

Friday 24 June 2021

## Unions call for paid domestic violence leave as domestic sexual assault surges.

Family and domestic violence-related sexual assault surged by 13 per cent during 2020 according to figures released yesterday by the ABS.

Research from the Queensland University of Technology also found that more than two thirds of domestic violence service providers reported an increase in clients during the pandemic and had more clients reporting controlling behaviours.

These new statistics point to a broader increase of family and domestic violence which many experts believe has occurred during the pandemic. It also adds urgency to the call for all workers to have access to a minimum of 10 days paid Family Domestic Violence Leave.

A 13 per cent increase is considerably higher than the 2 per cent increase between 2018 and 2019.

The ACTU is renewing its call for a minimum of ten days of paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave to be included in national workplace laws to help women escape violent situations.

Escaping a violent relationship takes time and money. Unions representing frontline family and domestic violence workers estimate that moving to find a new, safe place for yourself and your family costs can cost up to \$20,000 and take more than 140 hours. Federal laws currently only provide for five days of unpaid leave.

This week is the two year anniversary of the International Labour Organisation's ground breaking new Convention on Violence and Harassment (C190), which recognises every workers fundamental right to be free from all forms of violence and harassment at work, including gender-based violence and harassment. The Australian Government is yet to ratify this convention despite international support and it being a recommendation of the Respect@Work report.

### **Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:**

"This data now underlines what frontline support workers and experts have been telling us: the pandemic is driving family and domestic violence to crisis levels.

"The true picture is likely to be even worse. Women would be far less likely to report such assaults if locked down in a family home and trapped in an abusive relationship.

"1 in 3 employers now offer paid leave to their employees. It saves lives and sends a powerful message that women's safety is everyone's responsibility.

"It's time for all sides of politics to unite and extend this right to all workers, by including it in the National Employment Standards.

“The Morrison Government should amend its proposed Respect@Work Bill to fully implement the recommendations and give every worker at least 10 days paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave.”

**Rape and domestic violence helplines**

Sexual Assault Counselling Australia 1800 211 028

Domestic Violence Impact Line 1800 943 539

LGBTIQ+ Violence Services 1800 497 212

**Media contact:** Isabella Tilley 0414 894 040