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Experts introduce new school protection measures to tackle mental health concerns

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) Kuala Lumpur hosted an academic forum on Nov 22, bringing together leading experts in education, psychology, and public health to address the growing emotional challenges faced by Malaysian students and to present the comprehensive 'Sekolah Selamat 2.0' policy framework.

Panellists reached a strong consensus that mental health is no longer a secondary concern but a vital skill essential for survival, calling for a multi-sectoral and systemic

transformation of the current education ecosystem.

The forum featured the participation of TAR UMT Board of Governors chairman and Alumni Council chairman Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy, TAR UMT president Prof Datu Dr Lee Sze Wei, as well as school counsellors and educators.

Delivering the keynote address, Lee stressed that mental health and emotional resilience in schools are urgent national priorities that affect not only the education sector but society at large.

He highlighted the increasing complexity of mental health in the digital age, pointing out that technology and its underlying algorithms can heighten emotional cravings and pose potential risks.

He urged school leaders, teachers, parents, families, and the government to break away from working in silos and to strengthen collaboration, emphasising that early prevention is far more effective than addressing crisis after they escalate.

Assoc Prof Datuk Dr Monna Ong Siew Siew, the lead researcher behind



Chan (front, fifth left), flanked by Ong and Lee (right) in a group photo with the forum attendees.

the 'Sekolah Selamat 2.0' proposal, presented the initiative, which aims to strengthen educational safety through expanded elements such as psychological safety, mental well-being, digital literacy, and systematic, evidence-based interventions.

This integrated system connects schools, parents, local communities,

and health and safety agencies, forming the backbone of a national policy system designed to streamline information flow and crosssector interventions.

Ong highlighted alarming statistics, including a 177 per cent increase in physical bullying cases from 2023 to 2024 and a 60 per cent rise in stu-

dents reporting symptoms of depression, anxiety, and postpandemic stress.

She explained that the framework broadens the definition of school safety beyond physical protection to encompass psychological, social, and emotional dimensions.

Its phased implementation plan includes pilot testing in 200 schools nationwide and the training of 10,000 teachers starting in 2026.

She also proposed the establishment of a National Mental Health and School Crisis Intervention Council to coordinate inter-agency efforts and to oversee pilot implementation of the new framework.

The forum concluded with shared optimism that the 'Sekolah Selamat 2.0' will continue gaining momentum and help build to school environments where psychological safety and student well-being are prioritised.