

Civil servants suffer from workplace frustrations, too

The Star - 10/12/2006

PUTRAJAYA: Like most workers, civil servants too suffer from overwork as well as household and financial problems that affect their work.

A trained counsellor with a ministry here, who wished to remain anonymous, said the frustration of not getting a promotion after years of service while having to cope with a small salary was among the causes for depression and stress among government employees.

"When good work is not rewarded with increment or promotion, there is no motivation to improve. This leads to

a situation where workers do not want to work at all.

"Stress and depression set in and these people start to go AWOL (absent without leave)."

She also noted that some government department workers had little work to do while others who received the same pay had to work doubly hard.

A trainer counsellor at a ministry here, who has conducted counselling sessions for civil servants for several years, acknowledged that a problem exists among the million-odd government employees.

Counsellor Raja Kamariah Raja Mohd Khalid, attached to the Prime Minister's Department, said the number of people needing counselling had steadily increased but this could be because they have become more aware of such services and were willing to get help.

"In 2003, I had only 16 cases but last year I had 47," she said, adding that she discovered the performance of those she counselled had since improved.

She found that people most susceptible to stress and depression were clerical staff and higher-level employ-

ees such as heads of departments.

She said the common problem clerks faced were low wages while heads of departments had to grapple with work stress.

"Stress and depression exist in workers at all levels.

"Depression starts from uncontrolled stress and the introverts suffer most as they keep their problems to themselves," she said.

Public Services Department corporate communications unit head Hasniah Rashid said only six ministries have counselling units, and each of the

28 ministries would get at least one counsellor soon.

The most common cases are stress, de-motivation, trauma, anxiety and workplace relationships as well as depression, she said.

Cases that are beyond the capability of the counsellors to resolve, she said, would be referred to appropriate specialists in government hospitals.

From 1998 up to April this year, a total of 2,544 civil servants and their immediate families as well as sponsored students were given counselling by telephone, e-mail or in person.