

NEW RESEARCH ON SOCIAL WORK: TWO INITIATIVES

This note presents information about an Australian Research Council (ARC) Strategic Partnership with Industry - Research and Training (SPIRT) funded project due to commence early in 1999. The project is titled *Family conferences in hospital settings: the caregivers' perspective*. The project involves the analysis of the outcomes of hospital based conferences at the Royal Perth Hospital, the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre in Melbourne and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

Family conferences are defined as 'a meeting which involves a number of family members, the patient and hospital personnel in discussions concerning the patient's illness, treatment and plans for their care outside the hospital'.

SOCIAL WORK AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

A reminder that nominations for the above awards close on 26th February 1999. The awards recognise excellence in the work of social workers based on a number of categories:

- Professional practice
- Ethics
- Innovation/pioneering
- Management
- Policy Development
- Contribution to learning
- Research
- Leadership

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The focus is on decision making in relation to treatment and discharge of patients in acute care wards. Family conferences are supportive of speedy discharge of patients from hospital together with greater understanding between family caregivers and hospital staff. The aim is to examine the factors that influence conference outcomes and objectives, to measure the extent of family caregiver empowerment, and to measure the quality of the decision making environment. The study will modify the way family conferences are conducted, improve services for caregivers and benefit each hospital.

This award of a prestigious ARC - SPIRT research grant for a study of social work is rare and represents a West Australian first. The grant will advance the application of quantitative research methods to social work practice. The study will be based at Edith Cowan University, School of Community Services and Social Sciences, Centre for Social Research. The research team consists of Dr Frank Ainsworth, Dr. Pat Hansen and Bill Edward in Perth and Philip Cornish in Melbourne. The Boston team is Dr Karen Kayser and Martha Burke.

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Convenor: Laurie Sutherland ☎ 08 9722 0424 (W)

State Conference

Convenor: Rosina Pruiti ☎ 08 9344 9666 (W)

Youth


Convenor: Nic James ☎ 08 9458 9899 (W)

In addition to the ARC project Frank Ainsworth and Pat Hansen are conducting a study of social workers' views of parents of emotionally disturbed children. This study replicates a study of members of the National Association of Social Workers in the US recently undertaken by Professor Harriette Johnson from the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work.

The copyright of the validated questionnaire from the US study is held by Professor Johnson who has given permission for it to be used in Australia. The eventual aim is to collect data, that will allow for comparison, between the views of social workers and other professional groups, eg, psychologists, teachers, qualified child care workers.

The study requires the completion of the questionnaire by a random sample of approximately 500 members of AASW. AASW will mail the questionnaire in February 1999 directly to members from the Canberra office. This is to safeguard members privacy as the researchers will not be given members addresses. Additionally, the questionnaire can be completed without reference to any data that would allow the researchers to identify members personally.


All that is asked is that if you happen to be selected as a respondent that you complete the questionnaire and mail it anonymously to Frank Ainsworth at Edith Cowan University. A stamped addressed envelope is provided for this purpose. This will guarantee a good return and increase the value of the research findings. Once completed the intention is to publish the findings in a journal accessible to social workers.



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PUBLIC LECTURE

The Power of Narrative in Practice by Ruth Dean

Thursday 25th February 1999, 5.30 – 6.30 pm

Ruth Dean is Professor, School of Social Work, Simmons College, Boston. She has published extensively in narrative, constructivism, ethics, education and group work. A long standing clinical practitioner completing doctoral studies in later life, Professor Dean draws on experiential knowing in both her teaching and writing.

Travelling to Australia to attend the International Conference on Narrative at the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide, Professor Dean is interested in extending her knowledge of Australian uses of narrative in practice. She will be a visiting scholar at the School of Social Work, Curtin University from 23rd February to the 4th March. In this public lecture she will describe some of her current practice and research initiatives and would welcome discussion and exchange with local practitioners.

The public lecture is to be followed by wine and cheese. All interested practitioners and students are warmly invited to join Ruth for this presentation. So that catering arrangements can be made please rsvp by 20th February to Sue Plummer at Curtin School of Social Work on 9266 7030.

Net Watch

A premier Australian web site of particular interest to social workers is the home page of Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [http://www.hreoc.gov.au]. The HREOC web site uses a simple design which ensures quick loading and enables the user to readily navigate to the main areas of interest (Figure 1).

A valuable resource from the HREOC site is an informative guide to human rights, the underlying

international framework that has enabled the recognition of human rights and how Australia has developed its particular system of the recognition and enforcement of rights. You can navigate to this part of the site from the home page, or go to this section directly by using the URL http://www.hreoc.gov.au/hr_explained/ - see Figure 2.

Two areas in the HREOC site that members will find of particular interest is the Human Rights Poll and the announcement of the *Inquiry into pregnancy and work*.

Figure 1

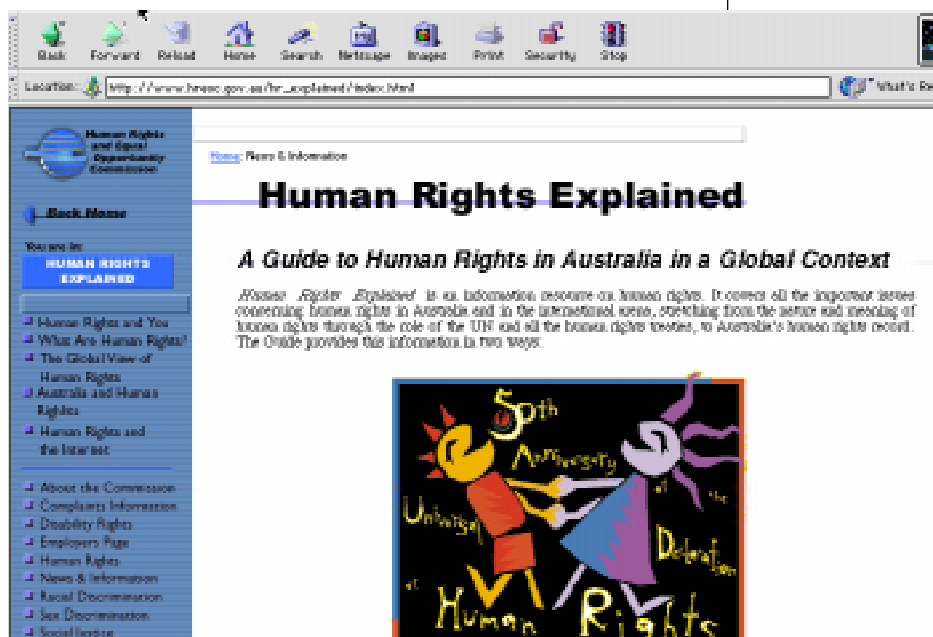


Figure 2

CPE Events

Wednesday 24th March 1999

Evening Seminar – 7pm to 9.00 pm

Presenters: Shelley Jung and Jan Roberts

Vocational rehabilitation and the impact of the WA Worker's Compensation legislation.

Further details will be published with March edition of newsletter.

Monday 3rd and Tuesday 4th May 1999

2 day workshop

Presenter: Suzanne Jenkins

Negotiating Behaviour Change – Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing is a directive, client-centred interviewing/counselling style that can be used to help clients explore and

resolve ambivalence about behaviour change. This workshop aims to provide information about 'the spirit' and the principles of Motivational Interviewing within a skills based forum.

Further details will be published with the April edition of the newsletter.

Friday 28th May

1 day forum

Presenters: A range of speakers will be available

The Business of Aging

The forum will provide an opportunity to discuss and review topical issues in this area.

Further details will be published with the April edition of the newsletter.

Human Rights Poll

This poll contains 10 questions which are reproduced below. The best method is to access the poll through the main menu, or otherwise enter the Human Rights Explained page [[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/hr_explained/.](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/hr_explained/)]

The questionnaire contains a novel approach of providing feedback to users by displaying the distribution of responses received from users.

Question 1

Consider this quote from Mary Robinson on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "I do not see this as an occasion for celebration. Count up the results of fifty years of human rights mechanisms, thirty years of multi billion dollar development programs and endless high level rhetoric and the global impact is quite underwhelming. This is a failure of implementation on a scale that shames us all." *Do you agree?* [Yes 69.0%, No 13.8% and Maybe 17.2%]

Question 2

Do you think Australia has a good record on human rights? [Yes 24.1%, No 62.1% and Maybe 13.8%]

Question 3

Do you think people should be allowed to say what they like? [Yes 51.7%, No 6.9% and Maybe 41.4%]

Question 4

Do you think the United Nations should have the authority to intervene in domestic human rights disputes? [Yes 82.%, No 6.9% and Maybe 10.3%]

Question 5

Do you think the right to a fair trial is as important as the right to education? [Yes 93.1%, No 3.4% and Maybe 3.4%]

Question 6

Does equality mean treating everyone exactly the same? [Yes 21.4%, No 71.4% and Maybe 7.1%]

Question 7

Should children be punished for crimes in the same way as adults? [Yes 13.8%, No 79.3% and Maybe 6.9%]

Question 8

Should countries enact special hate crimes legislation to protect minority groups? [Yes 58.6%, No 20.7% and Maybe 20.7%]

Question 9

Should refugees have the same rights as citizens?
[Yes 32.1%, No 50.0% and Maybe 17.9%]

Question 10

Should the age of consent for gay people be the same as for heterosexual people? [Yes 86.2%, No 6.9% and Maybe 6.9%]

Inquiry into Pregnancy and Work Issues Paper - November 1998

The Inquiry into Pregnancy and Work Issues Paper is the consultation and information document for the pregnancy inquiry. Launched on 1 December 1998, the Issues Paper is available free of charge to the public and calls for submissions to be made to the inquiry by 22 February 1999. A copy of the Issues Paper may be downloaded (as either a PDF file or as a word document) - go to http://www.hreoc.gov.au/news_info/.

The Issues Paper is designed to raise questions about pregnancy and work. It is intended to be used by all interested people, including employees, employers, unions, employer groups, academics, medical and legal practitioners, government departments and agencies and community organisations. The Issues Paper discusses the background and general principles surrounding the inquiry. It then looks at the various laws which may affect a pregnant or potentially pregnant employee and an employer, and the circumstances in which discrimination may occur.

While the Issues Paper raises questions and asks for comment, it is not necessary to comment on all the questions raised in the Issues Paper in order to make a submission. Comments on matters not raised in the Issues Paper are also welcome as long as they fall within the terms of the inquiry.

All submissions made in response to the Issues Paper will be considered and used to compile the final report due to be provided to the Commonwealth Attorney General by 31 May 1999. The submissions will also be used to put together guidelines of practice for employees and employers.

An extract of part of the Issues Paper has been included, to provide members with details of submission deadlines and the object of the inquiry.

Issues Paper - Executive Summary

Australian workplaces differ widely when it comes to the way in which the pregnancy and potential pregnancy of employees is handled. Some employers work hard to ensure that discrimination, harassment and victimisation of pregnant or potentially pregnant employees does not occur, others do not.

It is unlawful to discriminate against employees because they are pregnant or have the potential to fall pregnant. The federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* makes it unlawful to discriminate on these grounds in the following areas:

- Advertising and recruiting for positions.
- In the terms and conditions of employment.
- In the provision of training or offers of promotion.
- In the termination of the employment relationship.

This Issues Paper is designed to raise questions about pregnancy and work. It is intended to be used by all interested people, including employees, employers, unions; employer groups, academics, medical and legal practitioners; government departments and agencies and community organisations. It is not necessary to comment on all the questions raised in the Issues Paper in order to make a submission. Comments on matters not raised in the Issues Paper are also welcome as long as they fall within the terms of reference (see page *ii*). Of particular interest are comments on the following areas.

The scope and coverage of anti-discrimination law – is the law broad enough or too broad? Does it need to be changed, and if so, how?

How the law operates in practice – is the law applied properly and clearly in workplaces? Is the law confusing or difficult to comply with, and if so, why?

Which practices and procedures for handling pregnancy and potential pregnancy in the workplace work best for employees and employers and which do not work? What contributes to the success or failure of practices and procedures?

What should the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission do to help employees, employers and others manage pregnancy and potential pregnancy in the workplace?

Submissions will be made available to any person or organisation on request and may be cited during the inquiry process and in the report. If, however, you want a submission to be treated as confidential, please indicate this clearly. Requests for confidentiality will be decided in accordance with the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth).

This consultation process is a very important part of the inquiry. It is essential to determine what happens in the workplace in order to make useful recommendations to government. Consultations will also assist the development of guidelines to facilitate management of pregnancy and potential pregnancy in the workplace. This inquiry is a step towards the elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of pregnancy and potential pregnancy.

How to make comments

If you would like to make comments on any of the issues in this paper, please write to:

**The Director, Sex Discrimination Unit
Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission
GPO Box 5218 SYDNEY NSW 1042
Phone: (02) 9284 9696 or (02) 9284 9608,
Fax: (02) 9284 9789
E-mail:
sallymoyle@hreoc.gov.au or
sabinalauber@hreoc.gov.au**

The deadline for submissions is Monday 22 February 1999.
The final report will be produced by 31 May 1999.

Terms of reference

The Commission is to:

- a) examine the policies and practices of employers in relation to the recruitment of women who are pregnant or have the potential to become pregnant;
- b) examine the rights and responsibilities of employers and their employees in relation to employees who are pregnant;
- c) examine the rights and responsibilities of employers and their employees in relation to potentially pregnant employees;
- d) examine the rights and responsibilities of employees who are pregnant in relation to that pregnancy;
- e) examine rights and responsibilities arising under sections 15, 16, 17 and 20 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984;
- f) examine the adequacy of, and any need for changes to, relevant Federal anti-discrimination laws, or to policies and practices relating to pregnant or potentially pregnant workers;
- g) produce and publish guidelines to:
 - provide employers, principals of commission agents and contract workers, partnerships and employment agencies with practical guidance to those provisions of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* which apply to discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy or potential pregnancy;
 - assist those parties to implement policies and to eliminate and prevent discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and potential pregnancy;
 - provide employees and potential employees with practical guidance on those provisions of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* which apply to discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy or potential pregnancy; and

- assist all parties to understand and fulfil their obligations under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* in relation to pregnancy and potential pregnancy.

These guidelines may include:

- an overview of minimum standards;
- workplace examples that provide individual solutions to the circumstances of particular pregnant employees above and beyond minimum standards;
- sound management practices that meet the needs of individuals and their employers.

The term “employees” is to be interpreted broadly and should include, for example, part time, temporary, casual and shift workers.

Why do we need an inquiry?

Employment is an area under the Act in which it is unlawful to discriminate on the ground of pregnancy or potential pregnancy. Over 80% of all complaints accepted under the Act over the last few years relate to the area of employment.

Approximately 15% of all initial complaints accepted under the Act in the last financial year included an allegation of discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy. This percentage is significant when the number of women in the workforce who are pregnant at any given time is considered. There are also indications from some state based anti-discrimination commissions and anecdotal commentary that the number of complaints is on the rise.

Complaints and anecdotal evidence demonstrate that pregnancy discrimination occurs in public and private sectors of employment and across most industry sectors. The discrimination occurs when women announce that they are pregnant, as well as prior to the event when women indicate an interest in having children or are categorised as likely to become pregnant in the future.

Discussions the Sex Discrimination Commissioner has had with state authorities, employees, employers, unions, employer groups and non-government organisations have clearly pointed to the need for increased education about pregnancy and potential pregnancy discrimination.

These discussions have highlighted that a significant level of misinformation and ignorance exists in the workforce about these issues and continues to be acted upon. A level of confusion is also evident about the way discrimination law and occupational health and safety law intersect and interact. Part of the aim of this inquiry is to provide practical guidance to manage these complexities.