

YOUNG WORKERS HEALTH & SAFETY SNAPSHOT



ABOUT THE YOUNG WORKERS CENTRE

The Young Workers Centre was established in 2016 to break the cycles of exploitation at work for young Victorians. We educate young people across Victoria on their rights, safety and wellbeing at work. We provide free legal advice and assistance on workplace issues. We organise and train young people to develop campaigns to improve their workplaces. We collect data and undertake research to advocate for young workers.

Our vision is a state in which young people are safe at work, do not suffer harassment or bullying, and are provided their legal entitlements. For this vision to be realised, we must encourage young people to speak up without fear and join with other young workers to make change and improve their workplaces and communities.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

The young workers research project documents life at work for young Victorians. We collect data through state-wide surveys and our legal and education programs. We interview young people about their experiences at work.

This health & safety snapshot draws upon case study interviews with young workers and data collected from the 2016 Young Workers survey. The 2016 Young Workers survey was an open access internet based survey conducted over five weeks between 20 July and 23 August 2016. The survey collected 1,028 responses. The survey was open to Victorians aged 15-30 who are currently working or have previously worked (paid or unpaid). The survey collected data on safety, pay and conditions at work.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

The 1000+ young Victorians who have shared their stories with us through interviews and surveys.

UCLA Labor Studies Centre #I am a Young Worker research project which was the inspiration for this and upcoming young worker snapshots.

This report would not be possible without the support of



This report was prepared by Sarah Bright, Keelia Fitzpatrick and Amy Fitzgerald of the Young Workers Centre.



INTRODUCTION

Entering the world of work is a significant milestone for thousands of young Victorians each and every year. It can be a positive experience and a unique opportunity for young people to gain confidence, develop their interpersonal skills and have their first taste of financial independence.

Unfortunately for many, a first job is memorable for the wrong reasons. According to WorkSafe, 49 young people aged 15-24 were injured every week in 2015-16. Our findings suggest the true figures are much higher due to underreporting. We asked over 1000 young people through surveys and interviews about life at work. 1 in 3 young people who experienced workplace injury or illness told us they did not report this to their boss or supervisor. They talked about practices that caused injury or illness, bullying and harassment in the workplace that came from customers, bosses and co-workers and a normalisation of unsafe work.

Some stories are outrageous and shocking - young women being solicited for sex at work, being advised to simply 'wear long pants' to prevent serious burns from dangerous work equipment, or paying for medical costs for workplace injuries out of their own pocket.

The common thread to this underreporting is a widespread fear of retribution for raising health or safety issues in the workplace. Young workers worried they would be targeted as troublemakers and lose shifts or the jobs entirely. The young workers who did raise these issues reported that these concerns were justified as shifts evaporated and names disappeared from rosters.

This snapshot illustrates their stories and outlines keys recommendations to ensure young people are confident to speak up and ensure these stories no longer remain the status quo.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1.** Young people are beginning their working lives without the education needed to identify workplace bullying and health & safety hazards and their employers' obligations to address them. Young people are not being equipped with the tools to confidently question unsafe practices in the workplace and confidently raise issue when needed. This has led to a normalisation of unsafe work practices as the status quo.
- 2.** Young people, particularly young women, report sexual harassment in the workplace is commonplace, unaddressed and preventable. Young people and particularly young women receive it from all directions - customers, bosses or supervisors and co-workers. Young women reported a normalisation of sexual harassment in the workplace, citing it as an everyday occurrence that was treated by employers as a 'non-issue'. They also reported being placed in unsafe work situations which resulted in sexual harassment, such as working alone early in the morning or late in the evening.
- 3.** Health & safety issues and workplace injury or illness are underreported. 1 in 3 young people who sustained workplace injuries or illnesses did not report them to their boss or supervisor. When asked to perform an unsafe task more than half will do it rather than raise it with their boss or supervisor. Young people reported fear of retaliation - such as losing their shifts or not having their contracts renewed - and fear that health & safety issues or workplace injuries or illnesses would not be taken seriously by their employer. Taking action to report an incident is seen as an extraordinary course of action, rather than the commonplace response to hazards.
- 4.** Mental Health issues related to work are not correctly understood and dealt with as workplace health issues for which employers have responsibilities. Starting work is a significant developmental milestone for young people, but if the experience comes with stressors related to mental health its many benefits are undermined. Young people reported self-censoring the injury as they weren't sure work-related mental health issues were valid workplace health issues, or they felt their employer would not see their issues as valid. Young people also cited precarious work, either through casual or temporary contract employment, as a trigger for stress and anxiety.

BULLYING & HARASSMENT

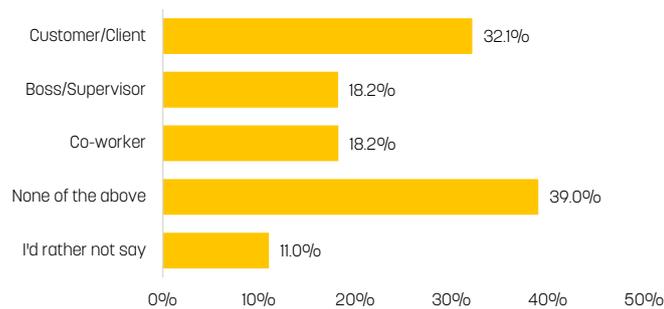
1 in 2 (49.98%) young people surveyed reported experiencing incidents of bullying or harassment at work.



Based on 999 people.

Young people experienced bullying or harassment from a number of people in the workplace - customers or clients, bosses or supervisors and co-workers. The majority of workplace bullying or harassment came from customers or clients (32.1%). Almost 1 in 5 experienced bullying or harassment from a boss or supervisor and almost 1 in 5 from a co-worker. 1 in 7 young people (14.9%) cited more than one of these offender categories.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED BULLYING OR HARASSMENT FROM ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?



Based on 999 people.

Note: Multiple selections of offender were available for this question.

WHAT YOUNG WORKERS SAID

"I feel that sexual harassment is common at work that it isn't treated as an issue. It's a daily occurrence and I would be pinpointed as sensitive if I felt uncomfortable by some of the vulgar comments made by customers daily."

Female, 23, Gaming Supervisor

"You have to consistently be polite to rude and sometimes cruel customers. This is pretty related to Trip Advisor and the stigma in a rural town of having to keep a high rating even if it means putting up with rude customers."

Female, 23, Food Service Assistant

"I was asked to work early and late at age 15-16, without any supervision. At this time I was solicited for sex by a customer...I said no and kept working"

Female, 21, Integration Aid

"I would like to know more about how to handle workplace bullying as at the moment I feel like I am being bullied by my co-worker and our supervisor. I want to face this issue the wise and smart way not just me getting sick of it then just explode."

Female, 19, Waitress

"[I] was being harassed, [I] was told to pretend it never happened."

Male, 29, Forklift Driver

"I have had to leave a job [in farm work] because of sexual harassment that my co-workers seemed to deem 'part of the process' of getting a second work visa"

Female, 23, New Zealand Temporary Visd Holder (444), Hospitality Manager

CASE STUDY: ZHANG LI



Zhang Li* is a 20 year old international student. She came to Melbourne to study in 2014 and found a job on her campus working for a fast food joint.

“The first job I ever got was just a very casual sort of job at University at one of the fast food restaurants. There was no process, no interview, no application. It was sort of like “I hear you’re looking for people. I went there and I didn’t really know what like the minimum wage was, health and safety or anything like that.”

Zhang Li worked in a tiny, cramped kitchen space surrounded by hot industrial cooking equipment. There were rice cookers on the floor, no safety gear and no training in how to use the equipment safely.

“It’s a relatively small space and there was like four workers plus the managers themselves, so it’s quite cramped, especially with all these really hot objects lying around... the hot plates are really hot. People got burnt like quite often.... there was like a rice cooker on the floor where I burnt my leg a couple of times”

“[The boss] kept telling me stories of how, like ‘oh, lots of people get burned, this other time, like, ...blah blah got burned’ ... and I was like, ‘you’re not helping, you’re not helping at all! What are you doing? Yeah, and I just hear of people getting burned all the time. [The boss] was like, ‘oh, wear long pants next time’. There’s nothing, no First Aid Kit, no nothing.”

Zhang Li was also being underpaid and was employed off the books. When Zhang Li started to question the safety conditions in her workplace and her pay and sought legal assistance to help, she stopped receiving shifts and was out of a job.

“As soon as they got the [anonymous legal] letter, they stopped calling me in... I got fired basically. I think they suspected [me]...I think it was pretty obvious because I didn’t work there very long and immediately after I came, trouble came. They probably put it together.”

**Name has been changed.*

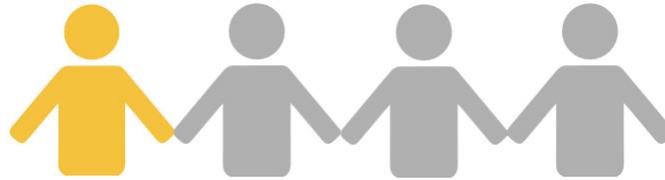
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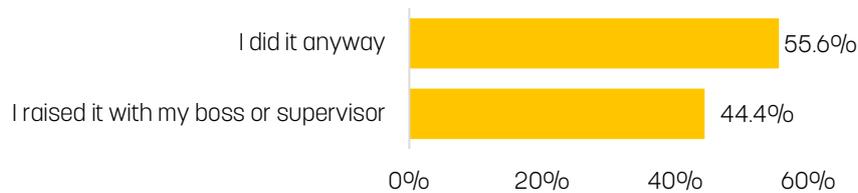
SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

1 in 4 young people surveyed (25.0%) have been asked to do something at work that made them feel unsafe.



Based on 983 responses.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ASKED TO DO UNSAFE WORK?



Based on the 242 people who reported being asked to do unsafe tasks at work.

I WAS ASKED TO DO WORK THAT WASN'T SAFE. I DID IT ANYWAY...

When placed in unsafe work situations the majority of young people (55.6%) reported they did the job anyway. People cited a normalisation or culture of performing unsafe work, pressure from employers such as franchises, and fear of speaking up due to being a new employee or being in a precarious employment arrangement such as contract or casual.

"It was a very dangerous installation job for the whole team and if I were to speak out they would tell me to f*** off"

Male, 21, Cabinetmaker

"I was new and wanted to listen to what my manager told me to do. Other people were doing it as well so I thought it was only normal to be doing that task"

Female, 19, Customer service

"Because it's a franchise and they push you"

Female, 18, Cashier

"I was on a contract and worried that if I raised the issue my contract would not be renewed."

Female, 27, Counsellor

“ I was bullied and told that if I didn't do it, I was weak. I was told that I might as well just learn how to deal with it now otherwise I should reconsider any future career in the same area. I was told I had no backbone of I didn't confront the situation ”

Female, 20, Receptionist

I SPOKE UP ABOUT SAFETY ISSUES AT WORK...

Less than half of young people (44.4%) report raising unsafe work issues with their boss or supervisor. When raising safety issues at work, some young people reported positive experiences such as changes to work practices or the removal of hazards. Others who spoke up reported little or no change without the support of a representative such as trade union delegate, pushback from supervisors and personal retaliation such as having their hours or shifts cut or even losing their jobs.

"I was removed from the situation but it was never addressed"

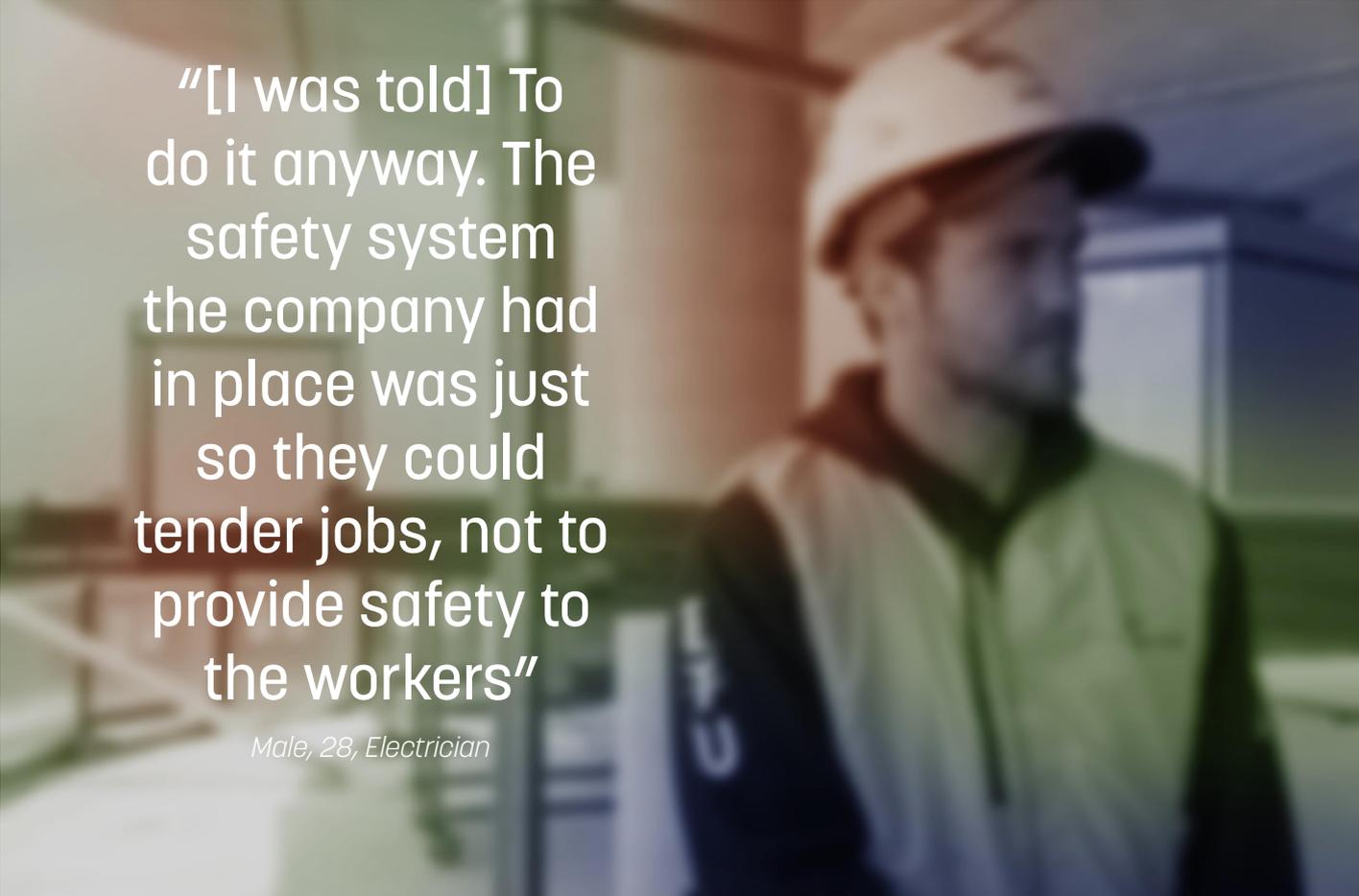
Female, 23, Hospitality Manager

"I got fired"

Female, 23, Shop Assistant

“ He [the supervisor] wasn't interested so I approached the shop steward. She came with me to speak with management and it was resolved quickly ”

Male, 26, Research Assistant



“[I was told] To do it anyway. The safety system the company had in place was just so they could tender jobs, not to provide safety to the workers”

Male, 28, Electrician

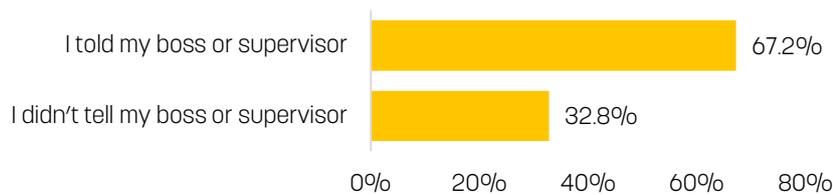
INJURY & ILLNESS

Almost 1 in 4 (23.2%) reported being injured or ill due to their work.



Based on 986 responses.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INJURED OR ILL DUE TO THEIR WORK?



Based on the 222 people who reported experiencing injury or illness in the workplace.

I DIDN'T TELL MY BOSS OR SUPERVISOR THAT I WAS INJURED OR ILL DUE TO WORK...

1 in 3 young people (32.8%) are not reporting workplace injuries or illnesses to managers or supervisors. Young people reported fear as a major contributor: fear of retribution such as losing shifts or hours, fear their injury or illness may not being taken seriously, fear their injury or illness was not valid if it was mental health related.

"Being embarrassed, not thinking they would see the injury as significant enough"

Female, 22, Registered Nurse

"Being a new apprentice"
Male, 21, Apprentice Electrician

"My hours would be cut"
Male, 27, Sales advisor

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Not thinking that mental exhaustion due to work stress was adequate reason

Female, 25, Arts Programs Coordinator

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I SPOKE UP ABOUT WORKPLACE INJURY OR ILLNESS...

The 2 in 3 who spoke up received mixed outcomes. Some reported appropriate care and support from their workplace and formal incident reporting. Others reported less than positive experiences such as paying medical costs themselves, having their illness or injury judged or deemed not significant, and others reported there simply was no outcome of them speaking up.

"Broke wrist at work, Supervisor was aware but other than filling out an incident form nothing happened. Used own health insurance to pay for hospital visits"

Female, 22, Out of school hours care educator

“ Time off, then asked to resign ”

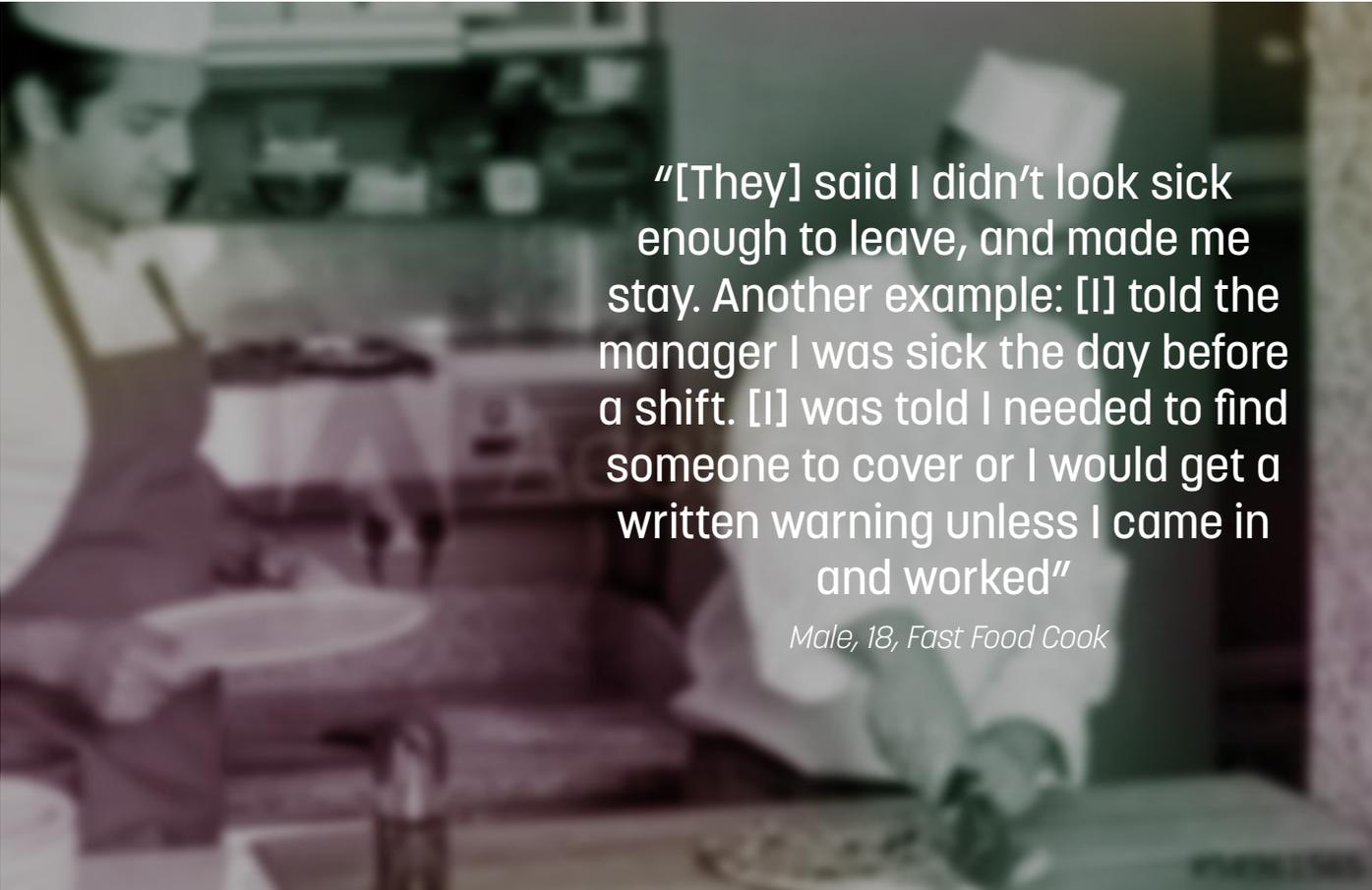
Female, 28, Sales Assistant

“ Nothing ”

Male, 17, Cook

"When I injured myself and ended up on WorkCover, I was treated in an extremely poor manner and each time I walk into work now, I feel extremely apprehensive and judged"

Female, 21, Waitress



"[They] said I didn't look sick enough to leave, and made me stay. Another example: [I] told the manager I was sick the day before a shift. [I] was told I needed to find someone to cover or I would get a written warning unless I came in and worked"

Male, 18, Fast Food Cook

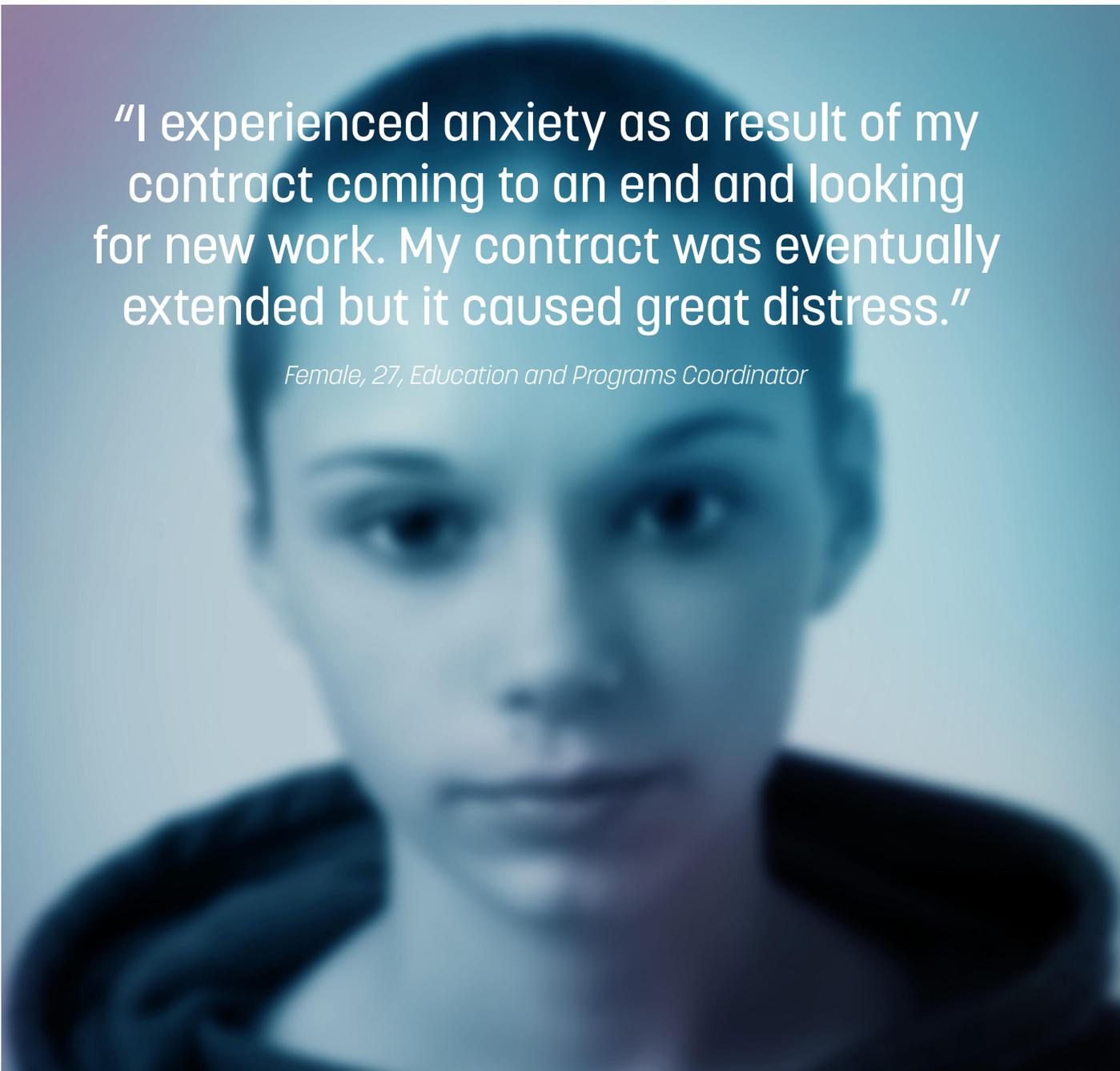
YOUNG WORKERS ON MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

“Working in a call centre is terrible for mental health due to the level of bullying by people on the phones. I think there needs to be some type of service provided to people for help”

Female, 21, Telephone Interviewer

“I am not studying and have little to no plans for studying in the future, so I think if I don't work to my absolutely mightiest now, perhaps it will make it a lot more difficult for me in the future ...It's stressful and causes debilitating anxiety. Mixed with full time work which is only night time work.... I don't believe the hours and such low pay serve justice for the exhaustion and pressure involved in the workplace.”

Female, 19, Waiter



“I experienced anxiety as a result of my contract coming to an end and looking for new work. My contract was eventually extended but it caused great distress.”

Female, 27, Education and Programs Coordinator

“

I work for a large company that violates employment law, food safety rules and OH&S regulations regularly. There's no way to do anything about it without being seen as a complainer- without managers knowing it's you and risking the consequences of that. Much of the time it's the managers themselves violating the rules, and it's such a known problem that it becomes the norm

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1.

Workplace bullying and health & safety training must be embedded in high school career and work-readiness programs and curriculum and mandated in all Victorian high schools for students Year 10 and above. This early education at the point at which young workers are entering the workplace for the first time is pivotal in ensuring they can develop habits in identifying safety and/or bullying hazards and understand their employers' obligations to address them.

2.

Sexual harassment in the workplace must be specifically defined and recognised as a workplace health & safety issue by WorkSafe and other government bodies. State and federal governments must collect data on sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace so that resources for prevention are correctly allocated. The introduction of recognised Women's Advocates in the workplace will raise the profile of sexual harassment as a workplace issue at the workplace level. Advocates would be entitled to training on gendered workplace health & safety issues and recognised as participants in consultation processes alongside other representatives.

3.

a) Young workers should not have to risk losing their job to have their safety or bullying concerns investigated and taken seriously. The creation of an online platform that allows workers to report and rate employer responses to incidents of workplace health & safety or bullying would validate workers' experiences whilst driving improvements to employer health & safety practices. Like the popular platforms Trip Advisor and Glassdoor (where users rate their experience with a company as recruitment candidates or employees), this tool would similarly elevate the power of individual stories and voices to impact an employers' practices and thereby their commercial reputation.

b) WorkSafe must introduce a bullying code to improve employer compliance with the requirement to provide a safe healthy workplace mandated by the OHS Act. Improvements must also be made to WorkSafe incident reporting mechanisms to ensure that anonymity is respected where necessary for the worker. In particular, systems that facilitate anonymous reporting must include bullying. Serious hazards or incidents must be escalated even if the worker wishes to remain anonymous.

4.

a) Injury to mental health and wellbeing is not being perceived by young people as a valid workplace health issue in the same way as physical injuries. Early education, through a mandated schools program outlined at Recommendation 1, is required for young people to conceptualise stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues as important and avoidable workplace hazards.

b) Despite Australia's high and increasing figures of precarious employment, there remains an insufficient level of research examining the links between precarious work and its impact on mental health. There is an opportunity to fill this gap in research to ensure that national efforts being made to improve the mental wellbeing of young people are not weakened by a failure to tackle potentially injurious forms of employment.





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