



ECONOMIC RIGHTS INSTITUTE
BUILDING BRIDGES TO BETTER WORK

SUICIDE IN THE CHINESE ELECTRONICS SECTOR

DR. DIMITRI KESSLER PH.D.
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR



Responsible public procurement.
Rights of electronics workers.

4TH DECEMBER, 2017



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THE FOXCONN SUICIDES



THE FOXCONN SUICIDES



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DISPUTED VIEWPOINTS

Forbes & the Economist

- Chinese experience 22 suicides per 100,000 people per yr
- Foxconn employs 1,000,000 people; suicide within expected “norm”

Dr. Michael Phillips

- The Foxconn suicides clustered in time [7 suicides in one month]
- Foxconn publicity heightened risk of suicide [the Werther effect]



DISPUTED VIEWPOINTS

Boy Lüthje

- Foxconn conditions “better” versus other electronics firms

ICO

- Rising aspirations of Chinese youth blocked by limited opportunities

SACOM

- “Appalling” & “draconian” employment conditions & management contribute to work pressure which results in suicide
- Suicide is form of protest

China Labor Bulletin

- Improve workers’ income so they depend less on overtime
- Reduced overtime will permit friendship, socializing





HIDDEN BEHIND FOXCONN



THE NEWER TREND

Foxconn victims of suicide were:

- Avg of 21.7 yrs old
- Living in the city

Review of Chinese suicides from 2002 to 2011 shows:

- 44% of suicides were of people 65 yrs old or older
- Close to 80% of suicides occurred in the countryside

2008 studies show 1% of Chinese 24 yrs old or younger committed suicide by jumping from building

- 88% of Foxconn suicides jumped from a building



THE LESSER KNOWN SUICIDES

Of 64 electronics suppliers where ERI conducted surveys,
14 reported incidents of suicide

Suggests in excess of 20% of electronics suppliers
experienced suicides



THE LESSER KNOWN SUICIDES

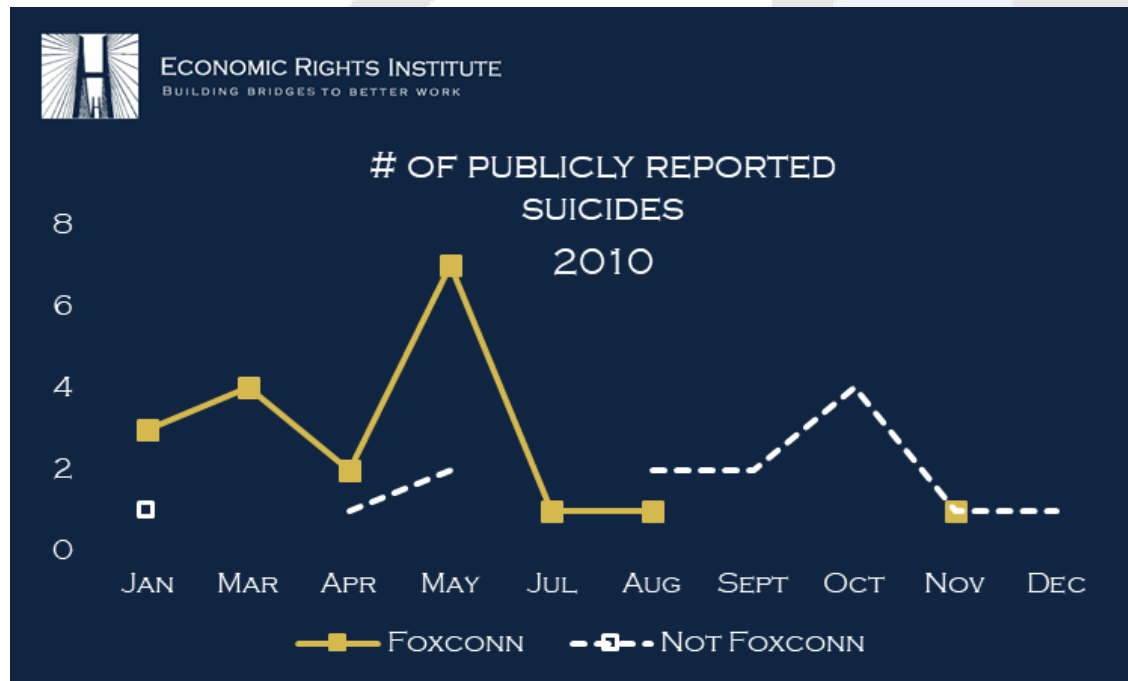
ERI collected internet references on 122 suicides in Chinese electronics suppliers:

- 32 Foxconn incidents
- 90 non Foxconn incidents



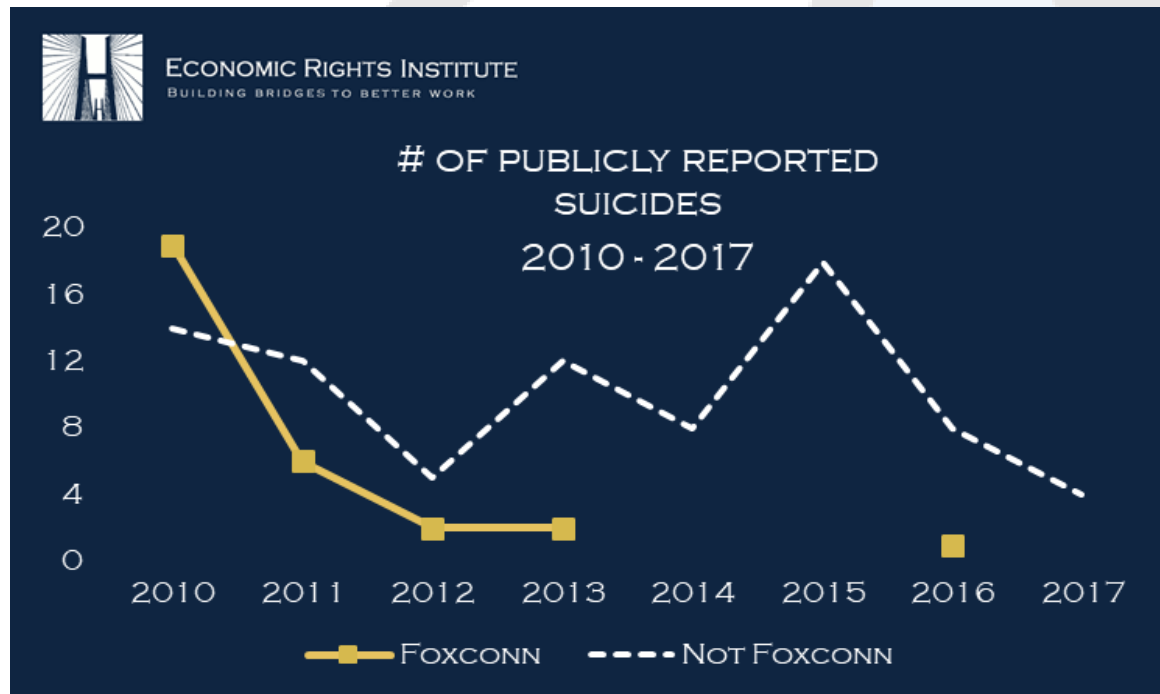
THE FOXCONN EFFECT

Non Foxconn suicides rise with Foxconn suicides, show distinct trend 6 months following Foxconn spike



THE LIMITS OF THE FOXCONN EFFECT

Non Foxconn suicides evolve independently of Foxconn



THE LESSER KNOWN SUICIDES: DATING

Worker kills self with knife after murdering girlfriend when she refuses to visit his home province

Two workers poison themselves in the dormitories in response to difficulties finding girlfriends on the internet



THE LESSER KNOWN SUICIDES: TIME OFF

Management permitted time off; under production pressure, management required worker to return to work sooner; following dispute with supervisor, she clocked out a half hour into afternoon shift, rushed to dormitories & jumped

Worker requests time off; management gives permission for a day, so worker simply doesn't go to work; fired for missing work with income deductions; worker jumps from building



THE LESSER KNOWN SUICIDES: HOSTILITY

Worker overdoses on sleeping pills following dispute with supervisor; other employees suggest string of suicides in firm of 10,000

Single mother under pressure of criticism by supervisor requests time off, even cuts her wrists unsuccessfully; supervisors don't believe; worker jumps from building following discussion with supervisor



THE LESSER KNOWN SUICIDES: PROTEST

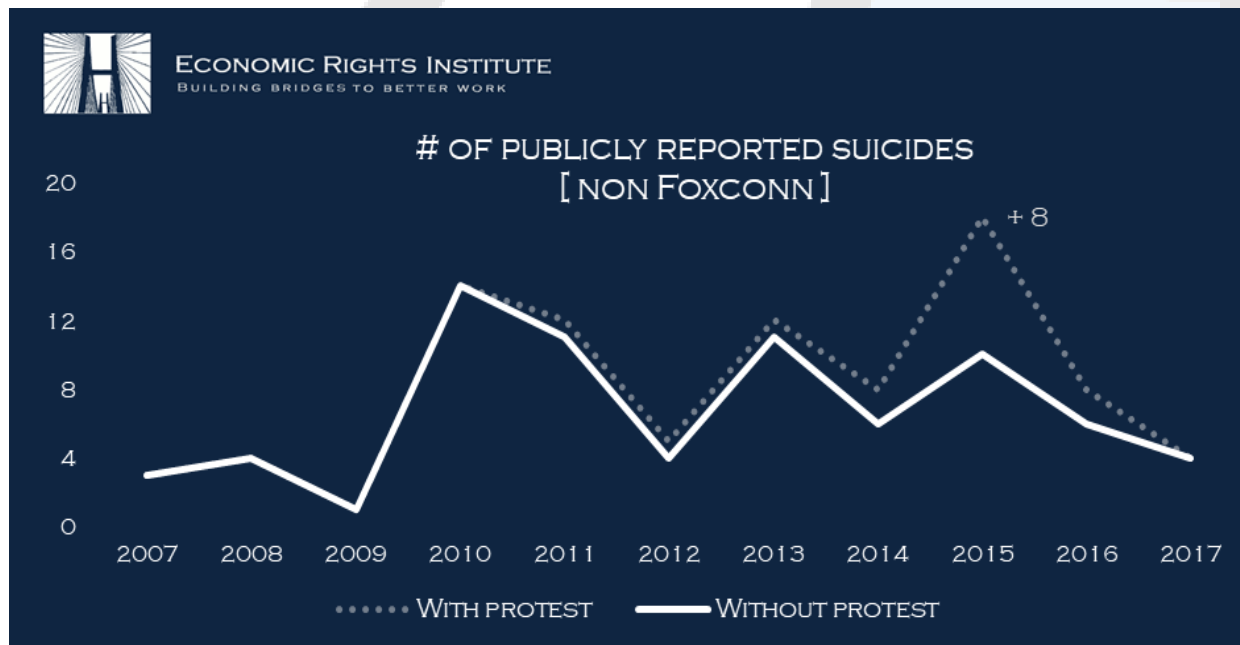
600 workers sent to new division with difficult employment conditions; 150 workers go to roof & suggest they will jump in protest

Supplier shuts down & employer flees without reimbursing workers for 3 months income; workers strike; when police intervene, worker climbs office building to pressure for resolution



THE EFFECTS OF PUBLICITY [& GOVERNMENT RESPONSE]?

- Public reporting of employee suicides is linked to visible rise in the “use” of suicide in protest in 2015
- Followed by a dramatic drop in publicity of suicides



CENSORSHIP

Chinese censorship of suicides includes:

- Employers seizing possession of evidence, pressuring employees not to discuss suicide
- Police arresting or resorting to violence to prevent survivors from publicizing suicide
- Employer & government using recompense to pressure survivors to silence
- Police not reporting or preventing reporters from reporting
- Internet, telephone references deleted



IN THE SPIRIT OF PREVENTION?

Evidence suggests publicity of suicide comes with risk of triggering new clusters

Experts worry publicity of restitution to suicide victims will trigger utilitarian suicide

- Committing suicide to support surviving family



THE LESSER KNOWN SUICIDES: UTILITARIAN

Worker with impulse control issues climbs roof to jump to pressure employer to give her income in advance to meet timeline for online advertisement

Worker went to jump from office building before beginning first shift with new employer; firemen intervene only to recognize worker from previous incidents; reporters find connection to multiple incidents



THE QUESTION OF RESTITUTION

Little evidence protest & utilitarian suicides end in suicide

- There is tradition of government petitions [“上访”]

Will utilitarian suicides evolve if restitution grows?

- Chinese law prescribes restitution to workers who die on the job close to ¥ 1,000,000

Employers & government offer limited restitution for suicide

- Publicly reported restitution seldom exceeds ¥ 100,000
- One known incident is suspected murder of striking worker



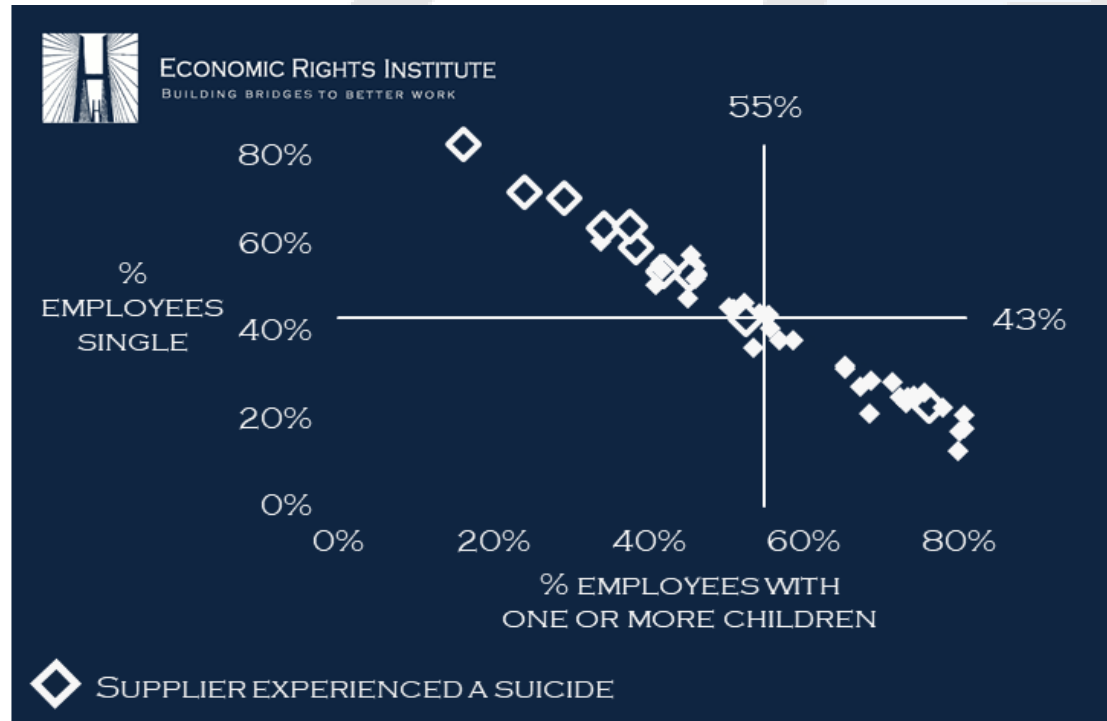


A FEW NOTEWORTHY TRAITS



ELECTRONICS SUICIDE IS YOUNG

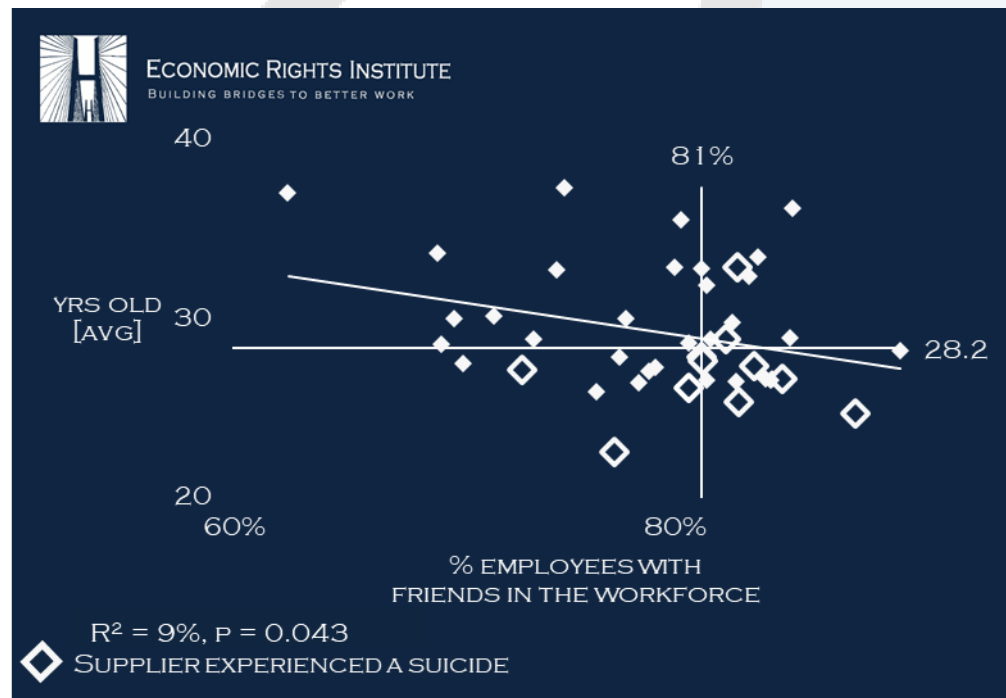
10 out of 11 suicides in surveyed suppliers occurred where more workers were single & without children



ELECTRONICS SUICIDE IS YOUNG

8 out of 11 suicides occurred where more workers report friends

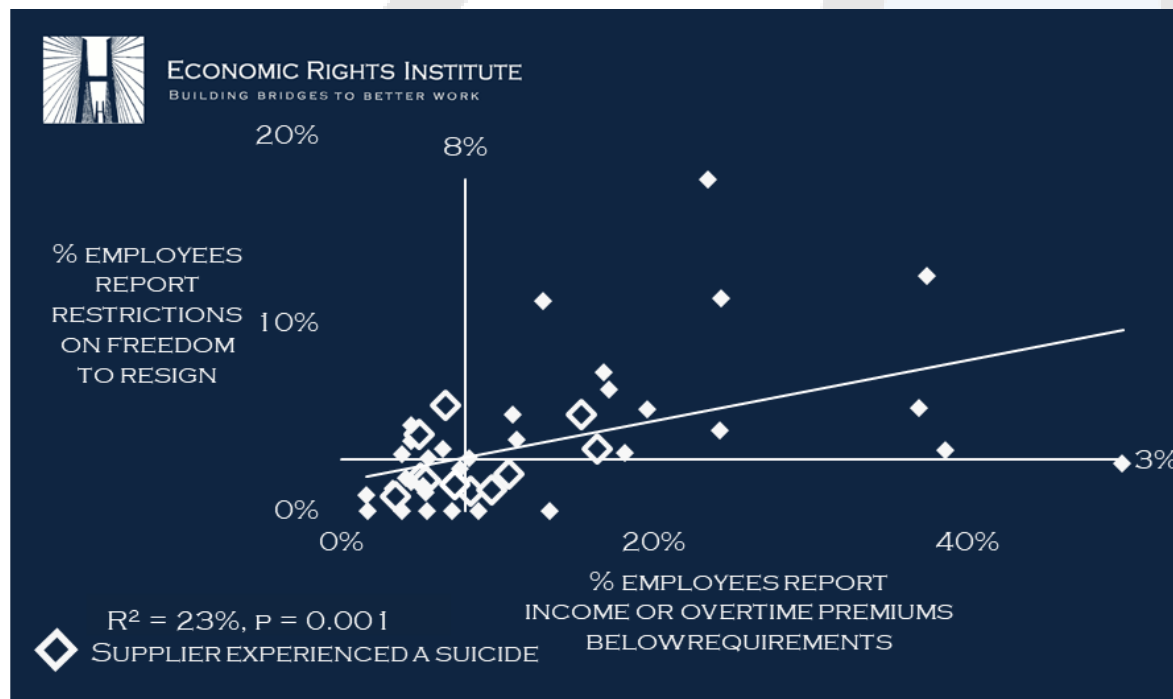
- This is intertwined with youth
- Older workforces report fewer friends



RISK OF SUICIDE NOT OBVIOUS

Employers restrict freedom of employment to prevent workers from resigning when income doesn't meet requirements

- Not obviously linked to risk of suicide





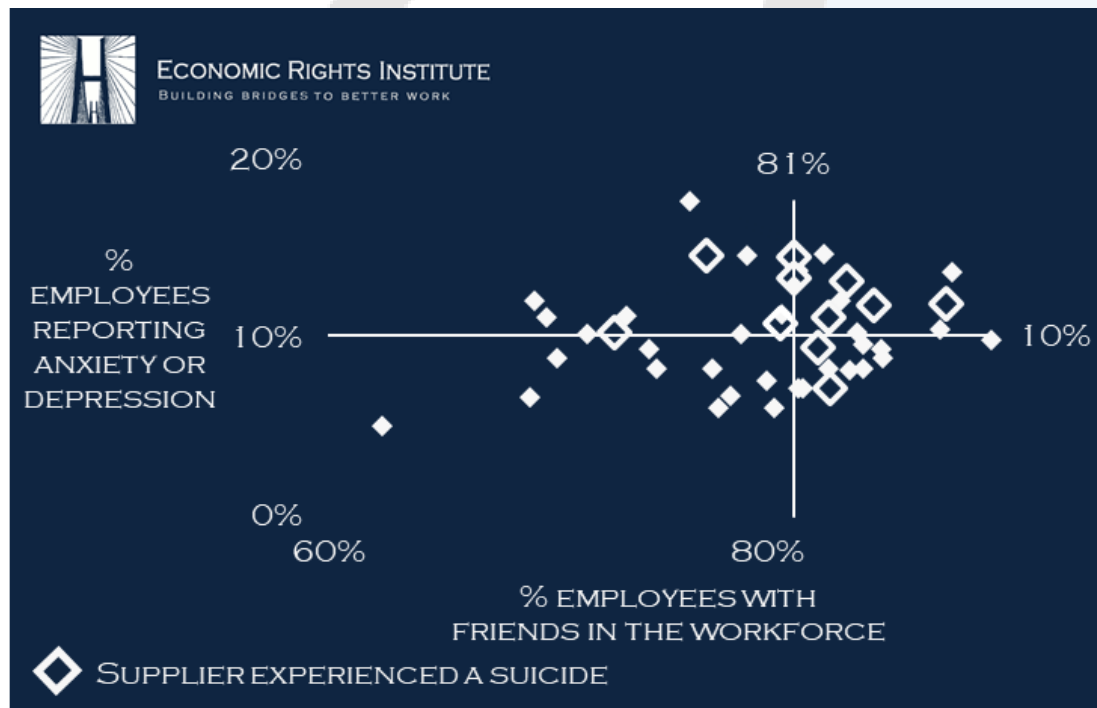
THE LINK TO EMPLOYMENT



DEPRESSION A TRAIT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

9 out of 11 suicides occurred where over 10% of the workforce reports anxiety or depression

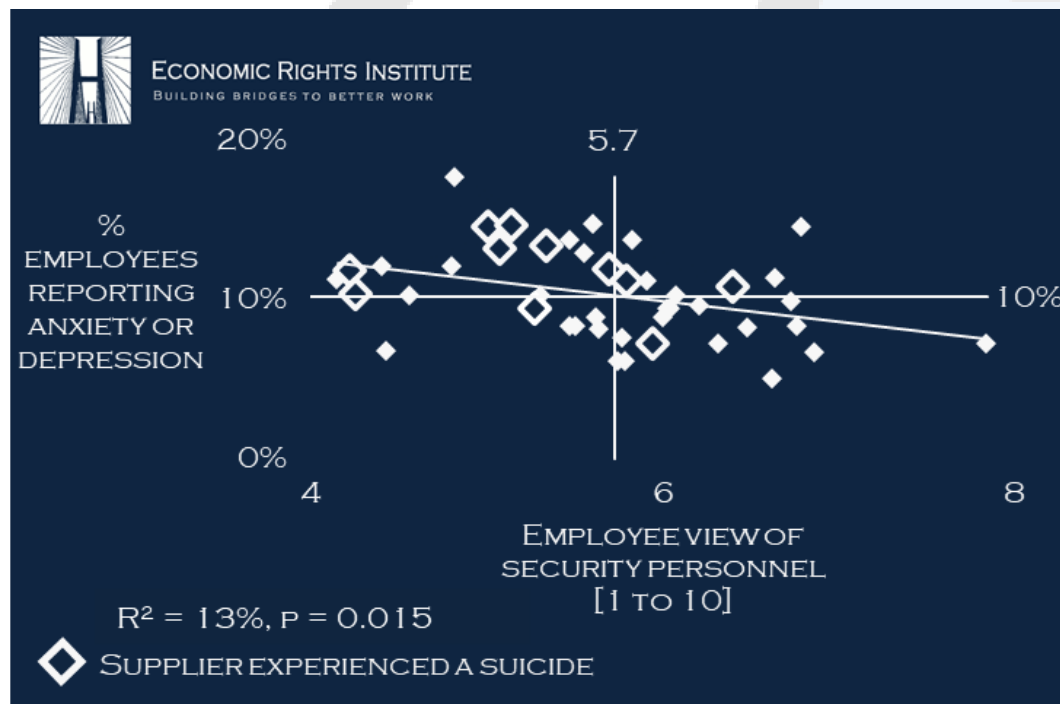
- Suicide is not reducible to psych dysfunction



SECURITY & DIGNITY

Security personnel contribute to worker depression

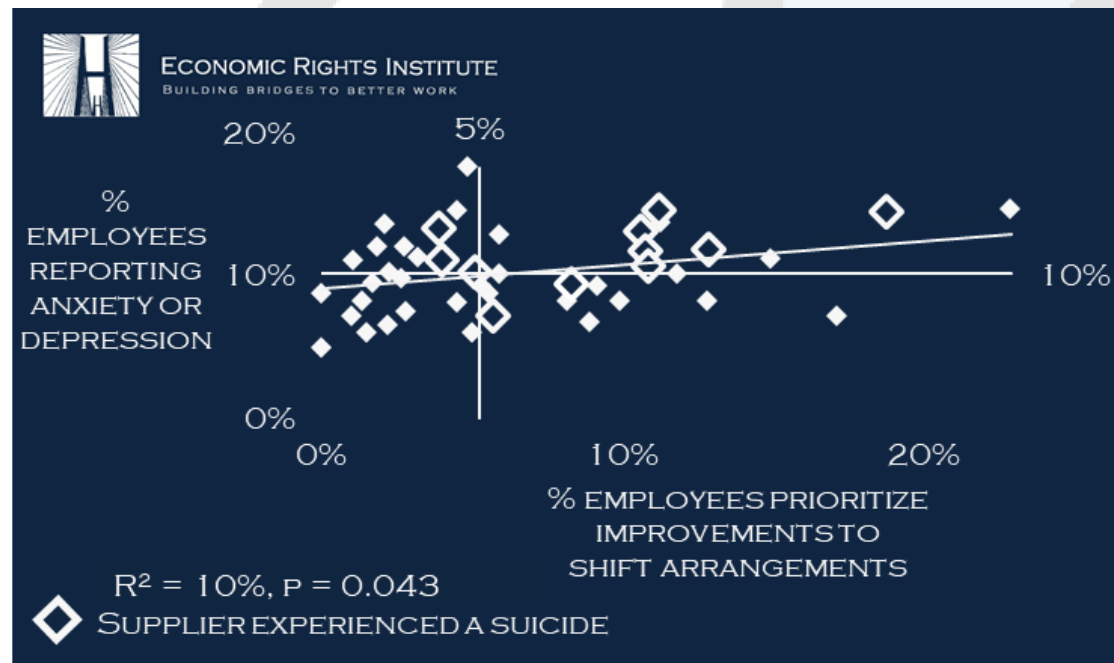
- 8 out of 11 suicides occurred where more workers criticize security personnel's attitude



SHIFT WORK LINKED TO DEPRESSION

Anxiety & depression linked to worker perceptions of problems in [night] shift work

- 8 out of 11 suicides occurred where more workers express problem with shift work



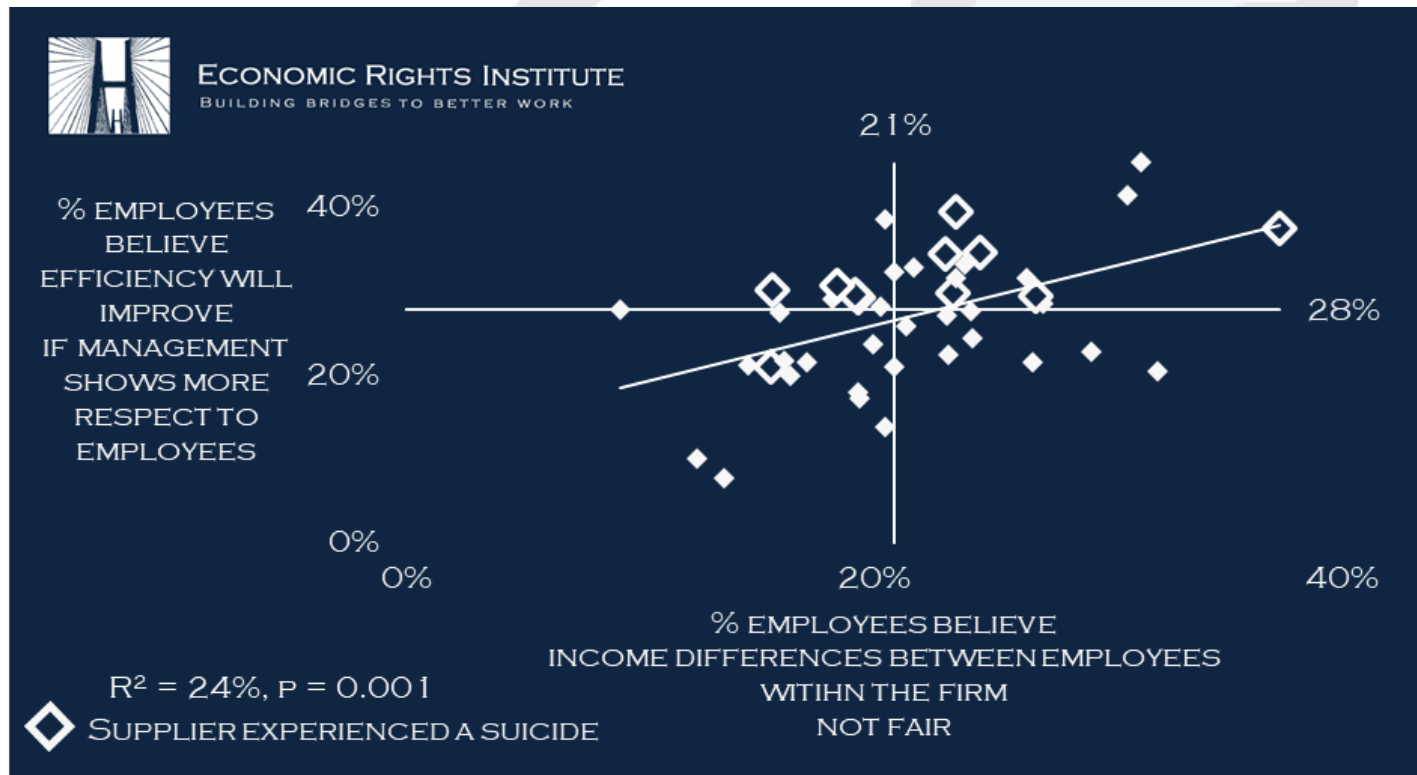
PERCEPTIONS OF INCOME DRIVE DEPRESSION

Where workers don't think income differences within the firm fair, more workers show signs of anxiety or depression



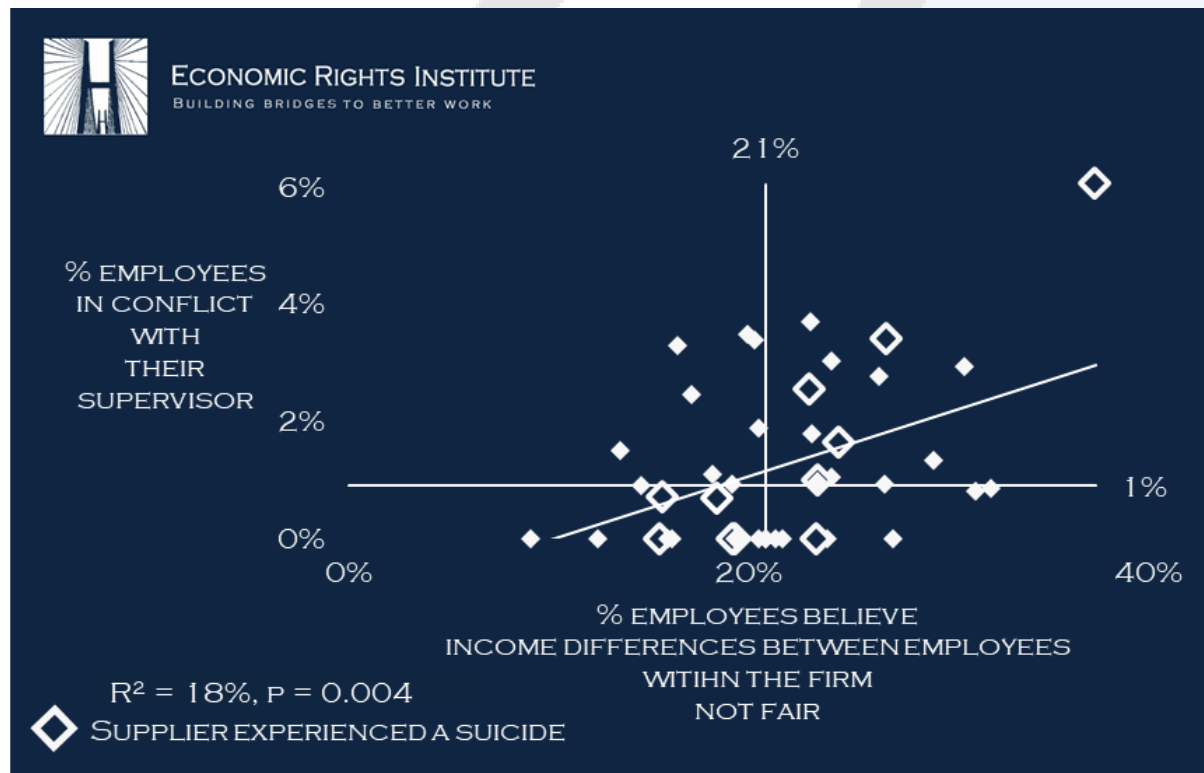
EFFICIENCY, RESPECT & A FAIR INCOME

Income differences strongly linked to whether management respects employees



SUPERVISORS & INCOME DIFFERENCES

Employee perception of income differences strongly linked to incidence of conflicts with supervisors



PROBLEM SOLVING & VIOLENCE

Worker perceptions of poor problem solving by the employer strongly linked to violence on the shop floor



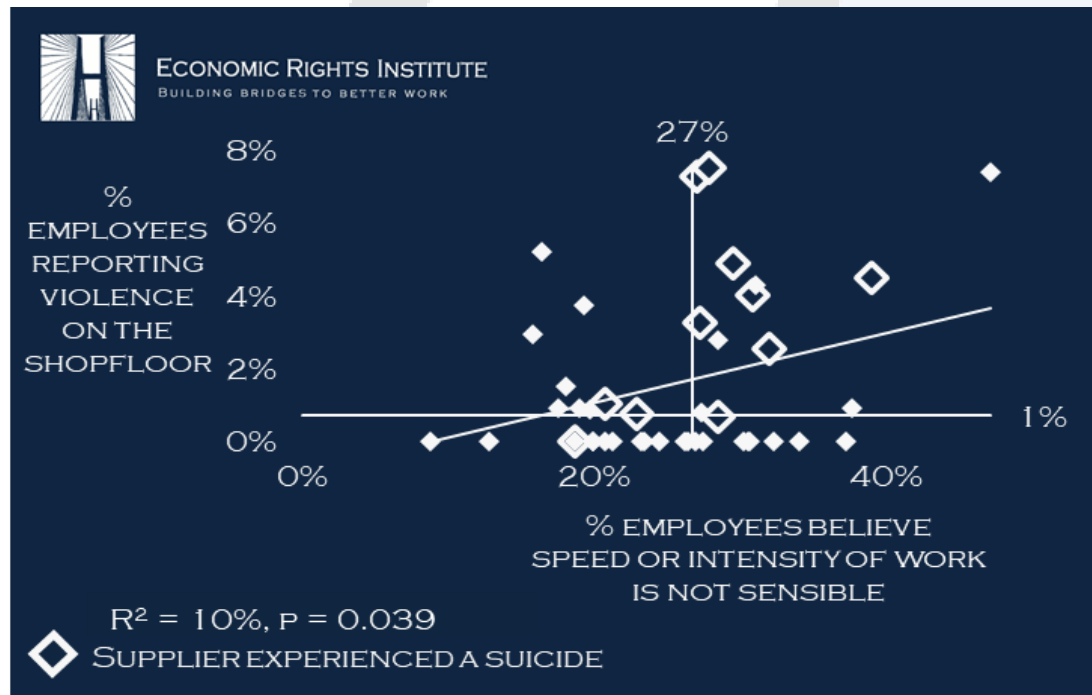
10 out of 11 suicides occur where 1% or more of workforce report violence on the shopfloor



EXCESSIVE PRESSURE, VIOLENCE & SUICIDE

Violence on the shopfloor is linked to speed & intensity of work

- 8 out of 11 suicides occurred where more workers find speed & intensity excessive





RESPECT FOR
EMPLOYEE

DEPENDENCE
ON COERCION

WORK SPEED
& INTENSITY

RISK OF
SUICIDE



RESPECT FOR
EMPLOYEE

RESPECT BY
SECURITY PERSONNEL

CONFLICTS WITH
SUPERVISORS

DIFFERENCES
IN INCOME

DEPRESSION

RISK OF
SUICIDE





RESPECT FOR
EMPLOYEE



DEPENDENCE
ON COERCION



WORK SPEED
& INTENSITY



CONFLICTS WITH
SUPERVISORS



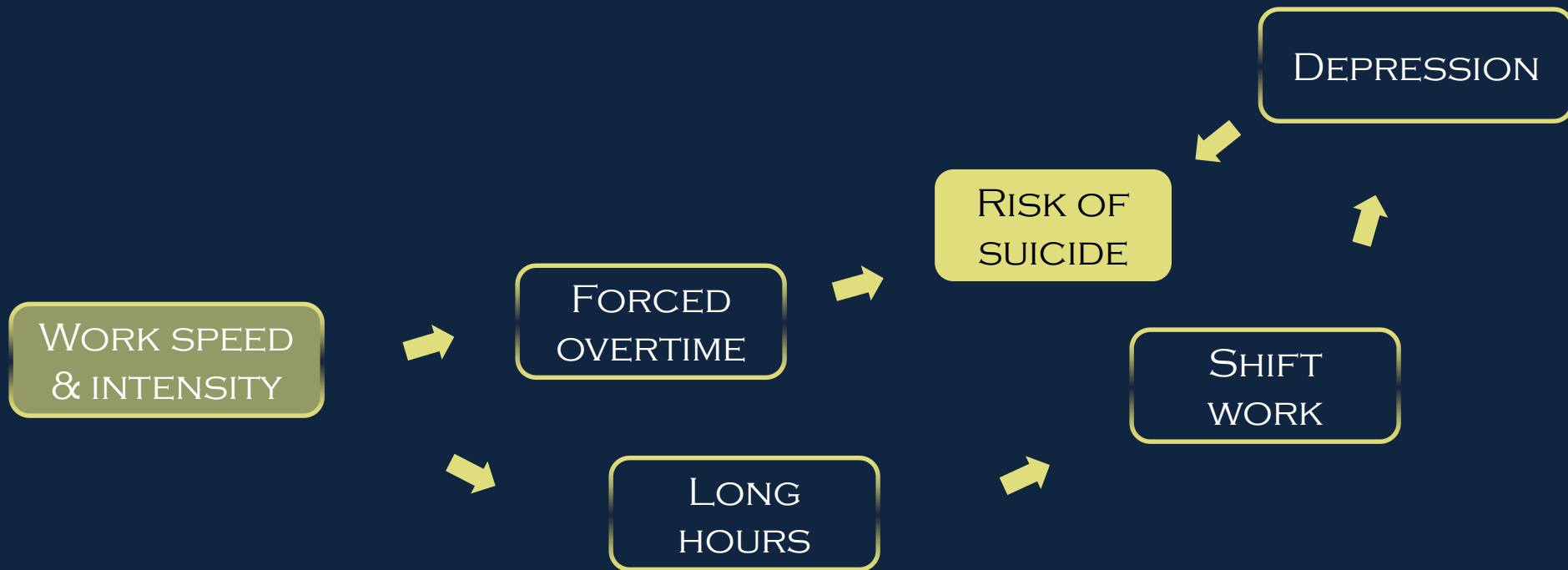
VIOLENCE ON
SHOPFLOOR



FORCED
OVERTIME

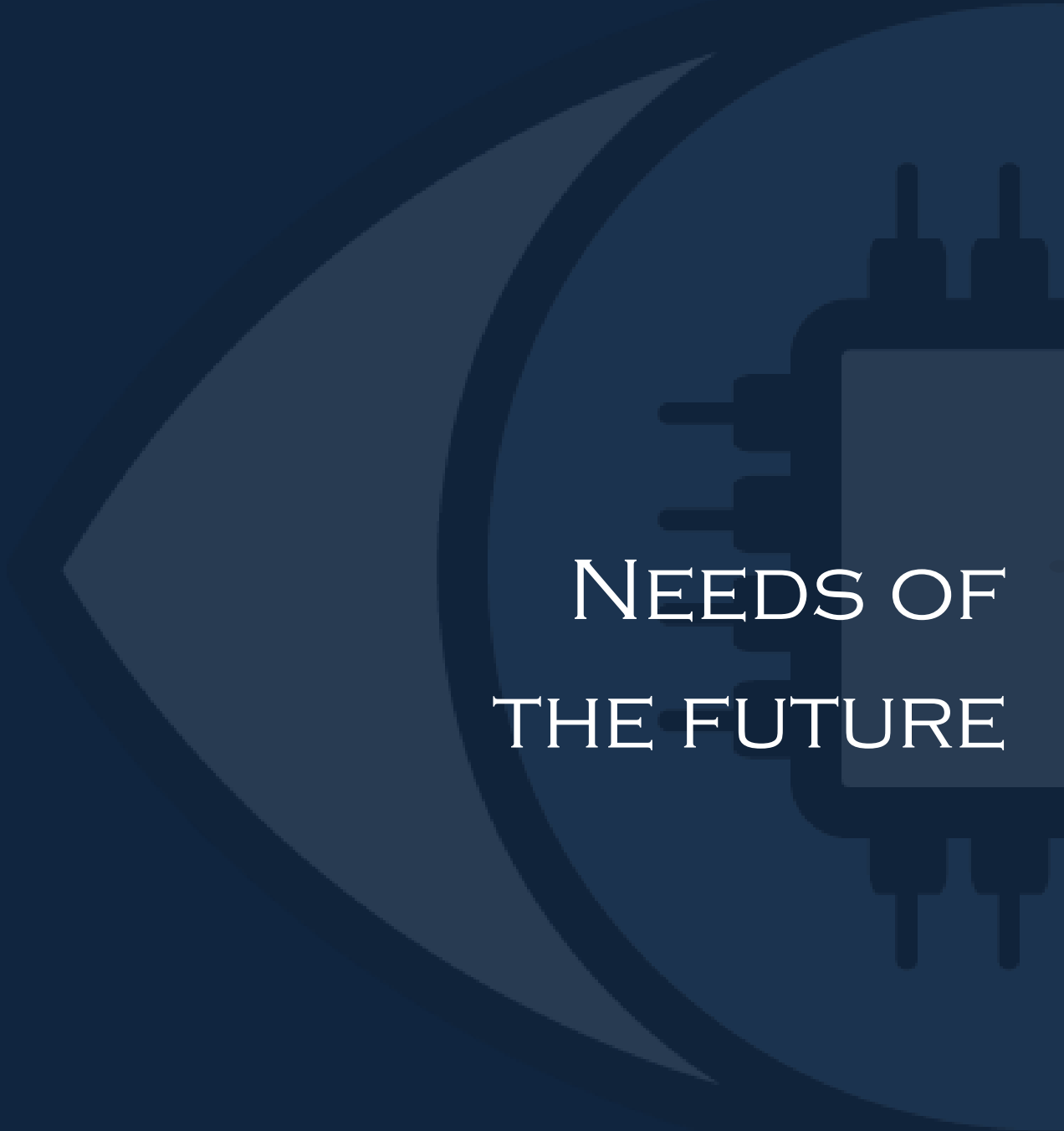


RISK OF
SUICIDE





NEEDS OF THE FUTURE





OPENNESS TO EXPLORE ISSUES HONESTLY & RESPONSIBLY

EFFORTS TO BETTER DEFINE & IDENTIFY TRIGGERS &
EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

OVERSIGHT TO STRENGTHEN RESTITUTION
EFFORTS, WHERE APPROPRIATE

PUBLICITY FOR DISCUSSION OF WIDER POLICY
EFFORTS BY BUSINESS & GOVERNMENT

THANKS

Founded in 2012, the Economic Rights Institute is registered in Hong Kong. Its mission is to support alliances that strive to actualize economic development that respects the rights of all.

We design methods & tools to strengthen multi-tiered discussions: between employees & management, NGOs & the business community, buyers & suppliers. We put the insights & momentum of these discussions in the pursuit of solutions to foster the conditions for better work.

ECONOMIC RIGHTS INSTITUTE
20B NEO HORIZON BLOCK 1
25-27 DISCOVERY BAY RD
DISCOVERY BAY LANTAU ISLAND
HONG KONG

T +852 9083 2907



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Key points of ERI's methodology include:

- We support suppliers' improvement **first in independent sessions** for workers and sessions for management. This gives both sides confidence to express themselves freely, confidence that is needed for them to trust the points of consensus and compromise which might emerge from future meetings together.
- We **prioritize workers and management talking to one another**, without waiting for the "perfect" conditions. Workers and management talk to themselves with a sense of purpose and context that no one else could provide. And every session builds skills and experience for the next session.
- We **follow worker priorities to extend discussion** beyond the scope of code of conduct topics. This strengthens workers' involvement, and is useful for solving problems.
- We **use quantitative tools to give perspective** to the results of dialogue. This guides priorities for improvement, provides a more convincing view of the benefits of improvement [and the costs of not improving], and incentivizes suppliers to improve by showing where they fit in the context of wider trends.
- While no simple solutions exist for some deeper issues, we continuously seek to improve the ERI methodology and **give concrete and pragmatic suggestions for next steps**.