

# Addressing mental health at work

## Guidelines due next year to give bosses and workers more clarity on issue

By YUEN MEIKENG  
meikeng@thestar.com.my

**PETALING JAYA:** To promote better mental well-being, the Human Resources Ministry will be coming up with guidelines on mental health in the workplace by next year.

The ministry said it recently concluded research on mental health in the workplace through the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH).

"More comprehensive guidelines on the subject will be released to employers, employees and occupational safety and health practitioners by next year.

"We hope that these guidelines will increase awareness of the factors arising at the workplace that cause psychosocial diseases and assist in preventing them," the min-

istry told *Sunday Star*.

This is in line with the recent move by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation, with both having come out with guidelines and policy briefs on mental health at work.

Globally, 15% of working-age adults live with a mental disorder, based on the "Mental Health at Work" policy brief published by both organisations.

In May, it was reported that 58% of workers in Malaysia admitted to feeling burnt out from their work in the last three months, based on a study by human resource solutions provider Employment Hero.

However, the ministry said it is unfair to say that Malaysia's work culture deals with a high amount of stress because there are many fac-

tors that can affect one's mental health.

"WHO's definition of stress is 'any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain'.

"Nevertheless, Malaysia's current law – the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) – protects workers in the country from the hazards that originate from the workplace," the ministry said.

Under the Act, there is a regulation that requires employers to report to the DOSH if an employee suffers from an accident, dangerous occurrence, occupational poisoning, or disease.

"There were only 24 psychosocial cases reported to the department over the past five years, from 2016 to 2021.

"The figure is comparatively lower than what has been reported

in the media.

"Hence, if there are more cases, we call on employers and medical practitioners to report any psychosocial cases that they believe stem from the workplace," the ministry urged.

On the upcoming guidelines next year, both bosses and workers lauded it as a way to create more awareness on mental well-being, which has become a key issue today.

"Having clear guidelines will allow more attention to such matters," said Malaysian Employers Federation president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) president Mohd Effendy Abdul Ghani said the guidelines can encourage employers to take action on mental stress faced by workers.

"Such guidelines would be good

for workers to know their rights and for bosses to have a guide on how to handle the cases.

"The guidelines can also be part of the standard operating procedure at work," he said.

The MTUC also hoped that mental health can be included in the OSHA since it is the law that protects workers.

"Perhaps more discussion is needed on this, but the first step forward is to engage with all parties including workers on this," added Mohd Effendy.



Should Malaysian workers be given mental health leave?

See pages 20-21

## Kiulu folks mull tagal system for forest conservation

By STEPHANIE LEE  
stephanielee@thestar.com.my

**KOTA KINABALU:** People in Kiulu are planning to adopt a tagal system in their forests to preserve the flora and fauna in the district.

The idea of having a tagal system, which limits the entry and activities conducted in specified areas, was

mooted by Kiulu assemblyman Datuk Joniston Bangkuai.

Bangkuai, who is also Sabah Assistant Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, said the proposal follows the success of river tagal, an initiative to regulate fish catches that has since become a tourist attraction.

He said the community's adop-

tion of the system is an excellent way to demonstrate their ongoing dedication to the preservation of the environment, which includes wild animals that live in surrounding areas.

"The abundance of pristine plants and wildlife in Kiulu has made it a popular destination for eco-tourists.

"While we advocate for the locals to turn their villages into tourist hotspots, we want them to have a deep appreciation for their natural surroundings," he said during a biosphere reserve roadshow at the Kiulu rainforest park on Friday.

Bangkuai said while he understood that villagers have been hunting for food for generations, he also

believed that a regulation should be put into place.

He said while the existing tagal system tries to limit the depletion of freshwater resources, similar approaches should be implemented in the community forest.

He said this would ensure that the forest was free of hunting activity for a set period of time.