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Rules for working women failing to end workplace sexual harassment

A report released today by the Australian Human Rights Commission showing less than one in five people who experienced sexual harassment in the last five years reported it shows our workplaces rules are failing workers.

The AHRC report found one in three people had experienced sexual harassment at work in the last five years, a marked increase in the prevalence rate recorded by previous surveys. The report found that 17 percent of people who experienced workplace sexual harassment made a formal complaint, or reported it. It also found almost 80% of perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment in the past five years were male.

These findings show that the current rules which are intended to protect workers from workplace sexual harassment are failing. The current solutions are entirely reactive and individualistic and involve lengthy, costly legal processes. People are often afraid to speak up for fear of victimization. The laws need to change to make it easier for workers to get justice and to require employers to take proactive steps to prevent workplace sexual harassment before it occurs.

There's an urgent need to take steps to address all the compounding factors of gender inequality; including insecure work, wage stagnation, pay inequality and poor occupational health and safety practices. These factors create unsafe workplaces and addressing them is critical to ensure long lasting, effective solutions which protect people are risk of sexual harassment at work.

See attached report for an extensive overview of how the rules for working women need to be improved.

Quote attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil

"The survey findings show the rules are failing working women. We know that often when working women come forward about being sexually harassed at work they are ostracized or worse they may be bullied, sidelined, not promoted, or even dismissed. We need to change the rules to allow for systemic action against workplace sexual harassment.

"The ACTU has long been calling for stronger and more effective measures to prevent, address and redress all forms of violence and sexual harassment at work.

"Sexual harassment at work is driven by power imbalances and gender inequality, and compounded by poor, unsafe and insecure work practices and conditions.

"We need a package of reforms to address this, including powers for the Fair Work Commission to quickly and effectively resolve sexual harassment complaints."

Media contact: ACTU Media 03 9664 7315, or Kate Shuttleworth 044 7418 726

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