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Headline: 70-year-old has served eight prison stints for drug offences

Link: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/70-year-old-has-served-eight-prison-stints-for-drug-offences>

70-year-old has served eight prison stints for drug offences



Fabian Koh

Two divorces and eight stints in prison.

That is what Johan's (not his real name) life of crime has cost him. He has been in and out of prison since 1970, all for drug offences.

The most recent jail stint was in 2013, when he was put behind bars for 3½ years for drug consumption and trafficking.

Johan, 70, is among a growing group of criminals here who are above 60 years old.

Last year, 486 of them were jailed, a 50 per cent jump from 2013. Drug-related offences were among the top three crimes committed.

Johan was first jailed for a year in 1970 when he was 21, after getting caught for possession of cannabis.

"It was after I had left school and had started work. The circle of peo-

ple I mixed around with... You get triggered and tempted by them, so you tend to try. After that, you get hooked on it," said Johan.

He felt at a loss in prison due to the monotony and lack of freedom.

"Every rule and instruction - you have to abide by them," he recalled, adding that back then, there were no proper programmes for the inmates and they just lived day to day.

After his release, he tried new drugs in the market such as Mandrax, a prescription sleeping pill which was abused by drug users back then.

He attempted to stop his addiction a few times, but just could not succeed.

Johan, who got married a third time when he was 45, said his first wife divorced him because of his criminal activities.

They were married when he was 21, and the union lasted 10 years.



Johan was first jailed for a year in 1970 when he was 21. The 70-year-old, who is twice divorced and has been married to his current wife since 1994, resolved to turn over a new leaf after his last jail stint ended in 2017. ST PHOTO: ARIFFIN JAMAR

"I was in and out (of jail) and she said she couldn't cope with that," he said.

He met his second wife through a neighbour, and they got to know each other for six months before

they were married when he was 40.

Johan never revealed his past to his in-laws but they found out a few months later.

"The father told me, 'I think you won't be able to support my daughter in the long run so I hope you can separate'."

"I discussed with my wife, and I packed my things and left. There was nothing to argue about."

That second marriage had lasted only a year.

In 1994, he married his current wife, who is now 72. He has two step-daughters.

Johan now works as a cleaner in an office building, earning about \$1,300 a month. He has worked there for over two years.

At work, he adopts a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. The jobs he applies for are on a contract basis and the employers do not check his background.

His current boss does not know

about his tainted past.

"It's not a passion for me to work. I just do it to have some activities to occupy my day," Johan said.

He works from 7.30am to 4.30pm daily, then meets some of his childhood friends to chat over coffee.

He also goes for walks in the Commonwealth area with his wife, volunteers at a mosque and attends religious study sessions.

Johan said it takes a lot of discipline and self-control to stay away from drugs, but he knows he can do it as long as he occupies his time with healthy activities.

He resolved to turn over a new leaf after his last prison stint ended in 2017.

"Every time I go in and come out, there are new train lines I don't know how to take and new smartphones I don't know how to use," he said.

fabkoh@sph.com.sg

Text:

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By Fabian Koh

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That is what Johan's (not his real name) life of crime has cost him. He has been in and out of prison since 1970, all for drug offences.

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