

Alcohol survey sparks concern

By SUSAN FURLONG

ABOUT one in three street kids in Tai Po regularly abuse alcohol, a survey has revealed.

The study, conducted by the Hongkong Children and Youth Services, involved 245 "street-gathered youths" — who congregate in shopping centres, games arcades, fast food shops and in the stairwells of housing estates.

It found about 12 per cent of youths took drugs including cannabis and tranquilisers. Another 22 per cent inhaled organic solvents such as glue, while about 13 per cent abused cough medicine. Almost 30 per cent abused alcohol.

Children and Youth Services' development officer, Mr Wallace Cheng Kai-chi, said youngsters were driven to substance abuse by peer pressure and mounting stress within families as 1997 approaches.

"There are more kids on the streets. With parents increasingly concerned about earning money before 1997, they sacrifice their children," he said.

"While both parents are working, children get together on the streets after school and sometimes they do self-destructive things."

Mr Cheng called on the Government to close loopholes in legislation which made Hongkong a virtual smorgasbord for the young substance abuser.

"For instance it's very easy for youths to buy certain substances such as organic solvents and alcohol."

He urged a complete ban on the sale of alcohol to minors and suggested hotlines on substance abuse be set up at the district level.

He also called on the police to step up patrols of areas known as popular youth hang-outs.

The results of the study have prompted Children and Youth Services to organise a seminar tomorrow on the prevalence of substance abuse among youths.