

# Crucial to strengthen family institution

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KOTA KINABALU: In wake of changing social system and the requirements of the National Population Policy, the need to strengthen the current and future family institution is most crucial.

Increasing awareness of family issues among the public and private sectors is essential in order to highlight the importance of families.

It is also crucial to heighten better understanding of the family's functions and problems, to promote knowledge of the economic, social and demographic processes affecting families and their members.

This national focus and

the ensuing national consensus will therefore stimulate and generate efforts to respond and prevent problems affecting families and population at large.

"Strategies for strengthening the family as the developer of human resource and the determinant of quality family life are essential and must be integrated with national policies of development," said Associate Prof. Dr Rosmah Ismail of the School of Psychology and Social Work at University Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

She said this in her paper entitled "The Quality of Family Life in Malaysia" which she presented at a "Gender, Family and Development" seminar attended by some

150 people here yesterday.

Dr Rosmah said that in Malaysia the process of family development among all ethnic groups began with family formation through marriage according to the couples' religions and social norms.

"But the family formation is also influenced by changes in the value of societies. And, education has an influence on age at first marriage...the higher the educational achievement, the later the age at first marriage," she said.

"Traditionally the selection of a partner among the older Malaysian generation was by family-based strict religious and cultural practices but this has changed," she added.

Dr Rosmah said as most husbands and wives were working, it would be logical to assume that they faced greater stress and challenges in their daily routine.

"Marital stability among Malaysian couples is an indicator that family has played an important role as the sustenance outlet for stress among the working couple," she said.

Dr Rosmah noted that with the specific aim to create quality of family life, various services had been made available in an effort to improve family life.

Some of the services available to the public were family counselling, marriage counselling, briefings, dialogues, training and workshop.

"Parenting is one programme that has been given priority and this includes both formal and non-formal education," she said.

While striving for rapid economic growth, emphasis is also given on retaining and enhancing social and moral values, and on the importance of the family unit as the central element in realising the country's social development objectives.

"The inculcation of positive values, ethics and morals starts at the early stages of a child's life through both secular and religious education," Dr Rosmah said.

She said being a multicultural society consisting of various ethnic groups and in an effort to forge greater

unity and communal relationship among the ethnic groups, community self-help, community pillars and neighbourliness were some of the activities being implemented by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.

In conclusion, Dr Rosmah said that the generation of quality human resource and hence quality population, began in the families as basic social units of society integral to the health and survival of every other social institution.

"All the deepest human feelings have their source in the family, both the good feelings, the companionship, love, nurturing as well as the bad violence, incest and even murder," she said.