



14 November 2018

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*New path-breaking report:*

## **Links Between Working Conditions and Employee Suicide Study of the Electronics Sector in China**

Today, the Economic Rights Institute and Electronics Watch released [\*The Link Between Employment Conditions and Suicide: A Study of the Electronics Sector in China\*](#). The report analyses original quantitative and qualitative data, including public reports of suicide, on-site surveys of employee perceptions of employment conditions, and off-site interviews with workers from select electronics suppliers to show how the employment conditions of some electronics firms in China heighten the risk of employee suicide.

The report suggests two “cycles of influence” that contribute to different forms of suicide. In the cycle of coercion, employers ignore signs of employee stress and use punitive forms of discipline to enforce productivity requirements, intensifying tensions on the shop floor which sometimes devolve into fistfights and other forms of violence. The pressure of these work environments contributes to the emergence of privileges for preferred employees and employees’ belief that income is not connected to merit or effort. These conditions aggravate some employees’ depression and increase the risk of suicides triggered by forced overtime, fines and supervisor hostility.

Other suppliers depend less on coercion, but use hiring requirements and incentives to ensure their flexibility to recruit and downsize, depending on the needs of production. In this cycle of influence, workers hired through recruiters for repetitive cycles of short-term employment struggle with insecurity in their jobs and elsewhere in their lives. Initial fieldwork findings suggest this is linked to the incidence of suicides by employees in disputes with recruiters and employees struggling with dating and marriage.

The Economic Rights Institute and Electronics Watch have issued a “[call to action](#)” for a multi-stakeholder taskforce to develop, implement, and monitor an action plan to effectively address employment conditions that heighten the risk of employee suicide in the electronics industry. Among other measures to prevent employment conditions from contributing to the risk of suicide, the report suggests the need to:

- End “soft” forms of forced labour, including forced overtime and restrictions of workers’ right to resign from their jobs without forfeiting their wages.
- Abolish punitive forms of discipline and intervene effectively to prevent hostility and violence in the workplace.
- Empower workers to collectively influence enterprise decisions connected to conditions that heighten risk of employee suicide, including productivity requirements, overtime and the structure of incentives.

“Employee suicide in the Chinese electronics sector reflects the repression of workers’ collective voice. If coercion were not limiting workers’ choices, employers would need to build consensus with employees or otherwise incentivize them. This would reinforce sensible productivity requirements, respect on the shop floor and incentives responsive to employee perceptions of merit and effort, which would reduce the risk of suicide,” said report author, Dimitri Kessler, Director of Economic Rights Institute.

Every suicide is likely a response to multiple stresses, and not every employee suicide is linked to employment conditions. But this study highlights the need for credible processes to determine accountability and prevent violations of workers’ rights from contributing to the needless loss of life.

The report is not intended to expose any single firm but rather seeks to highlight the connection between the phenomenon of employee suicide and systemic employment issues which will only be resolved through the collaborative efforts of industry, government, civil society and other experts.

“This report is a call to action” said Björn Claeson, Director of Electronics Watch. “While some companies have directed needed attention to employees’ individual mental health, this report demonstrates the urgent need for a new focus on the link between employment conditions and suicide to create an industry that promotes worker wellbeing and dignity.”

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**The Economic Rights Institute** supports alliances that strive to actualize economic development that respects the rights of all. ERI designs methods and tools to strengthen multi-tiered discussions: between employees and management, NGOs and the business community, buyers and suppliers. ERI puts the insights and momentum of these discussions in the pursuit of solutions to foster the conditions for better work.

**Electronics Watch** is an independent monitoring organisation that helps public sector organisations work together and collaborate with civil society monitors in production regions to protect the rights of workers in their electronics supply chains. [www.electronicswatch.org](http://www.electronicswatch.org)