

Charge parents to curb underage driving, say experts

PETALING JAYA: Stiffer fines and pressing negligence charges on parents could help curb instances of underage driving, say experts.

Schools and local communities also have a hand in reducing the risk of teens taking to the wheel, they added.

Road safety expert Law Teik Hua said relevant laws could be amended to ensure guardians are held accountable.

"This includes imposing heavier fines, community service or possibly facing charges of negligence," said Law, who heads Universiti Putra Malaysia's Road Safety Research Centre.

He said underage driving is a severe and developing problem in Malaysia.

"They don't have the physical coordination, emotional maturity

"If you notice someone underage driving ... voice it out, either to them or the person's family."

Wong Shaw Voon

or even legal training to drive safely.

"This could lead to more instances of speeding, making bad decisions and being involved in deadly accidents," he said.

Weighing in, lawyer Salim Bashir said parents must take

responsibility and cannot plead ignorance when their children break the law.

He said Section 39(5) of the Road Transport Act 1987 has a provision that parents can be held accountable for allowing children under 16 to operate motor vehicles.

Under this section, no one under the age of 16 may drive any motor vehicle, and those under 17 are prohibited from driving any vehicle other than a motorcycle or invalid carriage.

Additionally, individuals under 21 are not allowed to drive heavy vehicles or public service vehicles.

Anyone who drives or allows an underage person to drive, commits an offence and, upon conviction, may be fined up to RM2,000, jailed for up to six

months, or both.

The former Bar Council chairman also said Section 31 of the Child Act spells out that guardians can be held responsible for negligence.

Under this act, any guardian who abuses, neglects, abandons or exposes a child to risk of physical or emotional harm commits an offence and, upon conviction, may face a fine of up to RM20,000, imprisonment of up to 10 years, or both.

"Section 28 of the Child Act also imputes liability for negligence in supervising and protecting the children and the liabilities could be stretched to include when the damages or injuries are caused to others due to the delinquency committed and contributed by their children," he said.

Apart from penal punishments,

he said parents can also face civil actions for the wrongful act or damages caused by their underage children.

Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research chairman Prof Dr Wong Shaw Voon said schools could identify potential underage drivers among their students.

"We cannot just say that since the incident happened outside the school compound, no action can be taken," he said, urging schools to educate children on safety.

"Local communities play a role too. If you notice someone underage driving a vehicle, voice it out, either to them or the person's family.

"It's also one way of showing care and concern, so that person does not end up hurting themselves or even worse, your loved ones," he added.