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Abuse of soft drugs higher in private schools

By KENNETH KO

A GOVERNMENT survey has found that soft drug abuse is higher among students in private secondary schools than those in subvented or Government colleges.

Assistant Secretary for Security, Mr Frederick Tong Kin-sang, said yesterday the survey showed a slightly higher percentage of private school students had taken soft drugs but exact figures were not available.

However, Mr Tong said he did not consider the findings alarming.

Speaking after a forum on the use of psychotropic substances, Mr Tong said: "I cannot really talk about the trend of this problem in schools because this is the first survey conducted by the Government.

"However, according to the findings of the survey, around 1.1 per cent of secondary school students have abused psychotropic substances while the figure of regular soft drug users has dropped to 0.5 per cent."

The survey also found that 2.8 per cent of technical institute students had used soft drugs.

Mr Tong said the incidence of drug abuse among students in Hongkong was very low compared to the United States and European countries where up to 10 per cent of students took soft drugs.

About 110,000 students in 148 secondary schools and eight technical institutes answered confidentially and anonymously to a questionnaire for the survey, conducted by the Narcotics Division of the Government Secretariat.

The findings have confirmed that Mandrax, canna-

bis, cocaine, Lily 40 and amphetamines are the most popular psychotropic substances used by students.

Yesterday's forum also highlighted a general concern over the increasing use of cannabis among youngsters.

Mr Tsui Ming-sum, service supervisor of the Development and Health Services of the Hongkong Christian Service, told the forum that more young people were using cannabis, which was becoming fashionable among people in the 14 to 21 year-old age group.

Mr Tsui attributed the trend to the influence from Western countries.

Mr Tong said that although use of cannabis was on the rise the problem remained under control. He said the Government would strengthen its promotional efforts to educate young people to stay away from soft drugs.

The number of new cannabis users reported to the Central Registry of Drug Abuse in the first half of this year was 83 while only 74 cases were recorded last year.

Another speaker, Mr Tang Kam-mun, chief staff inspector of the Police Narcotics Bureau, said more young people were using cannabis because of a declining supply of Mandrax.

Similar school surveys will be conducted every two years.

The survey population will be extended to include secondary level students from international schools.

Non-Government surveys by voluntary bodies have indicated that the incidence of drug abuse among students in international schools was up to 10 per cent, Mr Tong said.