

Educate instead of punishing unwed mums, MMA tells authorities

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MMA president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai said punishments will only push desperate unwed mothers into unsafe pregnancy and childbirth that could threaten their lives and cause permanent harm to their health. - File pic, for illustration purposes.

KUALA LUMPUR: Instead of criminalising unwed pregnancies, the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has urged the authorities and lawmakers to provide comprehensive sexual education and access to reproductive health services.

MMA made the call after the Terengganu government had on Dec 1 amended the Syariah Criminal Offences (Takzir)(Amendment) Enactment 2022 to penalise pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births for Muslim women.

MMA president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai said punishments will only push desperate unwed mothers into unsafe pregnancy and childbirth that could threaten their lives and cause permanent harm to their health.

"Out-of-wedlock pregnancies and childbirths often arise from unplanned pregnancies among young adults or adolescents due to lack of education and access to services regarding reproductive health.

"The dire consequences of unplanned pregnancies range from septic abortions, baby dumping, preterm labour, maternal and neonatal morbidity, including deaths, among others.

"Punitive actions had not been shown to ever decrease unplanned pregnancies in the many decades of research.

"Malaysia's national data had recorded one of the highest maternal mortality rates in 2021 at 68.2 per 100,000 live births.

"In addition, the baby dumping rate of 100 per year for the past few decades had never decreased and sexual activity among our youths with very little knowledge of reproductive health is rising rapidly," he said in a statement today.

Besides reducing unplanned pregnancies, Dr Muruga Raj said comprehensive sexual education would also reduce incidences of sexual activity and sexually transmitted diseases among the young.

He, therefore, urged the authorities to tackle the issue with compassion and implement policies that were in line with scientifically-backed methods.