

'Almost all PPR families cannot afford nutritious food'

The Star 27/06/2022 pg 3 New

ALMOST 100% of the residents in people's housing projects (PPRs) in Kuala Lumpur are not consuming enough fruits and vegetables, according to a study by RTI International, an independent non-profit research institute.

Its Better Health Programme lead Dr Lim Shiang Cheng said 96.5% of adults interviewed at six PPRs from August to December 2020 said they could not afford fruits and vegetables.

She works with Health Ministry to carry out research and draw up strategies to overcome public health concerns.

"We spoke to 3,000 adults living in PPRs in Cheras, Batu and Kepong in Kuala Lumpur.

"They mostly eat energy-densed processed food like rice and bread to feel full.

"About 70% also consume sugary drinks at home and the children consume the same food prepared by their parents," said Lim.

"For teatime, families prepare snacks like curry puffs, *cucur udang* and *goreng pisang* (banana and prawn fritters) which are high-energy food but not necessarily healthy," she said.



Lim suggests giving PPR residents food subsidy cards instead of one-off payments so they can shop for healthier items like fruits and vegetables.

She highlighted that malnutrition and obesity driven by poverty at PPRs were becoming a big concern.

"We need a food subsidy scheme for the lower-income group.

"Instead of just giving one-off payments, give a food subsidy card to enable them to buy fruits and vegetables.



Families living at PPRs cannot afford to buy fruits and vegetables and turn to processed food instead.

"If you give cash, they will most likely buy rice and noodles," she said, adding that Malaysia had the highest rate of obese people among Asian countries due to poor dietary practices at low-cost housing schemes.

"The PPR residents' lack of purchasing power is one aspect that we have to deal with, and the other is their lack of knowledge,"

said Lim.

She emphasised that it did not help to only warn the poor people of diabetes, for example.

"Their immediate concern is making sure their families don't starve. For them, diabetes is a concern they will deal with later," she said.

It is important to educate people to start eating healthily now, and

one of the practices RTI teaches is the *suku-suku-separuh* meal plan, which is filling one's plate with good sources of protein (a quarter), grains (another quarter) and fruits and vegetables (half).

"We also tell them that if they have to eat outside food, they should bring a bottle of water to replace the usual sugary drink they order at the eatery," said Lim.