

Treating mental health: Economic situation among factors to be taken into account

NST 31.8.2019 2

KOTA KINABALU: Unlike other illnesses that can be cured with the right medication, treatment for mental health problems needs a more holistic approach.

"This is a preventable disease, which is triggered by many aspects include stressful situations while dealing with economy-related problem.

"The way to eradicate (not to say entirely) is to tackle the economic situation of the people of Sabah," Minister of Health and People's Wellbeing, Datuk Frankie Poon Ming Fung told reporters after closing the 2nd Borneo Quality of Life Conference on Friday.

The three-day conference was held for the 2nd time in collaboration with various organisations at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Main Auditorium.

Frankie noted that according to the National Health and Morbidity Survey, 29.2 per cent of the Malaysian population face mental health issues.

"The number is even higher in Sabah which is a whopping 42.9 per cent.

"If we look closely at mental health issues, depression is the leading cause of global disease burdens among mental, neurological and substance-use disorders.

"Suicide has become the second leading cause of death among youth today, according to WHO in 2018."

He stressed that the prob-



Frankie (centre), Helen (4th right) and Jannie (4th left) in a group photo with conference participants.

lem is serious and the government is working towards a solution.

"The university's (UMS) effort to organise such a conference was one of the ways we voiced out the problem as well as how to find the best way to deal with it."

Earlier, the conference organising chairperson, Professor Helen Benedict Lasimbang said that outcomes from the three-day (August 28-30) conference revealed that poverty, inaccessibility to healthcare, and inequality of education, employment, power and income were important factors.

It also highlighted on issues regarding pollution – agricul-

ture and industrial, infrastructure, and marginalisation of some groups.

"Among suggestions given by people at the conference were responsible and balanced development on transport, healthcare, infrastructure, connectivity and employment," Helen said.

Helen said that the conference and its outcomes are important and part of preparation for the 2022 International Society Quality of Life Conference which will be held in Kota Kinabalu.

Meanwhile, Assistant Law and Native Affairs Minister, Jannie Lasimbang stressed that low socio-economic status has been identified as a major

risk factor for mental illness.

"Due to the past-paced development, the cost of living has also increased tremendously and since socio-economic status is determined by income levels, low-income earners have been associated with poor mental health and increased risk for mental illness.

"Depression is now more prevalent among the lower income population."

Jannie noted that in 2005, among 2,535 households selected by Department of Statistics Malaysia, 8.1 per cent were found to be under the category of 'urban poor' – a total monthly income of RM706 and below.