

Indonesia - Female Blue collar workers denied maternal rights : Study

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Harsh working conditions, fear of losing job, lack of facilities hurt blue collar workers Some women give birth without maternity leave.

Indonesian women working in factories are still being denied their maternal rights, according to a study conducted by women's rights group Perempuan Mahardhika.

The study, carried out from August to November, polled 773 women working in 45 factories at Kawasan Berikat Nusantara (KBN) Industrial complex in Cakung, North Jakarta.

It found that 118 of the workers polled were currently or have been pregnant in the last three years. Half of them claimed to have felt insecure about their jobs and their pregnancy, the study said.

"In our interactions with the workers, we heard so many stories about the conditions the experience. That spurred us to do a more intense and specific investigation," Perempuan Mahardhika research coordinator Vivi Widayawati said.

"These numbers back up their stories on what their lives were like at the garment factories."

Researcher Sapta Widi said his team had interviewed each respondent for up to five hours on at least two separate occasions.

"We start with a questionnaire as a guide," he told *The Jakarta Post* on Tuesday. "Then we conduct a more in-depth interview to learn more details about the women's experience."

The research team consisted of 16 current or former garment workers, all of whom were women, "so the data team understood what the workers were going through and were able to communicate with them in their own language," he said.

The women's worries were the result of several factors, the survey showed, ranging from harsh working conditions, the fear of losing their jobs, to the lack of facilities available for pregnant or breastfeeding women.

Four out of the 25 currently pregnant women went so far as to conceal their pregnancies, which Vivi said was because of the contractual nature of the women surveyed were on short term contracts.

"When their contract is about to end, they think the only way they can hang on to their job is by hiding their pregnancy," she said.

Even when their pregnancies were known, the survey showed that it was not taken into consideration by the factory's management. "If the workers don't reach their production targets, they are forced to work overtime without pay," Perempuan Mahardhika national secretary Mutiara Ika Pratiwi said. "No concessions are made for the pregnant women."

There weren't even chairs available for the women to rest on, she added. Toilets were also hard to access.

Seven of the women workers experienced miscarriages which they attributed partially to the tough conditions.

"Even the women workers that successfully give birth are not secure," she said.

"Sixteen out of the 86 respondents did not receive any paid maternity leave." Nine of them were forced to sign new contracts while the remaining seven lost their jobs.

Solwati, a public relations officer for PT Kawasan Berikat Nusantara, was not available for comment on Tuesday.

Based on the survey results, Perempuan Mahardhika set out a series of recommendations for the government, companies and labor unions. Ika said the organization hoped to hold a social dialog with all the stakeholders early next year.

Jumisih, the chairperson of the Inter Factory Labor Federation, a labor union which counts some of the Cakung laborers among its members, said the survey confirmed her own experience in talking with the women workers.

She thought that government oversight was the key to solving the problems exposed by the research.

"The regulations in the 2003 Employment Law are actually very comprehensive," she told the *Post*. "the only thing that's needed is strict and regular supervision by the Manpower Ministry."

She said her union and other organizations were ready to participate in that process but could not do it effectively without government intervention.

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