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Four in five working people injured or ill due to work: Survey

Nearly 80 percent of working people have been injured, or become ill, or both as a result of their work, according to a survey released today by the peak body for working people. The same number of people say existing penalties for employers are not enough to make them take safety seriously.

The *Work Shouldn't Hurt* work health and safety survey carried out by the ACTU in July exposes an underbelly of unsafe work practices that has led to unacceptable numbers of working people dying as a result of their work, being exposed to trauma, experiencing violence, or sustaining psychological/physical illnesses and injuries.

More than 26,000 working people responded to questions about their experiences of work health and safety, including the sorts of working conditions they had faced in the past 12 months. Areas surveyed included exposure to traumatic events – like the death of a colleague, occupational violence, hazardous conditions, poor management, and remote or isolated work.

In their survey responses, working people talked about injuries as a result of their work, from being physically assaulted (punched, and kicked), being held hostage by a patient, to being crushed, electrocuted, or burnt at work. Others said they had broken major bones or had been left traumatised or depressed by work conditions.

The results highlight an alarming growth in the rate of psychosocial (mental) injury as a result of high exposure to hazards at work. Three in five working people surveyed had experienced psychological illnesses or injuries such as stress, depression or anxiety at work. This needs immediate attention and regulation.

In 2018, the Government commissioned a report into model work health and safety legislation resulting in the Boland review, which made 34 recommendations to strengthen work health and safety laws. The ACTU has called for all recommendations to be implemented across all states and territories.

We need a strong commitment from the Morrison Government and all states and territories to prevent all workplace deaths and end all forms of workplace injuries, including the increasing level of psychosocial injuries.

We need better rights for workers' representatives to enforce safety so that no one is hurt at work. Work shouldn't hurt. Unions play a vital role in making sure work is healthy and safe.

Key findings:

- 78% of respondents had been physically or psychologically injured or ill as a result of their work;
- 78% of respondents knew someone who had been seriously injured or ill as a result of their work;
- 16% of respondents knew someone who was killed at work, or died from a work-related disease;

- In the last 12 months 47% of respondents were exposed to traumatic events, distressing situations or distressed or aggressive clients/customers;
- 66% of respondents experienced high workloads;
- 31% of respondents had experienced occupational violence (abuse, threats, or assault at work by clients, customers, the public, or co-workers).
- 61% said they has experienced poor mental health because their employer or workplace had failed to manage of address these poor work conditions;
- 91% of people did not make a workers' compensation claims in relation to this poor mental health;
- Of the 9% that did, only a third of them were approved;
- 55% said they were aware of existing conditions in their workplace that could cause serious injury or illness if not addressed.
- 80% said the penalties were not significant enough to make employers or companies take safety seriously;
- 91% said employers or companies who cause the death of a worker through gross negligence should face serious jail time (up to 20 years);
- 98% of respondents said they believed unions had a role in work health and safety;
- 91% said unions should be able to immediately enter workplaces to address health and safety issues;
- 97% said unions should be able to take employers and companies that break health and safety laws to court;

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien

"Everybody should go to work free from the fear of being killed, injured or getting ill. Work shouldn't hurt; all workers should come home from work mentally and physically safe.

"The survey highlights a horrifying level of unsafe work practices in our workplaces. Working people are paying with their lives or are left seriously injured or ill as a result of unsafe work practices.

"Unions are playing a crucial role in making sure that work is safe, but the Morrison Government's laws are failing working people. We need an overhaul of model work health and safety laws.

"We call for urgent action to prevent workplace deaths and injuries and illness as a result of work. All 34 recommendations of the Government's own sweeping review – the Boland Review – must be implemented.

"The rate of mental injuries in Australia is on the rise. The Morrison Government must urgently act to ensure that there are real deterrents in place which will force employers to take safety seriously.

"Unions play a crucial role in pushing for work health and safety legislative reform to ensure that all forms of workplace injuries - including the increasing level of psychosocial injuries - and deaths at work end."

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