimulant use, 1946-1956

The first stimulant-addicted person was admitted to hospital in Tokyo in September 1946, marking the beginning of the first stimulant epidemic in Japan [1].

During the period from 1946 to 1956, there were many reported cases of psychosis induced by chronic stimulant use in Japan, in contrast to the small number of stimulant-addicted persons reported in Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland and the United States of America.

Drug control law

In 1941, there were no restrictions on the sale of methamphetamine. It was sold to the general public under the name of Philopon, which became a synonym for all stimulants available on the drug market. Initially, the use of Philopon had been restricted to psychiatric practice. But during the Second World War, the military, considering stimulants to be useful for aeroplane pilots, the signal corps and civilian military workers on night shifts, proceeded to increase production markedly. After the war, pharmaceutical companies sold stockpiles of stimulants to the local population. It was believed that stimulants met the needs of war veterans and juveniles affected by dramatic post-war social change.

In 1948, the Drug, Cosmetics and Medical Instrument Law regulated stimulants as health dangers for the first time. Pharmacies were permitted to sell stimulants only to users who had signed for the drug.

In August 1949, an ordinance of the Ministry of Health prohibited production of stimulants in tablet or powder form. Stimulants in liquid form, used for injection, however, were not covered by the prohibition. Consequently, injection, previously uncommon, became a major method of stimulant use. Use by injection had a much stronger and more acute effect than oral use; it also had more devastating and long-term effects on the physical and mental health of the user.

In the period that followed, the number of persons hospitalized for stimulant addiction increased dramatically in Tokyo [2]. In 1950, an ordinance of the Ministry of Health banned stimulant production *in toto*. But many pharmaceutical companies illegally produced stimulants and made them available on the black market, and clandestine laboratories produced their own version of Philopon.

In 1951, the enactment of the Stimulant Control Law made the import, production, sale, receipt, possession and use of amphetamines and methamphetamines a criminal offence, punishable by a term of imprisonment of up to three years. Its enforcement did not, however, have enough impact to curtail the epidemic; instead, it led to stimulant production and distribution by criminal syndicates.

In 1951, police arrested 17,528 persons for stimulant offences; of those, 4,489 or 26 per cent were under the age of 20. Approximately half of those arrested were addicted to stimulants. According to police statistics, law enforcement officers confiscated 4.6 million vials of injectable liquids, 8,000 tablets and 77 kg of stimulant powder that year.

The number of arrests increased threefold from 1951 to 1954: 17,528 in 1951; 20,000 in 1952; 40,000 in 1953; and 55,000 in 1954. The amount of confiscated drugs also increased considerably during that period.

The Stimulant Control Law was amended in 1954 to permit harsher penalties for stimulant offences (i.e. terms of imprisonment of up to five years for a first offence and seven years for recidivists and traffickers). At the same time, the Mental Hygiene Law was amended in order to place drug-addicted persons with symptoms of psychosis in treatment programmes under the auspices of mental health care facilities. There were nearly 6,000 stimulant-related arrests in October 1954 alone, 46 per cent of which were for the possession of stimulants, approximately 28 per cent for buying or selling them and nearly 22 per cent for using them (see table 1). Some 14 per cent of those arrested were of foreign origin.

Law enforcement

In 1953, the Japanese police system was reorganized and transformed from a largely inefficient regional police force to a centralized national force designed to control post-war crime. Law enforcement authorities were faced with countering:

(a) An epidemic that had spread from large urban to small rural areas;

(b) An increase in the importation of ephedrine, an illicit raw material used in stimulant production;

(c) The development of chemical expertise in illicit drug production;

(d) An increase in illicit production;

(e) The organization of underground illicit drug syndicates;

(f) Enhanced sophistication in production, concealment and distribution;

(g) An increase in substitute stimulant-like drugs [3];

(h) An increase in drug addiction, drug crime and drug-crime recidivism.

In 1955, the Stimulant Countermeasure Promotion Headquarters, headed by the Minister of Health, was established. A massive campaign was initiated to discourage stimulant abuse. In August 1955, the Stimulant Control Law was amended again to prohibit the importation of raw materials for producing stimulants. By controlling raw materials, raiding clandestine laboratories and holding producers and large-scale traffickers in custody for longer terms, law enforcement authorities began to control stimulant-related problems in the country. There were no drug smuggling connections with foreign countries at that time.

Table 1

Number of stimulant-related arrests, by type of violation, October 1954

Violation	*Number of arrests*	*Share (percentage)*
Possession	2 771	46.4
Sale or purchase	1 668	27.9
Use	1 301	21.8
Production	223	3.7
Others	13	0.2
Total	5 976	100.0

Source: National Police Agency data.

The number of stimulant arrests decreased from 1954 to 1958: there were 55,000 stimulant arrests in 1954; 32,000 in 1955; 5,000 in 1956; and 271 in 1958. The first stimulant epidemic had ended. It was followed by a 10-year period of relative calm with regard to stimulant abuse and trafficking.

The second epidemic of stimulant use, from 1970 to date

A second epidemic of stimulant use began in Japan in 1970, during a period characterized by economic growth and prosperity and by a new student youth movement. Although Japanese youth had undoubtedly been influenced by drug-use patterns in other countries, numerous other factors may have contributed to the emergence of the new drug abuse problem among the nation's young people. Organized criminal syndicates had begun to dominate stimulant supply, a development that was not characteristic of the first epidemic. In the early 1970s, many gang members and their leaders who had

been convicted and imprisoned in the 1960s were released; they allegedly sought lucrative activities, including the production of stimulants.

The second epidemic appears to have started in the Osaka area and gradually spread to Tokyo and northern Japan. Criminal syndicates expanded their operations throughout the country.

Today, all stimulants are illegally imported from traffickers of other Asian countries with which organized gangs in Japan have connections. It should be noted that traffickers smuggle only stimulants, in spite of the availability of heroin from South-East Asia; apparently, the demand for heroin is not large enough.

Current drug problems

Seizures

Police seizures of stimulants amounted to 152 kg in 1980; 140 kg in 1981; 107 kg in 1982; 99 kg in 1983; and 198 kg in 1984. In 1985, as a result of the Stimulant Control Law that went into effect that year, approximately 300 kg of stimulants were seized (see table 2), representing a dramatic increase compared with the period from 1980 to 1984. That increase in stimulant seizures, however, appeared to have had no effect on illicit stimulant use or on the street price of stimulants.

Today, almost all stimulants are illegally imported from countries of the Far East and South-East Asia; each year there are only one or two arrests for domestic illegal production of stimulants.

Table 2

Amount of drugs seized and number of arrests, by drug control law, 1985

Law	*Drug*	*Amount seized*	*Number of arrests*
Stimulant Control Law	Stimulant	295.53 kg	23 297
	Raw material	2.79 kg	46
Narcotics Control Law	Heroin	16.35 kg	71
	Morphine	. .	1
	LSD	131 tablets	24
	Cocaine	141 g	34
	Narcotics for medicinal purposes	30 g	7
	Others	3 g	1
Opium Law	Opium	. .	1
	Poppy	37 000 pieces	442
Cannabis Control Law	Hashish	16.10 kg	206
	Marihuana	103.84 kg	919
	Hemp	10 kg + 4 000 pieces	148

Sources: Data from the National Police Agency, the Narcotic Control Agency and the Maritime Safety Agency.

Japan has become a transit point for international drug trafficking between South-East Asia and North America. Heroin seizures generally range from 0.5 kg to 2 kg annually. In 1984, however, 7 kg were seized and in 1985 there was a record high of 16 kg seized.

Small amounts of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and cocaine have been seized and a small number of offenders have been arrested in connection with those seizures. None the less, there is some concern that after the saturation point has been reached with regard to cocaine on United States and European markets, the demand for it in Japan may increase.

Cannabis seizures have remained relatively constant over the past 10 years.

Arrests on drug charges

There were over 23,000 arrests on stimulant charges in 1985 (see table 2); thus, there was relatively little change from the annual arrest figures for the period from 1980 to 1984. About half of those arrested for stimulant offences were recidivists.

Only 71 persons were arrested on charges of heroin trafficking in 1985. Moreover, the number of arrests for heroin-related offences in each of the 10 preceding years never exceeded 100. Twenty-five out of the 71 arrested for heroin trafficking in 1985 were of foreign origin. It is believed that the number of Japanese heroin users has remained very small. Most of the opium-related offences are for the cultivation of opium poppies. There do not appear to be any opium users in Japan today.

There are approximately 1,000 arrests for cannabis-related offences annually. There appear to have been no major changes in the arrest figures for such offences over the past 10 years. Most of the cannabis is illegally imported from the United States and Asia. There are also cases involving domestic wild cannabis growth and cultivation.

Characteristics of stimulant offenders

Stimulant offenders tend to be involved in other criminal activity and associated with organized gangs. With the exception of male juveniles, they usually have some affiliation with organized crime (see table 3). Moreover, stimulant offenders are likely to have a history of involvement with the criminal justice system for offences other than those relating to drug use. Although this clearly applies to most members of both sexes, it applies less often to females than to males. Also, female adults are less likely than male adults to have histories of juvenile incarceration [4].

Data from the National Police Agency for 1985 indicate that more than 60 per cent of narcotics offenders were young adults in their twenties (see table 4). The ages of those arrested for stimulant offences were widely distributed from the teens to the forties. Those arrested for opium offences tended to be in their fifties.

Table 3

Characteristics of stimulant offenders by sex and age

(Percentage)

Characteristic	Male			Female			Grand total (N = 2 334)
	Adult (N = 1 805)	Juvenile (N = 140)	Total (N = 1 945)	Adult (N = 332)	Juvenile (N = 57)	Total (N = 389)	
Relationship to organized gangs							
Gang member	30.3	10.7	28.9	29.8	15.8	27.8	28.7
Some association with gangs	28.8	13.6	27.7	29.2	47.4	31.9	28.4
No association with gangs	40.9	75.7	43.4	41.4	36.8	40.4	42.9
Criminal justice history							
Non-drug-related arrest record	82.3	77.1	82.0	51.2	42.1	49.9	76.6
Stimulant-related arrest record	40.3	12.1	38.2	33.7	14.0	30.8	37.0
Admission to prison (juvenile training)	35.6	12.1	33.9	9.7	10.5	9.8	29.9
Drug use							
Philopon	7.8	—	7.2	1.2	—	1.0	6.2
Heroin	2.3	—	2.1	0.9	3.5	1.3	2.0
Marihuana	4.0	0.7	3.8	1.5	—	1.3	3.3
Sleeper or tranquillizer	20.8	7.1	19.8	32.8	19.3	30.8	21.6
Thinner	20.3	72.1	24.1	10.2	50.9	16.2	22.8
Others	7.0	2.9	6.7	5.1	1.8	4.6	6.3
No previous experience	54.4	26.4	52.4	59.6	40.4	56.8	53.1

Source: M. Tamura and others, "A study on the traits of stimulant users", *Research on Crime and Delinquency Prevention,* vol. 21, No. 1 (1980), pp. 33-45.

Table 4

Age and occupation of persons arrested, by drug control law, 1985

(Percentage)

Age and occupation	*Stimulant Control Law (N = 22 980)*	*Narcotics Control Law (N = 115)*	*Opium Law (N = 426)*	*Cannabis Control Law (N = 1 097)*
Age				
Under 15	0.1	—	—	0.2
15-19	8.9	1.7	—	6.4
20-24	19.8	25.2	0.2	33.4
25-29	13.0	40.0	0.9	30.0
30-34	13.5	22.6	3.1	14.4
35-39	18.2	7.0	4.0	9.4
40-44	11.8	—	5.6	3.3
45-49	8.0	—	8.8	1.2
Over 49	6.8	3.5	77.5	1.9
Occupation				
Construction or manual worker	19.9	28.7	9.4	20.7
Amusement or service worker	8.3	7.8	1.2	16.1
Small business proprietor	5.4	14.8	5.2	16.1
Transportation worker	3.6	6.1	—	3.0
White-collar worker or sales clerk	3.6	9.6	3.1	13.1
Farmer or fisherman	0.9	0.9	45.8	1.2
Student	0.9	3.5	—	7.2
Housewife	2.6	1.7	16.4	1.2
Unemployed	54.8	27.0	19.0	23.0

Source: National Police Agency data.

Over 50 per cent of those arrested for stimulant violations were unemployed; approximately 20 per cent were manual workers; and 8 per cent were employed in the amusement and service sectors, which are often associated with organized crime. Another 4 per cent were in the transport sector; it is a well-known fact that taxi and truck drivers sometimes use stimulants to remain awake while driving late at night.

Other drug offenders

Unemployment among persons committing other drug-related offences was much lower than among persons committing stimulant-related offences, but the type and distribution pattern of their occupations were similar. The majority of the opium offenders were farmers who had illegally cultivated opium poppies, though not for their personal use. Most of the cannabis offenders were white-collar workers and students. Of those arrested for offences involving drugs other than stimulants, 29 per cent were of foreign origin.

Juvenile drug use

An increase in the use of inhalants by juveniles started in 1967, when it became fairly commonplace to see juveniles on the streets putting solvents in bags and sniffing them. Some 50-100 juveniles die every year as a result of this practice.

As a measure to combat the use of inhalants by juveniles, the abused chemicals were designated as dangerous by the Poisonous and Dangerous Chemicals Regulation Law of 1972. Thereafter, the sale of inhalants was placed under strict control, resulting in a decrease in the number of juveniles arrested for inhalant-related offences in 1973 and 1974. But the number increased again in 1975; since then, it has stabilized at around 40,000 annually (see table 5).

Table 5

Social status of persons under protective custody for glue sniffing, 1985

Social status	*Number of persons*	*Share (percentage)*
Middle school student	8 325	18.4
Secondary school student	4 290	9.5
Other student	849	1.9
Employed juvenile	12 102	26.7
Unemployed juvenile	14 463	31.9
Adult	5 280	11.9
Total	45 309	100.0

Source: National Police Agency data.

As glues and solvents are chemicals used in daily life, it is difficult to limit sales. Moreover, organized criminal gangs sell products whose effects are 10-20 times stronger than those of legally sold products.

Today, 90 per cent of Japanese youth graduate from secondary schools and 40 per cent go on to attend universities. In order to secure a prestigious job, an individual must graduate from a well-regarded secondary school and university. Thus, Japanese youth are faced with considerable educational pressure and competition. This is regarded as one of the major factors contributing to drug use and delinquency. Young inhalant users are prospective secondary school drop-outs. Only a small portion of them manage to endure the educational competition and examination process.

Facilities and programmes

Most drug addicts receive treatment in mental health facilities or hospitals. They are usually first sent to such facilities or hospitals for mental health problems by family members and/or acquaintances. Referrals by the courts or public prosecutors are limited to cases involving legal insanity. Normally, the

personnel at such facilities and hospitals with open treatment units are not inclined to handle stimulant addiction. Stimulant-addicted persons are generally regarded as "violent" and disregardful of institutional rules and regulations.

A person arrested for stimulant offences is referred by the police to the public prosecutor. Following an examination of his or her case history for previous stimulant-related incidents (e.g. length of time of drug use, prior criminal record, work history), the person may be released without conviction.

Indictments for stimulant-related offences have gradually become stricter, as part of the response of drug law enforcement agencies to the epidemic. In 1985, 90 per cent of those taken into custody for stimulant violations were indicted, compared with 77 per cent in 1970; 61 per cent were sentenced to terms of imprisonment of from one to two years, representing a marked increase in the length of sentence compared with 1972, 1974 and 1979 (see table 6).

Table 6

Court sentences for offenders of the Stimulant Control Law, 1972-1984

Sentence or verdict	*Share (percentage)*				*Number of offenders 1984*
	1972 (N = 1 534)	*1974 (N = 3 181)*	*1979 (N = 12 872)*	*1984 (N = 16 037)*	
Prison term					
Less than 6 months	15.3	20.6	8.6	0.1	21
Between 6 and 12 months	37.0	38.6	50.7	26.3	4 222
1-2 years	25.9	24.3	29.2	61.3	9 828
2-3 years	5.8	6.8	6.0	7.9	1 274
3-5 years	2.0	1.5	1.3	1.2	177
5-7 years	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.7	267
7-10 years	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	39
10-15 years	—	0.1	0.1	0.1	11
15-20 years	—	—	—	—	4
20 years or more	—	—	—	—	—
Fine	2.7	0.4	—	—	—
Not guilty	—	—	0.1	—	2
Others	9.8	5.9	1.8	1.2	192
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	16 037

Source: Japan, Supreme Court, *Judicial Statistics Annual*, 1985.

In recent years, those sentenced to terms of imprisonment have accounted for an increased proportion of the offenders who received sentences. The proportion of students among the imprisoned stimulant offenders has also been increasing in recent years.

Those imprisoned for stimulant-related crimes receive vocational and/or educational training in a facility or hospital. In addition, in many correctional facilities, special programmes have been initiated (e.g. counselling, group discussion, drug education).

In the Japanese probation system, each probation officer supervises 50-100 volunteer probation officers, each of whom directly supervises one or two probationers. Volunteer probation officers are highly regarded members of the community. They live in the same community as their probationers and provide counselling, secure jobs and mediate family problems. They are not professional counsellors or social workers; however, they have access to an extensive community-based service network [5].

There are few facilities and programmes specialized in drug abuse prevention and treatment, either for juveniles or for adults. For the treatment of alcoholism, there are specialized facilities and programmes and Alcoholics Anonymous.

There are no diversion programmes for drug abuse in Japan. There are cases in which a lower court refers juveniles to private facilities "for treatment" for approximately six months, as a kind of probation. But the total number of such referrals is low; and it is not a referral programme specialized in juvenile drug problems but one for juvenile "delinquents" in general.

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