MOTHERHOOD IN CHILDHOOD:
TEENAGE PREGNANCY & MOH INITIATIVES
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Teenage pregnancy in Malaysia is the result of either early marriages, consensual sex or the tragedy of rape. Although the age specific rate is showing a decline from 32 per 1000 women aged 15–19 years in 1980 to about 14 in the year 2010, the Ministry of Health (MOH) continue to focus on adolescent health with great concerns. Incidence of teenage pregnancies continue to be reported and in 2015 the highest is still those reported in Sabah and Sarawak. Although many were attributed to traditional early marriages here, their pregnancy still fall under teenage pregnancies in which the outcomes for both mothers and babies, as compared to the adult mothers, poses greater challenges in the care and follow-up.

The MOH has taken several measures in creating awareness and providing the facilities to address teenage pregnancy issues. It has thus far produced good outcomes. There is greater trust earned. The MOH has been able to desensitize pregnancy among teenagers. In the earlier 2000 it was still a taboo for the teenagers to patronize the health clinics together with their “senior” counter parts, but today almost 80% come forward to be assessed and examined. They are given guidance and counselling, early identifications and intervention to help reduce the risk of serious morbidities during pregnancy or childbirth. In 2015, more than 14,000 girls under the age of 18 attends the Health Ministry’s Maternal and Child Health Clinics nationwide, where about 30% of them are unwed mothers.

Another important aspect in managing teenage pregnancy is future planning for both the teen mother and the new-born baby. Unplanned teenage pregnancies, occurred with lack of comprehensive sex education, which leads to unprotected and unwanted sex. Social environmental factors include poverty, family surrounding, chaotic lifestyle, weak parental monitoring and academic failure are also common precursors. Most teenagers also fail to see the dangers and complications of having a baby at a young age, and are simply unaware of the responsibilities of becoming parents. Teenagers pursuing to raise their child, leads to sole motherhood and the burden of overcoming self-esteem, braving for social integration and yet looking after the baby, all resting on her shoulders often concluding with unfavorable social outcomes.

This growing concerns has led to the development of several strategies with the matter being raised up to the highest order, the “Majlis Raja-Raja” or Council of Rulers from all the states. The resultant attention has drawn the interest of many agencies at the State level and most significant is the creation of One-Stop Center under the flagship of “Generasi Ku Sayang” - Our beloved Generation. This committee works and offers a multi-agency approach and the opportunity for each teenager, in focus those unwed mothers, have now greater hopes for more options and opportunities for a brighter future.

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