

Abuse eases among Hongkong's young but rises in higher age bracket

THE incidence of drug abuse in the territory continues to rise.

Latest figures of the Narcotics Division's Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) show there were 41,650 active drug abusers as of the end of June 1991. This was an increase of nearly 3,000 or 7.5 per cent from the same period in the previous year.

Active drug abusers are people who had been reported anonymously by doctors and other medical practitioners at least once to the CRDA during the past five years.

The biggest group of drug abusers recorded by the CRDA comprised people between 31 and 40. This was 28 per cent of the total last June.

The figure, however, was a slight improvement from 28.7 per cent in the previous period.

The problem of drug abuse among youths under 21 also eased marginally as their percentage share slipped to 6 per cent from 6.2 per cent.

More people aged 41 to 50 turned to drugs, their percentage share edging up to 15 per cent last June from 13.8

per cent. Heroin continued to be the most popular drug of abuse. Of the 1,275 newly reported drug abusers last June, 73.5 per cent took heroin.

The proportion of new cannabis users fell slightly from 18.2 per cent in the first half of 1990 to 14.7 per cent in the same period last year.

Of the 19 districts in the territory, Tuen Mun had the largest proportion (20 per cent) of drug abusers newly reported last June.

Social workers attribute this phenomenon to the proximity of Tuen

Mun to southern China, widely pinpointed as one of various sources of drugs for Hongkong.

Of last year's total, 12,695 abusers were undergoing treatment or after-care in three main programmes.

These are the Correctional Services Department's compulsory treatment programme, the voluntary in-patient treatment programme of the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers and the voluntary outpatient methadone treatment programme of the Department of Health.