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Sexual assault and harassment 'rife' in mines

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More than one in five women working in Western Australia's mining industry have been sexually assaulted or offered better conditions in exchange for sexual favours, a new report detailing the sexual harassment and abuse of female fly-in fly-out workers has found.

Almost half of the surveyed female FIFO workers said they did not believe the reporting of sexual harassment was encouraged by

managers, and they feared being black-listed as troublemakers if they came forward.

The women said the sexual harassment was perpetrated by co-workers, managers and supervisors who pressured female workers into sexual activity in exchange for access to training and job opportunities.

The survey, by the Australian Workers Union and the Mining and Energy Union, included responses from 425 FIFO workers, including 125 women. The results are included in the unions' submission to a state parliamentary

inquiry into sexual harassment of women in the mining industry.

Daniel Walton and Tony Maher, the national leaders of the two unions, called for an independent body to tackle the "sex abuse cover-up culture at WA mines".

"While it's shocking so many workers have been sexually abused at mine sites, what's more shocking still is the mine management culture of cover-up and victim-punishment," Mr Walton said.

Mr Maher said there was an "all-powerful culture of 'get on with job or get out' on mining sites:

"Mining giants are very happy to feature smiling women in PR and marketing materials but as soon as it becomes mildly inconvenient to protect their safety at work, they head for the hills."

One female worker surveyed

said she recently became single and "some men at work will refuse to talk to me now because I will not sleep with them".

Another female employee said she would not go into the crib room after experiencing and witnessing "so much leering and sexual comments".

"I have seen a man watch porn on (the) bus and plane. I have found (a) porn magazine in a truck. I have had underwear stolen. I have had a male try (to) get into my room. I have witnessed a colleague being videoed while eating her

dinner and this video was shared in a group chat while making pig noises," she said.

"A female crew member on my crew was bashed by a male colleague. Bystanders did not report. People were saying she got what she deserved. I reported harassment on numerous occasions and nothing was done. I sat in my superintendent's office crying my eyes out, begging to be moved ... I heard nothing back, he didn't even check on me."

Twenty-two per cent of women surveyed said they had been offered improved conditions of

employment or career advancements that were dependent on sexual favours, either explicitly or implicitly

One in five women said they had experienced physical acts of sexual assault, and two-thirds had experienced verbal harassment of a sexual nature.

Unions said mining employers should provide more security measures at FIFO worksites including panic buttons, self-closing doors, electronic locking, duress alarms and swipe card locks.

Resource sector employers said while action was being taken to

tackle sexual harassment, they recognised there was a higher-than-average prevalence of sexual harassment reported across the industry.

Australian Mines and Metals Association chief executive Steve

Knott said "union bosses stating managers are doing nothing and seeking to engage in victim punishment is indicative of their increasing detachment from the sector ... Rather than hurl uninformed abuse from the sidelines, we would welcome any positive input they may have that seeks to add to positive culture changes."

'Some men at work will refuse to talk to me now because I will not sleep with them'

FEMALE MINE WORKER
SURVEY RESPONDENT