

Need for different approach when detaining people with disabilities

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PETALING JAYA: The mother of an autistic man who was arrested for allegedly molesting a woman had to tell her son that he was in a *Gerak Khas* movie so he would not be traumatised by the incident.

On Sept 11, the 22-year-old man (pic) was arrested for allegedly touching the 24-year-old woman's chest after a birthday celebration at a restaurant.

He was then taken to court to be remanded the next day, which meant that he had to spend the night in the police lock-up.

His mother Hasnah told *The Star* that her son — who is of diminished mental capacity — did not understand the consequences of his actions or why he was being arrested.

"I'm not blaming the police, and I don't blame the complainant either."

"Putting myself in her shoes, it can be a harrowing experience, especially when you are not exposed to autism and my son looks like a normal guy," she said.

However, Hasnah wished that the police could have handled her son's unique

situation differently.

that she is unaware if there is a police standard operating procedure for handling people with disabilities.

"I don't mind if the police want a blood test or even a medical test done, our family can always bring him over," she said, adding that detaining her son for four days would have been detrimental to his mental health.

She said that after taking her son home on his release pending further investigations, he was not his usual self.

"I noticed that after he got home from court, he did not want to change his clothes and eat," she said and expressed relief that the Welfare Department had counselled her son yesterday.

Hasnah said it was good that they came because even she could not get through to him. I am not even sure if he knows what had happened to him. I don't want him to be traumatised.

"There is no reaction from him, so I just don't know," she added.

Hasnah said her son is a slow learner and it usually takes him two years to develop the ability to realise that he is not allowed to do certain things.



approach when handling people with disabilities.

Malaysia Disabled Prihatin Secretariat chairman Mohd Faisal Che Yusof reiterated the call for a different policy to be used by the authorities to handle those with disabilities.

"Even those who are deaf face problems with the police due to a breakdown in communication," he said.

Meanwhile, some organisations have urged the government to review and adopt different policies when handling persons with disabilities.

National Autism Society of Malaysia chairman Felina Muhammad Feisol said there needs to be a different procedure when authorities deal with persons with autism.

"I am not blaming anyone here. I believe the police were only following their standard procedure when dealing with an accused."

"However, what is needed is a different procedure when authorities are handling a disabled person," she said.

Felima added that some sort of protection must also be given to those who hold an OKU (disabled person) card.

She explained that the man was arrested and treated as a common criminal even though he had an OKU card.

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