

'One teen birth every day'

Over 18,000 cases by girls under 19 recorded last year, says Health Ministry

By IVY SOON

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KLANG: More Malaysian teenage girls are getting pregnant, with a major hospital recording at least one case every day.

According to Dr Mohamad Farouk Abdullah, senior consultant and head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital here, about 14% of the 12,000 babies delivered annually at the hospital were by teenage mothers with many of them unwed.

"We thought such numbers of teen pregnancies were only in Klang, but I am also hearing of similar scenarios in the other six specialist hospitals in Selangor," he added.

"The youngest girl to give birth at our hospital was a 12-year-old girl," Dr Mohamad Farouk said at the "Pregnant by Choice, Not by Chance or Force" seminar. It was organised

by the hospital in conjunction with its Family Planning month.

The Health Ministry recorded 18,652 births by girls below the age of 19 last year compared with 5,962 in the second half of 2010.

Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Hospital's medical social welfare officer Nurul Azira Mahamad Jafar said she had been handling at least one case of an unwed mother every working day of this year.

"The highest number of referrals I have had in a day so far was 14. These are our children who are pregnant in their teens," said Nurul Azira, who has been handling cases of unwed mothers as well as rape and sex abuse victims at the hospital for the past six years.

Most of the pregnant girls are referred to the hospital by clinics.

This is because teenage pregnancies are considered "high-risk cases". A teenager is twice more likely to die



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— DR MOHAMAD FAROUK ABDULLAH

from pregnancy or childbirth complications than women in their 20s.

Most of the girls come to the hospital complaining of discomfort such as stomachache and spotting.

As part of the hospital's protocol, the doctors screen them for pregnancy and once confirmed, they would be admitted and the family notified.

It is also part of the hospital's policy to provide antenatal care and treatment to them, regardless of

their marital status.

Nurul Azira said pregnant teenage girls under 18 and their babies were protected under the Child Act 2001 and would be referred to the Social Welfare Department.

In most cases, the girls became pregnant because they were in relationships and had consensual sex.

"They are also from broken homes and low-income families. Some are runaways," she said.

"We have to establish rapport with these girls. Out of fear, they won't even confide in their family, so we need to gain their trust to be able to get their family's contact details," said Nurul Azira.

She said many parents expressed shame when told of their daughter's condition.

"They are afraid their neighbours will know," she said. "There are also those who are numb to the fact because they feel they are unable to

control their daughters.

"We will usually refer these girls and their parents to the department for counselling," she added.

Nurul Azira said if the parents were unable to take care of the unwed mothers and babies, they could surrender them to the department.

She cited the case of a 13-year-old girl, who gave birth at the hospital recently.

"Her parents said they could not ensure that the girl would not get pregnant again as the father of the child was still living in the same community," said Nurul Azira.

"So the parents agreed to the girl and her baby being sent to a department home."



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