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Sex and the clueless

Young Malaysians in the dark over 'facts of life'

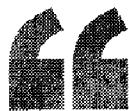
By Chai Mei Ling

KUALA LUMPUR: Incredibly, half of all young Malaysians don't know how babies are born.

A National Population and Family Development Board (LPPKN) survey had also found that two in five do not know where the foetus develops.

Half of those surveyed did not know what the male and female reproductive organs are.

The Malaysian population and family survey, which polled some 1,700 respondents between the ages of 13 and 24, revealed the depth of ignorance among the young in basic sexu-



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— LPPKN director-general, Datuk Aminah Abdul Rahman

al and reproductive health.

The respondents were from all races and from urban and rural areas across the country.

Carried out by LPPKN every 10 years, the survey tested respondents on their knowledge on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives

and reproductive organs.

What is of even greater concern is that young adults between 20 and 24 were less knowledgeable about "the facts of life" compared to those aged between 15 and 19.

The young adults scored slightly lower in their understanding and knowledge of sex organs compared to teenagers.

The survey also found that males have slightly less awareness than females.

LPPKN director-general Datuk Aminah Abdul Rahman said it was high time this lack of knowledge and awareness was addressed.

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Young adults know less about sex than teens

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all the time.”

Universiti Malaya's Professor Dr Low Wah Yun echoed the need to act fast, citing a different study on female adolescents, which also indicated low awareness.

A quarter of the respondents in the 2006 study said a woman could get pregnant by just sharing a bed with a man, while 13 per cent said they were not sure if a woman could get pregnant by sleeping next to a man.

When asked if one could get pregnant the first time she had sex, slightly more than 10 per cent said no, while a third had no idea.

More than 10 per cent of the girls said a woman would not get pregnant if she was not turned on during sex, while 47 per cent did not know the answer.

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The study, called the National Survey on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights of Women in Malaysia, had polled more than 2,000 female youths aged 15 to 24 across nine states.

It was commissioned by the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry, and carried out by researchers in Universiti Malaya.

Out of the 2,005 girls surveyed, slightly more than 100 admitted to being sexually active. Of that number, one-fifth said they had sex more than five times a week, and 57 per cent had sex two to four times a week.

Low, who was one of the researchers, said the implementation of sexuality and reproductive health education was crucial to arrest the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS cases, unwanted pregnancies and abortions among youth.

The topic of sex education has long been a subject of debate, and Malaysia came close to implementing it in 2006 after the Cabinet gave the nod. But it appears to have fallen by the wayside.

"Sex education does not mean we are giving the youngsters a licence to have sex. It is to arm them with proper knowledge and to teach them to practise healthy sexual behaviour, and to be responsible for their own actions.

"What does a boy do when he gets a girl pregnant? Leave the girl alone to fend for herself?

"No. He has to face the con-

sequences of his actions.

"We must teach responsible sexual behaviour, more so in boys so that they respect girls and not see them as sex objects," said Low, a psychologist.

A World Health Organisation study on 19 countries that have a system of sex education in place showed that sex education did not hasten sexual activities.

On the contrary, it delayed sexual activities and led to safer sex.

Associate Professor Dr Mary Huang from Universiti Putra Malaysia said the mean age of marriage among Malaysians

was getting higher.

"This means young adults are getting exposed to more years where they can have premarital sex."

This, coupled with the freedom that children and youth enjoyed today, and the sexual messages that they were bombarded with in the media, was a recipe for social disaster, she said.

"Children today are exposed to so many things they think is sex education, but it's not. Pornography, for example, is a very perverted form of sex.

"Young people have to know what's real and what's not," said Huang, the honorary sec-

retary-general of the Federation of Reproductive Health Associations Malaysia.

Aminah said more focus should be placed on preventive measures instead of knee-jerk reactions to cases like abandoned babies.

"Too much funds have been allocated to fix problems instead of addressing them at the source."

Low said: "We shouldn't let our kids reach the stage where they have to seek abortions. We should prevent that from happening.

"Teach them abstinence but also arm them with knowledge about safe sex."



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**Professor Dr Low Wah Yun
Universiti Malaya**

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Datuk Aminah Abdul Rahman, director-general of the National Population and Family Development Board, says it is time to address the lack of knowledge and awareness about sex.

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