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Child abuse cases still high

Overuse of Internet adds to problem

KUALA LUMPUR: The number of child abuse and neglect cases is still high and parents remained the people mostly responsible for the acts, said Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Hannah Yeoh.

The cases committed by mothers were 7,805 while fathers were 5,190, she said.

"Although there was a decrease compared with previous years' figures, the high number is still worrying," she said at the closing of the forum Protecting Our Children yesterday.

Yeoh also said that as many as 605 first-time suspects committed child sexual offences under the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, an increase of 300 suspects (50%) compared with the figures in 2017, after the law was implemented in July that year.

From the figures, suspects who committed repeated offences increased to 5.62% in 2018 compared with 4.67% in 2017.

Yeoh said that sexual abuse was usually

done by those the children knew.

Compounding the challenges, she said, is overuse of the Internet.

"Cyberbullying, Internet addiction, cyber-crime and social media influence have become a new threat to the family institution," she said.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission noted in 2017 that 83.2% of children ages five to 17 were Internet users while 93% of children used smartphones to surf the Internet, she said.

She said that it creates a distance between parents and children, resulting in child abuse and neglect.

Yeoh also reminded adults to trust a child when he or she complains of sexual abuse, especially when there is a change of behaviour in the child.

"Parents have to take their children's complaints seriously," she said, adding that the public can call Talian Kasih 15999 helpline.