



Survey accuses Foxconn of more labor law violations

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Polled workers claim illegally forced overtime and exploitation

SHENZHEN - Taiwan IT giant Foxconn faces new accusations of forcing employees in its mainland factories to work excessive overtime and of exploiting interns.

The results of a survey of employees at Foxconn came just months after a spate of suicides at the company's plants on the mainland, including 10 at its Shenzhen facility, which employs an estimated 400,000 workers.

Researchers questioned 1,736 employees at 12 plants in nine cities and found they worked an average of 83.2 hours of overtime a month - more than twice the maximum of 36 hours allowed under Chinese law, the Shanghai-based China Business News reported on Friday.

Foxconn is the world's largest maker of computer components. It assembles products for some of the world's biggest companies, including Apple and Nokia.

The company, which employs about 900,000 across the mainland, said it has conducted investigations into the accusations and is expected to release the results over the weekend.

"We are not going to make any comment on the accusations now," Liu Kun, head of Foxconn's media office, told China Daily on Friday. "The official statement will come out soon."

The researchers were from more than 10 mainland universities, two Hong Kong universities and a Taiwan university, China Business News said, without saying when the survey was conducted.

Workers claimed Foxconn skimmed on overtime payments, forced student interns to work more than the statutory eight hours a day and provided inadequate medical checkups for employees exposed to poisonous and harmful substances, the report said.

Students have been widely used as interns in most of the surveyed factories and were forced to work 10 hours or more a day, it also said.

"The students intended to learn and practice skills during internship," Lu Huilin, an associate professor of sociology at Peking University, who helped conduct the survey, told China Daily on Friday. "But they were used by Foxconn as simple working machines and failed to receive any professional job training."

Guo Yuhua, a Tsinghua University sociology professor, who also participated in the project, said the interns have no choice but to work like robots at Foxconn, as the internship is required for graduation.

She pointed out that the problem should also be blamed on the education authorities and schools that signed contracts with Foxconn.

Foxconn was exposed to intensive public criticism following a series of suicides among its workers in the first half of this year.

The government had launched official investigations into the company while many labor rights activists blamed the suicides on harsh working conditions in its factories. But the official results have not yet been released.

Zhang Xiaojian, vice-minister of human resources and social security, the ministry that led the investigations, said in June that the suicides at Foxconn were not simply work-related but, rather, were caused by many factors. These included the company's management practices and the young workers' psychological problems.

Foxconn responded to the deaths by installing a suicide hotline, hiring Buddhist monks and counselors to help at-risk employees, pledging to retrain supervisors and installing safety nets outside buildings. It also increased salaries for assembly line workers by about 70 percent.

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