

Workers mental health under threat from violence and aggression, increasing work pressure and discrimination

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1 in 5 Australian workers sustained a mental health injury in the last year, according to new data released by the ACTU today.

Australian workers experienced unacceptably high levels of burn-out, stress and over-work, the latest data from the Work Shouldn't Hurt Survey reveals.

The report highlights widespread work-related psycho-social injury rates, including those caused by a spike in violence and aggression in the workplace and discrimination.

As part of Safe Work Australia's Best Practice Review Australian Unions will urge the state and federal work health and safety Ministers to introduce new regulations to tackle specific psychosocial hazards including violence and aggression in the workplace, as well as stubbornly high rates of discrimination in response to the findings. The proposed changes will require employers to take proactive steps to identify and control these risks in consultation with workers and outline these in written prevention plans.

The report confirms women suffer more injuries to their mental health than men and that younger workers are the most exposed to psychosocial hazards at work.

A quarter of working Australians aged under 34 sustained mental health injuries, a rate higher than for the general workforce.

Of those impacted, two-thirds reported needing time off work to recover. However, a third did not take time off because they had no entitlement to leave, did not want to be seen as bad workers or were concerned about missing deadlines, finding a replacement or catching up after time away.

Only around 1 in 10 workers who sustained a mental health injury filed a claim for workers compensation, compared to a claim rate three times higher by workers who experienced physical injuries. These statistics again highlight how workers compensation schemes around the country are failing workers.

Violence and aggression at work were most common in education, health and social services, with younger workers also reporting more exposure to violence and threats of violence.

Stress and the risk of burnout remain significant concerns, with 35% of all workers reporting they were regularly or always exposed to stress in their workplaces.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary, Liam O'Brien:

"This is not a new phenomenon; work has always impacted our mental health, but these figures show the significant and sustained pressures that Australian workers are under.

"The changing nature of work means that increasingly it is our minds, rather than our bodies, that are feeling the strain.

“This not only impacts front-line roles; it is playing out across public facing roles throughout the entire workforce from flight attendants to teachers, health and retail workers.

“Until we see specific, national regulations to protect workers from violence and aggression in the workplace, workload and discrimination, these problems will persist.

“Unions fought for the right to disconnect and to tackle insecure work, but we urgently need specific regulations that require employers to protect workers from these harms.”

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Media contact: Cameron Warasta (0447) 159 467