

Sexual abuse intensifies push for child protection laws

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PETALING JAYA: As children face growing risks in an increasingly digital world, the urgency to strengthen child protection in Malaysia has never been clearer, especially following the purported sexual abuse of an infant.

The case, disclosed by Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail on Wednesday, has sparked national outrage and prompted renewed discussions on how Malaysia can better safeguard its most vulnerable.

Universiti Teknologi Mara Social and Policy Studies lecturer Prof Dr Yarina Ahmad said the crime is not only heinous but a symptom of deeper, long-standing social failures.

"This is truly horrifying and deeply upsetting. It's difficult to comprehend how anyone could commit such an inhumane act.

"The issues are not new. They've been happening for many years but often escape public attention because many cases go unreported."

Yarina pointed to modernisation, digital exposure and a growing demand for exploitative content, particularly on the dark web, as driving forces behind such crimes.

"Unfortunately, there are those who produce and distribute abusive content to meet this demand, often for financial gain."

She emphasised that greater public awareness is crucial to drive action and protect children.

She also called for improved psychological support and a long-overdue update to child protection policies, noting that Malaysia still operates under a framework introduced in 2009.

"While the legal structure exists, mental health and trauma services remain limited, especially in rural areas such as Sabah, Sarawak and the northern states."

Universiti Putra Malaysia senior lecturer Dr Mohamad Naquiuddin Dahamat Azam said the case "warrants immediate and multidimensional intervention".

"The fact that a crime of this magnitude could occur and be monetised highlights deep systemic vulnerabilities," he said, warning that unchecked exploitation can inflict lasting psychological harm and lead to societal desensitisation.

He stressed the need for early psychological screening and structured rehabilitation programmes for individuals at risk.

"Psychology must play a central role in identifying red flags, especially signs of harmful sexual interest, followed by long-term monitoring and evidence-based rehabilitation," he said, urging stricter safeguarding protocols within child-related institutions and stronger public education on abuse prevention.

University of Nottingham Malaysia associate professor Dr Siti Khadijah Zainal Badri said the psychological impact of such crimes extends beyond the victim.

"Such acts can leave the public feeling powerless. It undermines trust in society and fosters a bleak worldview.

"The danger lies in a society that becomes less responsive and increasingly passive, where violence and exploitation are consumed as content rather than condemned as crimes."