

Influencing a culture of zero harassment in Indonesia

It happened in the blink of an eye. A factory superior casually smacked the buttocks of a young Indonesian worker as she walked past.

It caught the attention of a Better Work Indonesia staff member as he toured the facility on an assessment visit. He immediately made his way over to the woman and her boss.

"What just happened here?" he said.

She shyly replied: "He touched me."

The manager smiled when told that behaviour is unacceptable in the workplace.

"It's fine," he said. "It's very common."

Sexual harassment in the workplace is indeed very common, according to a survey conducted in 2012 by Better Work Indonesia. It found that an alarming 85 percent of workers are concerned about sexual harassment. Furthermore, almost 80 percent of respondents said they were concerned about verbal abuse, and 87 percent cited concerns about physical abuse.

Yet only 30 percent of respondents said they reported their cases to managers or supervisors. According to a local psychologist, many victims, especially women, believe that abusive treatment is just part of the job.

"Women tolerate it," said Jackie Viemilawati, who works with an Indonesian non-government organization, Pulih Foundation. "They think they'll lose their job if they report it." Viemilawati said that victim-blaming is common in Indonesia, which also prevents victims from speaking out.

The reluctance to disclose sexual harassment is part of the problem, which is rife among Indonesian workplaces, and highlights a gender-based power imbalance prevalent where a large group of women are supervised by a small group of men. This is the case in Better Work Indonesia partner factories where around 90 percent of the workforce is female occupying positions that lack authority.

There is also widespread confusion about what constitutes harassment. Mr Lee Hyun Joo, General Manager of PT. Dream Sentosa, another Better Work Indonesia factory partner, admitted that despite drafting and annually revising his factory harassment policy, even he has a hard time understanding what actually constitutes harassment.

"Sometimes the definition [of harassment] changes whether it comes from buyers, government or Better Work Indonesia," he said. "We have trainers come into the factory, but afterwards if they ask what harassment is, only one percent can actually say what it is"..

To help workers and managers have a clear understanding of what constitutes harassment, Better Work Indonesia has developed Guidelines on the Prevention of Workplace Harassment, based on ILO conventions and adapted to the Indonesian context. The Guide will be launched in March 2013, and will be disseminated among all 50 factories that work with Better Work Indonesia.

Throughout March, Better Work Indonesia will highlight issues of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace, first by defining each type of harassment, in order to raise awareness and encourage a zero-tolerance climate. This will include public service announcement videos and messaging via social networking linking Better Work Indonesia with workers directly.

To help its factory partners achieve zero tolerance, the programme will work toward ensuring all factories have an appropriate policy in place and promote compliance with that policy.

For more information on programmes related to prevention of harassment, please contact Olivia Krishanty, Buyer Relations Advisor, at krishanty@betterwork.org.