

Headline	Many risks of teen pregnancy and young mothers: Doc		
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Many risks of teen pregnancy and young mothers: Doc

Mary Chin

THERE are many risks of teen pregnancy, and young women under 20 face a higher risk of obstructed labour.

Quoting Unicef Malaysia, Reproductive & Sexual Health Specialist, Professor Emeritus Dr Mohd Ismail Tambi, said complications during pregnancy and delivery are the leading causes of death for girls aged between 15 and 19 in developing countries.

"They are twice as likely to die in childbirth as women in their twenties," he said in his presentation at a recent seminar organised by the Sabah Women's Advisory Council (MPWS), UiTM Sabah branch and Yayasan Sabah.

According to Dr Mohd Ismail, research indicates that pregnant teens are less likely to receive prenatal care, often seeking it only in the third trimester, if at all.

"As a result of insufficient prenatal care, the global incidence of premature births and low birth weight is higher amongst teenage mothers.

"Risks for medical com-

plications are greater for girls 14 years of age and younger as an undeveloped pelvis can lead to difficulties in childbirth," he pointed out.

On obstructed labour, Dr Mohd Ismail said if Caesarean section is not available, such obstruction can cause an obstetric fistula.

"It is a tear in the birth canal that creates leakage of urine and or faeces," he explained, adding that at least two million of the world's poorest women live with fistulas.

On a similar note, the Reproductive & Sexual Health Specialist said teenage girls account for 14pc of the estimated 20 million unsafe abortions performed each year. "Such abortions result in some 68,000 deaths."

As a result of unprotected sex, young people are also at risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV infection.

The highest rates of sexually transmitted infections

(STIs) worldwide are among young people aged 15 to 24, according to Dr Mohd Ismail.

Unicef Malaysia reported that some 500,000 become infected daily (excluding HIV).

"Two in five new HIV infections globally occur in young people aged 15 to 24."

It was also learned that surveys from 40 countries show that more than half their young people have misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted.

Another contributory factor is that married adolescent girls generally are unable to negotiate for condom use or to refuse sexual relations.

"Why? This is because they are often married to older men with more sexual experience, which puts them (adolescent girls) at risk of contracting STIs, including HIV," Dr Mohd Ismail explained.

Touching on the challenges of family planning and young people, Dr Mohd Ismail noted that young peo-

ple have limited or no access to education and information on reproductive and sexual health care.

He said modern contraceptive use among adolescents is generally low, and decreases with economic status. Fewer than 5pc of the poorest young use modern contraception.

"Young women consistently report less contraceptive usage than men. This is evidence of their unequal power in negotiating safer sex. It is also due to restrictions on their access to services," he said.

Dr Mohd Ismail named these restrictions as lack of information, shame, laws, attitudes of health providers and practices or social norms.

Why may young people hesitate to visit clinics?

He attributed this to lack of privacy and confidentiality, inconvenient locations and hours, high costs, limited contraceptive choices and supplies, and perhaps more importantly, the negative or judgmental attitudes of family planning providers.

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