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Half of workers in insecure jobs forced to work due to lack of paid leave

52 percent of workers in insecure jobs – including fixed-term and independent contractors, casuals, and gig platform workers – reported to have continued working while ill or injured due to the absence of paid leave, according to new data from the ACTU’s Work Shouldn’t Hurt (WSH) Survey.

While 18 percent of injured workers in secure jobs reported being unable to take time off due to lack of paid leave, in comparison, this jumped to half of all workers in insecure work.

Another alarming finding was that people in insecure work were more likely to experience physical injuries than those in secure employment, with 7 percent of secure workers reporting a physical injury compared to 11 percent of insecure workers. Mental injuries for those in insecure work also rose from 13 percent in 2021 to 20 percent in 2023.

The WSH findings support a 2023 survey by McKell Institute, the TWU, and TEACHO which showed that more than half of transport gig workers experienced work-related stress, anxiety, and mental health issues, and 56 percent of food delivery riders reported feeling pressure to rush and take risks on the road to earn enough money and avoid deactivation for being deemed too slow.

The data comes as Parliament is set to debate the remaining parts of the Closing Loopholes Bill next month, which would close loopholes that big businesses exploit to reduce the pay and conditions of working people in casual work and gig platforms.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O’Brien:

“No one should have to go to work when injured or ill simply because their job lacks the most basic of protections. Under the current law, if you’re a casual or gig worker and are injured or ill you’re forced to make the difficult decision of either taking time off with zero pay or going to work and likely worsening your condition.

“Parliament has the power to help these vulnerable workers by passing the remaining parts of the Closing Loopholes Bill, which guarantees these workers basic rights that other workers are entitled to.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

The WSH Survey is an annual, quantitative, longitudinal tracking program conducted by the ACTU Centre for Health and Safety to assess changes in work health and safety issues. The latest survey was conducted from May to June 2023 with 3,043 respondents. Quotas were applied for age, gender, and state to ensure a broadly representative sample. Full survey available in Feb but headline paper attached.

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