



Safety in ACT Workplaces for Young Workers

REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 2017

 **UNIONSACT**

WE STAND FOR WORKING PEOPLE. ALWAYS.

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UnionsACT is the independent voice for over 33,000 union members and 15,000 community supporters. Many tens of thousands more working people have their conditions of work set and improved by the work of our affiliates.



We are the ACT's leading voice for working people, their families and communities.

We are proudly and fearlessly independent, and advocate solely in the interests of our affiliates and their members.

Our mission is to create a society and economy that operates in the genuine interests of working people.

We campaign for **big, important and permanent changes** to improve the safety, dignity and health of all working people, at work and in the community.

OUR VALUES

WE ARE UNION

We are proudly union and stand for the principles of unity, solidarity, democracy and dignity of work.

WE ARE INDEPENDENT

We fiercely and fearlessly represent the interests of our affiliates, their members and working people, and the communities they live in.

WE ARE RESPECTFUL

We respect each other, our affiliates, our allies and we do not underestimate our opponents.

About UnionsACT



UnionsACT is the Canberra region's leading advocate for working people, their families and their communities.

We are proudly and fearlessly independent, and advocate solely in the interests of our affiliates and their members.

UnionsACT advocates for big, important and permanent changes to make the ACT economy and society operate in the genuine interests of working people.



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Trades & Labour Council of the ACT **ABN 31 724 041 495**

UnionsACT acknowledges that Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people.

We pay respect to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

About this Report



As part of its commitment to promoting workplace safety, UnionsACT engages in research on attitudes and awareness of safety in the workplace. Promoting safe workplaces is core business for UnionsACT.

In January/February 2017, UnionsACT conducted research interviews with young workers aged 15 to 25 about their experiences in work. The purpose of this research was to gain insights into the attitudes of young workers towards safety, and to better understand what issues young workers face in their workplaces.

With this information, UnionsACT hopes to better understand the challenges and priorities for young workers on a range of issues to do with workplace rights and workplace safety, and to improve awareness raising activities and initiatives.

Summary of Findings

Young workers lack experience and are generally unfamiliar with workplace procedures and policies.

Over half of respondents stated that they had been exposed to unsafe work practices.

Most respondents were not aware of their basic rights as workers

Over seventy percent of respondents reported being bullied or harassed at work.

Respondents who were aware of their rights reported that they felt afraid or to speak up or complain, with the principle concern being dismissal.

A high number of female respondents reported unsafe work practices or harassment of a sexual nature.



Methodology

UnionsACT undertook interviews with young people aged 15-25. The interviews consisted of 21 questions, covering areas including “bullying and harassment”, “unsafe workplaces”, awareness of minimum workplace standards, and demographic questions. Questions included open-ended “essay” style questions.

The randomly selected sample totalled 263 people. The surveys were conducted in person and online during January/February 2017.



Safety Findings

Two specific questions were asked relating to their safety at work:

1. *Have you ever worked in conditions that felt unsafe? If yes, tell us about what happened.*
2. *Have you ever felt bullied or harassed at work? If yes, tell us about what happened.*

UNSAFE WORKING CONDITIONS

53% of respondents have been put in conditions that made them feel unsafe at work.

YOUNG WORKERS SAID:

“There was one instance where the cafe had a faulty power point back of house and one young worker got zapped, so the bosses tried to comfort her and be super nice obviously so that she wouldn’t fill in an incident report. an older worker also got zapped and he pushed the bosses to do something about it.”

Aged 21

Have you ever worked in conditions that felt unsafe?



■ Yes - 53% ■ No - 47%

“When I had my first job at 14 and 9 months, I worked a lot in the back docks of the retail store. I often cut my hand on rusty nails, old staples, and metal trolleys, and would fall and hurt myself occasionally due to lots of rubbish on the ground.”

Aged 24

BULLYING & HARASSMENT

70% of respondents have felt bullied or harassed in the work place.

A higher number of respondents who have experienced harassment and unsafe working conditions were female.

- 77% of respondents who felt unsafe in their work environment were female.
- 78% of respondents who were bullied or harassed in the workplace were female.

YOUNG WORKERS SAID:

“I was never allowed to question incorrect pays/ shifts or I would get in trouble from management for causing issues in the workplace.”

Aged 21

“Had \$0.10c/hour deducted for asking why I was being underpaid.”

Aged 18

“Worked with a verbally abusive man who got in a few physical fights with other male employees. He was good at his job so he was never fired.”

Aged 23

Have you ever felt bullied or harassed at work?



■ Yes - 70% ■ No - 30%



SEXUAL HARASSMENT

A significant number of female respondents reported that they had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.

YOUNG WORKERS SAID:

“I was threatened with rape by an anonymous note at work.”

Aged 21

“At a cafe in Queanbeyan, the staff would look at me in a sexual way and ask me about the size of my boyfriends penis.”

Aged 18

“I was harassed by a coworker. I ended up quitting because my work refused to acknowledge that the guy was doing any wrong.”

Aged 18

“When I worked for an upper class restaurant I was sexually assaulted a number of times. This was molestation, not rape, but I note that after I complained to my supervisor after the fifth time it happened, there were no repercussions for him, and I had to continue to work with him and deal with his touching and comments. One of my male coworkers eventually spoke to him, and he left me alone. This went on for about 2 months.”

Aged 24

“My manager called me fat (I was severely underweight) and made sexist comments constantly to female staff - but was really ‘buds’ with the male staff.”

Aged 21



RESPONDENTS UNDER 18 – SAFETY

The largest group of respondents aged under 18 were in Year 11 (33 percent), with the remainder in Year 12, apprenticeships, commencing tertiary studies.

- Respondents aged 18 years or under were less likely to report working in conditions that felt unsafe, or being bullied.
- Over half (60 percent) of respondents reported feeling bullied or harassed (compared to 70 percent overall).
- Respondents reported that inexperience and lack of awareness of their safety and workplace rights was primary reason for unsafe conditions.

YOUNG WORKERS SAID:

“My boss at the pizza place was really horrible to me in every shift and then fired me for no reason.”

Aged 16

“A older and higher ranking employee and Hogs Breath constantly was belittling me, giving me looks that made me feel very uncomfortable and would often ask if I was a “retard” or “stupid”. Some nights I would come home in tears. My decision to leave the job was largely impacted by her behaviour.”

Aged 16

“A pizza kitchen, the over powering greasy smell made me sick and i had to vomit several times during work”

Aged 17

Have you ever worked in conditions that felt unsafe?



■ Yes - 25% ■ No - 75%

Have you ever felt bullied or harassed at work?



■ Yes - 60% ■ No - 40%

Next Steps

There is very low awareness of safety rights and responsibilities amongst young people entering the workforce or in work.

IMPROVE AWARENESS OF WORK-PLACE SAFETY FOR YOUNG WORKERS

As part of our commitment to promoting safety at work, UnionsACT will work with affiliates, government and industry to increase awareness of workplace safety amongst young workers.

In particular, UnionsACT is expanding its longstanding work with the Education Directorate to engage with students, through Work Experience, and workplace learning. UnionsACT is also working at universities and CIT to raise awareness of workplace amongst young workers.

WORK WITH GOVT. TO STRENGTHEN RIGHTS FOR YOUNG WORKERS AGED UNDER 18 AND INCREASE PENALTIES FOR WHS BREACHES

Young workers are an exceptionally vulnerable group of workers, especially for those workers aged under 18. Currently, the existing ACT safety rights for children in the workplace (aged 15-18) are flouted by unscrupulous employers. Additionally, the regulator

is not adequately resourced to enforce the law or prosecute employers who break the law.

UnionsACT will work the ACT Government and the regulators to strengthen protections for vulnerable young workers, and increase penalties for severe workplace safety violations.

SAFETY REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAINING & APPRENTICE FUNDING

UnionsACT research, as well as data from the ACT Government, shows that apprentices and trainees experience serious workplace accidents at twice the rate of the rest of the workforce. This is especially catastrophic for apprentices and group training apprentices in the construction industry.

UnionsACT will work with the ACT Government to introduce conditions of funding that require apprenticeship and trainee providers, and host employers, to provide safe workplaces. This requirement would see funding suspended or removed in the event of systemic or serious safety incidents involving young workers.

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