NEW STRAITS TIMES

Viral chair-pulling pranks pose serious risks to children's mental, physical health, says expert

By Ainun Jariah - October 19, 2023 @ 4:26pm



Professor Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh (inset), a public health expert from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia emphasised the importance of symptomatic care, including pain management with analgesia, during the healing process. -FILE PIC

KUALA LUMPUR: Playing pranks on children, such as the viral chair-pulling prank, could have serious consequences, including mental and physical trauma, a health expert warned.

Professor Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh, a public health expert from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, cautioned that the repercussions of such incidents can be long-lasting, leading to behavioural changes in children and adolescents that may persist into adulthood.

She stressed that physical pranks can significantly jeopardise the well-being of children and result in severe negative outcomes, exemplified by the spine injury suffered by the child in the video.

Dr Sharifa also pointed out that such pranks could potentially impact children's mental health and even contribute to the development of eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia.

Regarding the specific chair-pulling prank incident that happened recently, she said the child had apparent prior mobility issues and perhaps spine alignment issues.

"During a 'prank,' such as pulling out one's chair from behind, there is a possibility of injury to the spine and muscles, which can cause difficulties in walking and movement.

"In certain cases, if the fall occurs from a certain height or is impacted by other weight during the fall, fractures, disc collapse, or spine herniation may occur, necessitating treatment, surgery, and rehabilitation.

"This results in considerable pain, stress, and a loss of quality of life. Mobility can be impaired, and changes to one's education and lifestyle are required. This can impose significant costs on the family and the patient," she added.

Dr Sharifa further recommended that the patient should seek specialised clinics, such as orthopaedics, undergo radiological assessments, and follow expert opinions, which may involve surgery and physiotherapy.

She emphasised the importance of symptomatic care, including pain management with analgesia, during the healing process.

Furthermore, she highlighted the potential need for psychological counselling in such cases, and in severe instances, pharmacotherapy may be beneficial in reducing stress and anxiety related to the trauma.

Dr Sharifa also made a strong recommendation for parents, schools, and society in general, stating, "This (school chair prank) needs to be prohibited, as many turn out to be full of bullying and need to be reprimanded straight away. Parents and teachers need to be aware of potential cases like these and deter them from the start.

She also stressed the importance of providing counselling to high-risk individuals who may initiate pranks or bullying and, in severe cases, taking stern measures to prevent them from causing harm to others, even addressing the risk of cyberbullying.