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Nip the glue-sniffing problem in the bud

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THE case of teacher Azizan Manap who was accused of causing hurt to an 11-year-old pupil he allegedly caught for sniffing glue is one of the tell-tale signs that the problem of drug addiction among schoolchildren is escalating at an alarming rate.

According to recent statistics on drug abuse in Malaysia, the number of addicts is estimated to reach three million by the year 2020.

Equally disturbing is the fact that children below 13 years of age have been making headlines in drug abuse cases reported in the media from 2015 onwards.

In August this year, two youths fell from the eighth floor of a building in Kota Kinabalu after sniffing glue. One of them died from serious head injuries.

The Society for Education of underprivileged Children in Sabah (PKPKM Sabah) has reported that children as young as three years old are sniffing glue.

Inhalant abuse including glue sniffing is not a criminal offence in Malaysia. Easy access and affordability to the product – glue can be obtained for RM3 or less – has contributed to the high number of youngsters engaging in glue sniffing.

This is compounded by the fact that parents may not be aware of the health implications and long-term effects of glue sniffing on children, especially those who start at a very young age.

The long-term effects include memory loss, addiction and brain degeneration. Children addicted to glue sniffing also display violent behaviour and are prone to bullying.

Glue is considered an inhalant but it is not listed in the Dangerous Drugs Act. This lack of legislation has left the authorities unable to make arrests, and there have also been few prevention campaigns against glue sniffing.

A study by the Faculty of Education in University Teknologi Mara found that more

than 30% of the students surveyed felt their parents did not view glue sniffing, consuming alcohol or smoking as an offence. This is indeed very worrying.

Studies have shown that glue sniffing, which tends to be regarded as child's play, is a gateway to drug abuse. I-Medik is therefore urging the Government to take the matter seriously and emulate Singapore and Thailand in banning glue sniffing. An intoxicating substance law should be legislated to prohibit the misuse of certain substances which may cause intoxication when inhaled. Parents too must monitor the activities of their children closely. Check what is in their possessions and with whom they're mingling.

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