

Good News
Department of Labor and Employment
Bureau of Working Conditions
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DOLE underscores importance of workers' mental health

On 22 July 2020, a webinar entitled “Strengthening Mental Health in the Workplace Programs” was presented by the Project Inclusion Network (PIN) in partnership with the Department of Labor of Employment (DOLE). For the DOLE, present are Undersecretary (Usec) Ana C. Dione and Assistant Secretary (Asec) Ma. Teresita S. Cucueco.

In her welcome remarks, Usec Dione sadly noted that mental health has been an underrated issue for the past years especially due to its viability in the workplace with the stigma and discrimination that comes with it. As a result, she said that this has led to an inclination of workers at risk or with mental health conditions to keep it within themselves.

Pursuant to DOLE Department Order No. 208, Series of 2020 (DO 208-20) or the Guidelines for the Implementation of Mental Health Workplace Policies and Programs for the Private Sector, Usec Dione encourages the private sector to build an effective system of addressing mental health issues of the employees especially at this time of crisis. She added that the issuance of DO 208-20 is one of the initiatives of the DOLE in addressing the issue on mental health especially at this time of health crisis.

Admittedly, Asec Cucueco shared that she herself is experiencing mental stress because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Highlighting the importance of mental health, she also added that the issuance of DO 208-2020 is very timely though there were some constraints on the roll out of the Guidelines.

Asec Cucueco emphasized that mental health must be understood that it is a state of well-being. Unlike physical health that may be related to how we feel, mental health looks at how we cope with the stresses we face every day including stresses at work, she said. Looking at mental health conditions, she discussed that these relate to how we think, how we feel, and how we act.

Citing the statistical reports of the World Health Organization (WHO), Asec Cucueco shared that over 450 million people around the world suffer from different mental or neurological disorders. By 2030, the WHO predicts that business all over the world will lose approximately 12 billion workdays due to depression and anxiety disorders. Sadly, she noted that 9 out of 10 people with mental health conditions experience stigma and discrimination.

With reference to a 2012 statistics, Asec Cucueco reported that the Philippines has recorded 2,558 suicide cases caused by mental health problems and that it is projected that approximately 4.5 million Filipinos are suffering from depression or any mental health issues.

Asec Cucueco ultimately emphasized that implementation of policies and programs in relation to DO 208-20 is the responsibility of all employers through their safety and health committee and that this is now being monitored by DOLE's labor inspectors. As of 08 July 2020, she said that 15, 696 establishments were already jointly monitored by DTI and DOLE pursuant to the *DTI and DOLE Interim Guidelines on Workplace Prevention and Control of COVID-19*. Of those monitored, it was noted that 294 establishments have no physical and mental resiliency activities, while 249 establishments lack referral system.

"Mental health is really a different scope. It is an illness that we do not see but people feel," Asec Cucueco said. She added that we should ultimately aim for a safe space workplace free from feeling of being scared and anxious because of stigma and discrimination at workplaces.

Full text of DO 208-20 may be viewed and downloaded at <https://bit.ly/2EBIf9s> while a replay of the webinar may be accessed through the official Facebook page of Project Inclusion at <https://bit.ly/3fcxTIt>

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