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NGO: Provide decentralised mental health services to workers

MIGRATION can cause significant stress through loss of familial support, and difficulties in integrating into a new work environment and a new community, says Tenaganita executive director Glorene Das.

This is why there is a need for mental health services for employees, she said when contacted.

Tenaganita is a human rights NGO dedicated to helping and protecting migrants, refugees, women and children from exploitation, discrimination, slavery and human trafficking.

Glorene said decentralised mental health services should be provided, not only by employers at the workplace but also by the government, along with adequate and consistent training in mental health awareness.

Tenaganita's registered counselor and programme manager Fajar Santoadi said based on the cases he had come across, most mental health issues were directly linked

to the hardships faced by migrant workers.

"They may face issues related to their employers. This could be in the form of abuse related to salary issues, limited or restricted communication and freedom of movement, isolation, and stress in managing distant families.

"As such, migrant workers especially the blue-collar workers, need mental healthcare ranging from psychiatric treatment to help them maintain good mental health," he said.

Fajar said they occasionally attend to severe mental health problem survivors among workers in the labour sector.

"They could be workers who are facing legal violation and labour trafficking cases and we need to refer them to psychiatric facilities but this is not easily available," he added.

He said maintenance and prevention of mental health problems could only exist with good and



Fajar says migrant workers facing mental health issues may need psychiatric treatment.

humane working conditions that would allow migrant workers to function with all their needs fulfilled.

"Certain restrictions in the law and practice governing migrant workers in Malaysia do not allow some functions such as having their family around.

"Therefore it imposes stressors

and contributes to mental health problems," he said.

Another NGO that offers emotional support through phone, Befrienders Kuala Lumpur chairman Justin Victor said it would be ideal for organisations to provide mental healthcare support or any form of peer support for the migrant workers.

"Our callers at Befrienders are mostly Malaysians. This could be because our Befrienders speak mostly in Malay, English, Mandarin, Cantonese and Tamil.

"The language barrier may be a reason why the migrant workers do not call us. However, it will be ideal to ensure their mental healthcare is taken care of as they are living away from their family in a different country far away," he said.

The All Women's Action Society (Awam) Information & Communications officer Jernell Tan Chia Ee said Awam provided free legal information and

counselling services.

"So even for migrants, as long as they speak English, Malay or any of the mainstream vernacular languages such as Mandarin or Tamil, they can reach out to us," she said.

Tan said as for corporations and individuals who were hiring these migrant workers, they should be mindful of their mental health needs and at least have some details on where to refer their workers if there was a need.

Awam's helpline is 016-2374 221 or 016-2284 221.

When contacted, a spokesperson for the Human Resources Ministry shared that there were no mental healthcare-related policies under the ministry for migrant workers in the country for now.

However, the spokesperson said other employment rights that fell under the Social Security Organisation (Socso) and the Labour Department were in place to protect migrant workers.