



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Press Statement

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Decriminalisation of suicide bids welcomed

Section 309 of the Penal Code states that “Whoever attempts to commit suicide, and does any act towards the commission of such offence, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine or with both.”

Suicide bids are often associated with a person’s mental state of health. Such treatment of people who attempted suicide lacks empathy and is archaic. As such the Consumer Association of Penang (CAP) supports the decriminalising of suicide bids as we should understand why a person can contemplate to do.

Therefore, the government and society as a whole should be empathetic of those who survived suicide attempts rather than charging them with Section 309 of the Penal Code. Such legalistic approach to handle cases of failed suicide attempts is not favoured in light of modern understanding of suicidal behaviour.

With more than 125 Malaysians trying to kill themselves daily there are about five successful ones. According to the 2017 National Health and Morbidity Survey, 29 per cent of Malaysians have depression and anxiety disorder compared to 12 per cent in 2011. There has also been an increase in the cases of suicidal thoughts among teenagers aged 13 to 17 to 10 per cent in 2017 from 7.9 per cent in 2012.

The study also showed that 18.3 per cent of those in the age group suffered from depression. Of those who attempted suicide or died from it were affected by several factors: had a history of attempted suicides; suffering from depression and/or mental illnesses; substance and alcohol abuse; chronic disease; and loneliness. Mental illness is expected to be the second biggest health problem affecting Malaysians after heart disease by 2020.

Consider these some of such cases:

- In October 2019, a 10-year-old girl was coaxed into giving up the idea of jumping from the 20th floor of a flat in Larkin, Johor Baru.
- In August 2019, a 13-year-old Penang boy hanged himself because of homework pressure.
- In July, a teenager from Beaufort, Sabah, hanged himself after being scolded by his sister for skipping school.
- In May 2019, a teenage girl in Kuching asked her Instagram followers if she is live or die and 69 per cent voted that she should die. She leapt to her death.

We should be looking at the reasons why they resort to suicide at this early age and same for the adults too. Penalising those who attempted to take their own lives may aggravate rather than ‘softening’ their predicament.

Family members and friends need to recognise the early signs of mental illnesses as well. About 50 to 60 per cent of people contemplating suicide gave some warnings of their intentions to a family member or friend. Hence, suicides can be prevented if positive intervention is given but unfortunately there is a lack of understanding of the problem.

Patients with mental disorders were often ostracised and largely categorised as '*gila*' (mad) instead of attempting to understand their conditions and needs. It was reported in 2015 that about 60 per cent of them would rather seek *bomohs* or priests than going for medical treatment. Often the parents are fearful of the strong social stigma associated with mental illness, primarily arising from a cultural stand-point mired in superstitious belief and misconceptions.

We call upon the government to hasten the decriminalisation of suicide as it will also bring some relief to traumatised family members of those who failed in their suicide attempt. There are more than 200 classified types of mental illnesses yet the subject is treated as a taboo. More is needed to find the underlying causes of suicides and address them accordingly. Relevant government agencies can also hold exhibitions/roadshows to educate the public about mental illnesses and suicide.

Fathima bte Mohd Idris
Vice-President
Consumers Association of Penang