

Abuse figures alarm refuge

By Lana Wong

AN ALARMINGLY high number of immigrant wives from the mainland have been abused, according to social organisations.

Linda To, the co-ordinator of Harmony House for battered women, said the number of women seeking refuge had been increasing but the percentage of immigrant wives was significantly high.

Thirty-five per cent of the battered women accommodated by Harmony House in the 1989-90 financial year, came to Hongkong - mostly from the mainland - for family reunions, she said.

The situation was more or less the same for this financial year which reflected the existing problem in the territory, she said.

Harmony House began to collect figures on the battered women residing in Hongkong following family reunion because it found the situation rather conspicuous.

Miss To attributed the problem to poor foun-

dation and lack of understanding between couples from across-the-border marriages.

"Usually they did not know each other well or they did not have much chance to stay together," she said.

"Problems began when the couples had frequent contacts with each other after the wives joined their husbands in Hongkong. They started to realise their differences in personality."

Very often, the husbands exerted overwhelming control over their wives for fear the wives would leave them once they arrived in Hongkong, she said.

As for the wives, they needed the care and companionship of their husbands to help adapt to the new environment during their early days in Hongkong.

But husbands might not feel the same and could not give their wives enough support, she said.

In many cases it was all to do with the husband's behaviour, such as indulging in gambling, which the wives learn about only

after arriving in Hongkong, Miss To said.

Her view was echoed by a social worker in the Women's Centre of the Hongkong Council of Women, Linda Wong, who also noticed that a significant number of battered women were new immigrants.

"Mutual trust between the couple is low. The husbands are not confident that their wives really love them. Since some of them are uneducated and come from the lower classes, they tend to settle problems by violence," she said.

Miss Wong said orientation programmes for new immigrants were only provided by a few organisations and they were far from enough.

Hongkong could only do remedial work after problems arose.

But China should help prevent marital problems by giving more education and publicity to women in the country so that they would have a second thought about across-the-border marriages, she said.