

10-point plan to help old people

By CAITLIN WONG

ELDERLY people living alone in Mongkok suffer from appalling conditions and poor mental and physical health, a Mongkok District Board survey has found.

They are increasingly drawn into isolation by a lack of social contact and help, it reveals.

The survey, to be published today, makes 10 recommendations, including the setting-up of a social support network and priority medical service for the estimated 3,200 elderly people living on their own in the district.

The report also urges the Social Welfare Department to change its "passive" working policy and take the initiative to approach elderly people in need of help and services.

The four-month survey, conducted by a group of City Polytechnic social studies students, looked into the living conditions of 401 people aged over 60 and living on their own.

The man in charge of the survey, City Polytechnic's principal lecturer in social studies, Dr Kwan Yui-huen, yesterday said the group had found the elderly people living in very bad conditions.

There was either a lack of or inadequate provisions for them in respect of housing, financial assistance, medical care, meeting people, psychological support and emergency help.

Many of them were withdrawn and displayed a lack of knowledge and concern for society.

He said some of them received some money from their children, but most of them lived on social assistance or did labouring jobs.

He said a portion of those surveyed lived in bed-space apartments, but most of them either lived alone in small rooms or shared a place with other elderly people.

The executive director of the Hongkong Society for

the Aged, Mr Angus Tsang Kam-yan, yesterday warned that the number of elderly people living alone would increase.

He said the brain drain had also contributed to the problem as more elderly people were being separated from their emigrating children.

He said the problem was more obvious in the old urban districts such as Mongkok and Shamshuipo.

"Elderly people tend to stick to the place which they know well and resist moving to a new area," he said.

"The old districts they live in, however, are mostly under redevelopment. Old buildings, where there is the greatest concentration of aged tenants, are being pulled down to make way for new blocks.

"But although the displaced old people are often offered accommodation elsewhere, it is often difficult to persuade them to accept relocation. Very often, the more stubborn ones would rather move to a worse living environment in the same district, or simply sleep in the street than accept public housing elsewhere."