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New data reinforces urgent need to make workplaces safer for women

Sexual harassment is often compounded by insecure work which deters working people from raising issues and seeking help – according to a new survey commissioned by the ACTU.

Women are more likely to be in insecure work, leaving them at greater risk of harm in the workplace.

26 per cent of retail and 22 per cent of health workers reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace in the last 12 months according to an ACTU survey – both predominantly female workforces that are frequently employed on a casual, insecure basis.

Insecure workers were significantly more like than permanent workers to not take any action after an incident of violence or harassment (50% vs 32%), because they feared negative consequences for themselves.

Women were also far less likely than men to take action after experiencing crude or offensive behaviour (53% vs 43%) and unwanted sexual attention (31% vs 25%).

The union movement calls upon the Morrison Government to take action to make workplaces safer by implementing all of the recommendations from the Respect@Work report.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O’Neil:

“The Morrison Government talked a lot this year about women’s health and safety in the workplace. We have seen very little action. They have failed to implement key recommendations from the Respect@Work report that they commissioned, and which would make a significant difference in the lives of working women.

“The issue of women’s safety at work can’t be addressed in isolation, it is worsened by insecure jobs. Women in insecure work feel disempowered because they fear reprisals from their employers, such as losing their job.

“Women in insecure work are almost twice as likely as men to fear loss of hours or jobs. They are also more likely than men to work while sick because of a lack of paid leave. This isn’t just unfair on working women; the pandemic has also shown this to be a massive public health risk.

“Only a quarter of women who took action after an incident of sexual harassment were satisfied with their employers’ response. 100 per cent of workers deserve to be safe at work. The Morrison Government is failing working women by refusing to make employers responsible for preventing sexual harassment.”

Media contact: Kleo Cruse 0433 021 999