



SAVING LIVES

BABY HATCHES GIVE NEWBORNS A CHANCE AT LIFE

OrphanCARE's centres also provide counselling and consultation to pregnant mothers. It believes abandoning a child should be the last resort

SHUAH BEE KIM AND FARHANA SYED NOKMAN KUALA LUMPUR news@nst.com.my

SCARED and clueless pregnant girls as young as 18 have turned up at baby hatch centres, desperate for answers on how to deal with the unborn child they are carrying.

OrphanCARE Foundation, an organisation that has been handling baby hatch centres in Johor Baru, Sungai Petani and Petaling Jaya since 2009, revealed that there have been 14 cases of pregnant teenage girls coming forward to seek help, and the foundation found this alarming.

Project coordinator Syarah Md Tahir said the teenagers were "clueless" on what they needed to do after delivering their baby.

"We are here to listen, direct and guide them on the choices they have, and it is up to them and their family to decide."

"On the recent case of the 13-year-old girl for instance, after counselling, her family decided to look after the baby," she told the *New Straits Times*.

Syarah listed two main factors that caused these teenagers to go "astray".

"The main reason is because they are not exposed to sex education."

"When there's no sex educa-

tion, teenagers can be clueless on the impact of their actions, which they learn from the Internet."

She said parents who do not monitor their children's activities on the Internet and their smartphones put the kids at risk.

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SYARAH MD TAHIR
OrphanCARE project coordinator

She said many of them did not know the consequences of having sex and the symptoms of pregnancy.

"Some even say they suffer from irregular periods and have no idea they are pregnant for quite a while."

Syarah urged parents to not wash their hands of the matter.

They must monitor their children's activities on the Internet.

"Parental guidance is important. Parents need to know how to approach their children to talk about sex education."

"If they think it is hard, attend classes on parenting where they can learn how to deal with children."

In Johor, the situation is similar. Many who approached the foundation for consultation were students and some were dropouts.

Foundation branch manager Tan Kee Lin said some students were forced to drop out of school because of their pregnancy.

In some cases, their parents ask the school for temporary leave for the student.

"While some give up the baby due to financial constraints, especially factory workers who earn a low income, most give the baby up because they are not able to face other people," Tan said.

He said some women were forced to give up their babies as they were illegitimate.

"They got married and within a month, the woman is pregnant."

"Unable to get family acceptance and support, they give up the child."

He said the shame of being pregnant out of wedlock was often a concern of the parents who sought help from OrphanCARE.

"Parents will tell us they want things to be kept quiet as the child was unmarried."

"In such cases, the mothers have the option to stay at the OrphanCARE hostel until their delivery."

He said OrphanCARE believed that biological parents were the best people to look after a child,

and with this in mind, the centre would talk to the parents if they were willing to receive counselling.

"So far, our centres recorded 99 cases where we successfully persuaded the mother against giving up the child."

Tan said if the baby had to be given up, leaving the infant at a baby hatch was the best option because it increased the baby's chances of survival.

Newborns left outside someone's house or in a rubbish bin only have a 40 per cent survival rate.

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The OrphanCare Foundation branch in Bandar Baru Uda, Johor Baru. PIX BY ZAIN AHMED