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Parenting and work in a post-COVID context

This conference aims to explore the challenges arising from the intersection of parenthood and paid work. While labour market inequality arising from the gendered norms of caregiving and parenting is not novel, COVID has accentuated the inequality, not just in regard to gender, but also in terms of its intersection with race, class, disability and sexuality.

Program

9-9.15am

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country

*Emerita Professor Margaret Thornton FAAL
FASSA
ANU College of Law*



9.15-9.30am

Opening remarks

*Professor Sally Wheeler OBE MRIA FAcSS
FAAL
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International
Strategy), ANU; Dean, ANU College of Law*



9.30-10.15am

Keynote address

*June Oscar AO
Commissioner, Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Social Justice Commissioner,
Australian Human Rights Commission*



*Jennifer Collard (chair)
Group Manager, NIAA Taskforce:
Commonwealth Aboriginal & Torres Strait
Islander Workforce Strategy
National Indigenous Australians Agency
(NIAA)*



10.15-10.45am

Morning tea break

Panel 1

10.45am-12.15pm

Iterations of Parenthood

Dr Liz Allen

ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods



Parenting in Australia: Enduring and Emerging Demographics

Families and parenting have undergone much change in Australia over the last couple of decades. With this change has come emerging and enduring characteristics of parenthood. Data has played a major role in identifying parenting profiles and experiences; and with increasing data comes an appreciation of what is not known. This presentation explores what is and is not known about the enduring and emerging demographics of families in Australia: what parenting looks like and the needs of families now and into the future. Parenthood among people from diverse backgrounds, First Nations families, and same-sex parents are specifically considered.

Emerita Professor Margaret Thornton

ANU College of Law



Coronavirus and the colonisation of private life

The idea of a distinction between public and private life has a long history in political thought, but the boundary between them has become increasingly blurred as a result of temporal flexibility. Technological change lies at the heart of the ability to choose when and where work is performed, including 'working at home'. This refers only to productive work so that the unpaid domestic and caring work that women disproportionately undertake has been excluded. Its invisibility has led to it 'counting for nothing' in the computation of the Gross National Product. With particular regard to the gender ramifications of working at home, this presentation analyses the responses to an on-line survey conducted in Australia when lockdown was a key prong of the government response to COVID-19 in 2020. As unpaid work was integrated with productive work, it is suggested that the rationale for discounting it in national accounts no longer holds, especially as the sphere of intimacy is insidiously being colonised by capitalism.

Panel 1

Emma Graham
ANU College of Law



Australian Mothers and Job Loss: Rethinking the Existing Approach to Measuring Prevalence

In 2014, the Australian Human Rights Commission released findings from the first national prevalence survey on the extent, nature and consequences of employment-based pregnancy and maternity discrimination in Australia. A significant finding was that ‘one in five mothers’ are dismissed, made redundant or do not have their contract renewed because of pregnancy, parental leave, and family responsibilities. A critical gap in knowledge remains, however, as to the vulnerabilities that give rise to discriminatory job loss. This presentation will unpack the discrimination data and explore the types of discriminatory job loss that are obscured by the current prevalence measure. The role of labour laws in exacerbating vulnerabilities will be also explored with a focus on building a better evidence base to guide future policy interventions and law reform.

Associate Professor Faith Gordon (chair)
ANU College of Law



12.15-1.15pm
Lunch break

Panel 2

1.15-2.45pm

The Equality Conundrum

Emeritus Professor Marian Sawer
ANU School of Politics and International Relations



Equality: Starting at Home?

The COVID pandemic has heightened awareness of the precarious nature of progress towards gender equality. Australia lacks an overarching policy framework for achieving gender equality that encompasses both paid and unpaid work. The intersection of these needs greater policy recognition, as has occurred in gender equality frameworks elsewhere. For example, the Swedish gender equality policy includes both 'Economic gender equality' and 'An equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care work'. Progress towards equality in the sharing of unpaid work can be tracked through time-use surveys, as is done in Sweden. In contrast, Australia has been reluctant either to adopt formal policy on sharing of unpaid work or to maintain commitment to time-use surveys to measure progress (there was no survey between 2006 and 2020). This paper will consider this conundrum.

Professor Lyndall Strazdins
ANU Research School of Population Health



Equal Pay for Equal Care: Gender Equality and the Case for reducing Work Hours

Policies to address gender inequality in the workplace seek equal pay for work of equal value. They simultaneously aim for women's full and equal participation relative to men and for more flexible and part-time options. The former implies women are capable of working and earning as men do – the latter accepts most women are not 'free' to do so. Gender equality policy therefore embeds a profound contradiction regarding what equality might mean and how it can be achieved, which will persist while the time to care is not counted. Current representations of the problem draw attention to discrimination, occupational segregation and gender bias (all important) as drivers of women's unequal income, but lack an interrogation of the impossibility for both men and women to combine a full-time job with equal care. The paper makes the case for why a transformative shift in framing and action to limit full time work hours will be necessary for a gender balanced, and gender equal workforce.

Panel 2

Dr Anne Macduff
ANU College of Law



Sharing Care during a Pandemic: Gender, Post-separation Parenting and Family Law in Australia

In an attempt to curb the spread of COVID 19, governments around the world imposed restrictions on ‘non-essential’ gatherings and travel. These measures had a significant impact on many parents, who balanced work and caring commitments at home. This paper explores the experiences of Australian separated families who shared care during the pandemic. It considers a range of questions, such as: Were practicalities of shared care during the pandemic gendered? Was the Family Law Act able to meet their specific needs and challenges? How did the government’s assumption that children had ‘one home’ impact on women who were parenting post-separation.

Emma Graham (chair)
ANU College of Law



2.45-3.15pm
Afternoon tea break

Panel 3

3.15-4.45pm

The Future of Work

A panel discussion on future directions for the intersection of parenting and work, with consideration given to addressing the inequalities that have been exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor Ariadne Vromen
ANU Crawford School of Public Policy



Ariadne is the Sir John Bunting Chair of Public Administration in the Crawford School, a position that is co-funded by ANU and the Australia and New Zealand (ANZSOG) School of Government. Ariadne's research interests include: citizen engagement, digital politics and governance, women and the future of work, policy advocacy, and young people and politics. In mid-2020, Ariadne began an ARC Linkage project 'Designing Gender Equality into the Future of Work' with scholars at the University of Sydney that contrasts change and technological disruption in the retail and legal industries.

Cameron Roles
ANU College of Law



Cameron is a Senior Lecturer in the ANU College of Law where he teaches and researches in labour law. Cameron has expertise in the operation of the *Fair Work Act* 2009 (Cth), public sector employment and emerging forms of work, including the gig economy and its regulation. Cameron's current research is concerned with the extent to which the law can legitimately prevent a current or former employee from soliciting, enticing or otherwise encouraging one or many current or former colleagues to leave employment and enter into competition with the former employer.

Panel 3

Martin Hehir
*Industrial Relations Group,
Attorney-General's Department*



Martin is the Deputy Secretary of the Industrial Relations Group at the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department (AGD), with responsibility for a range of industrial relations policies and programs. Before joining AGD in 2019, Martin was the Deputy Secretary of the Workplace Relations Cluster in the Department of Jobs and Small Business. Martin has held several deputy secretary positions in federal government during his career. He has been responsible for areas including developing a new employment services model; work, health and safety policy; and small business and industrial relations policy.

Hon Mary Woolridge
*Director,
Workplace Gender Equality Agency*



Mary commenced as Director of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency in May 2021. She leads the Agency in driving gender equality in workplaces ensuring that women and men are equally represented, valued and rewarded. Mary served from 2006 to 2020 in the Victorian Parliament, including a term as Minister for Mental Health, Community Services and Women's Affairs. As Minister, Mary worked to implement the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 and was instrumental in establishing Our Watch, the national family violence prevention agency. Mary was the Minister responsible for signing Victoria up to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. She established the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People, including the nation's first Aboriginal Commissioner, Parkville College – an award-winning Public School in Youth Justice Centres and Australia's first Mental Health Complaints Commissioner and the Family Drug Treatment Court.

Honorary Associate Professor Sally Moyle
(chair)
ANU Gender Institute



4.45-5pm
Closing remarks

Emerita Professor Margaret Thornton FAAL
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