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MEDIA RELEASE

Australian workplaces rife with bullying, survey finds

Australian workplaces are rife with bullying, with almost one in three (30%) employees claiming they have been bullied at work; one in four (24%) claiming they have been discriminated against, and 44 per cent stating they have witnessed their colleagues experience either of these, a national survey of over 2,000 employees has found.

The Workplace Pulse Quarterly Survey, conducted by online learning and information management provider, WorkPro, reveals that bullying remains a feature of the modern day workplace; 27 per cent of respondents say they feel bullying or discrimination has happened to them within the past two years.

When asked about their peers, almost half (46%) of respondents say they have seen their colleagues bullied or discriminated against within the past two years; 31 per cent of this group say multiple times.

Tania Evans, Business Manager of WorkPro said the problem is more prevalent than many employers realise.

"It's quite shocking to hear from employees that this sort of behaviour continues to happen in modern times, but organisations need to realise that bullying and unfair treatment of staff is occurring and could be impacting their own workplace culture or worse still, exposing them to the risk of liability, possible fines and even brand damage," Ms Evans said.

"Managing the risks is about empowering your people to fully understand their rights and responsibilities at work, and to feel like they can speak up on inappropriate behaviour without experiencing recrimination as a result," she said.

The research found Australian employees are very aware of workplace sensitivities; almost three quarters (71%) of respondents say they worry about offending colleagues in a discriminatory way, such as on the basis of gender, disability or other distinctive attributes.

However despite a strong level of awareness, 27 per cent express uncertainty regarding when their own rights are being violated and 31 per cent are under the wrong impression when it comes to who is legally responsible to provide this information, indicating a need for further education.

Ms Evans said it was surprising that given the business risks employers are still not ticking all the boxes on Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) education

"The results show Australian employees have a thirst for knowledge about their workplace rights and obligations" Ms Evans said.

“More specifically, employees indicated they would most value information on: what to do if bullied or discriminated against (16%), their workplace rights (14%), unacceptable vs. acceptable workplace behaviour (12%), who to report an incident to (11%) – while 46 per cent want information on all of the above, before commencing a new role.

“What many employers fail to realise is that they don't have to be directly involved, or even aware, of an incident for them to be liable. They can be prosecuted for an incident that happens between other staff members, as well as for not providing employees with adequate OHS and EEO information and training, yet the latter is an area often left alone in terms of induction,” she said.

The Workplace Pulse research, conducted in June 2008 surveyed a sample of 2,146 employees applying for work through recruitment agencies across Australia, to gain an understanding of the experiences and beliefs about bullying and discrimination among Australian employees today.

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Notes to Editor:

Definitions:

- Discrimination is treating someone unfairly because of a personal characteristic or attribute;
- Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed toward an employee, or group of employees, that creates a risk to health and safety

About WorkPro:

WorkPro is an online e-learning and information management solution, specialising in the delivery of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) induction training.

The system represents best practice in the mitigation of workplace risk and assists employers in delivering mandatory workplace training information to employees and contractors (as well as on-hire employees or 'temps').

WorkPro's training combines the delivery of tailored and standard learning modules, in line with changing legislative requirements. The system was designed to help employers verify and centrally store candidates' personal, employment and induction information, such as residency status or prior learning assessments, for future-proofing.

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