

# Institute Represented at International Seminar on Work and Family

A seminar 'to explore how work organisations can be restructured to promote genuine gender equity' was held in Satra Bruk, Sweden in May-June. The seminar, 'Organisational Change and Gender Equity: International Perspectives on Fathers and Mothers at the Workplace', was sponsored by the Ford Foundation, the Allmanna Barnhuset Fund and the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It was held at the beautiful estate of the Allmanna Barnhuset Fund in southern Sweden.

The seminar brought together researchers who are conducting pioneering research in the area, and provided a forum where theoretical perspectives on the meaning of gender equity and barriers to its achievement could be explored within the context of empirical research and pragmatic experiences within organisations.

Sessions were organised around the following topics:

Formal company support for fathers and mothers at the workplace; Company culture and gender equity; Impact of organisational culture on fathers and mothers; Dynamics of organisational change; and Future directions for theory, research, organisational practice and social policy.

In all there were 22 participants representing the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark and Australia. The Australian contingent, who received travel support from the Department of Industrial Relations, ensured that Australian studies and policy initiatives were on the agenda.

Rohan Squirchuck (Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment) presented an overview of Australian workforce participation and family demographic trends. Phil Drever (Labour Relations Policy Branch, Department of Industrial Relations) provided input on the wide range of government work

and family programs and policies. The paper by Helen Glezer and Ilene Wolcott (Senior Research Fellows, Australian Institute of Family Studies) reported on findings from two studies conducted by the Institute that examined the impact of workplace conditions on family relationships and how family commitments affect the workplace. Graeme Russell (School of Behavioural Sciences, Macquarie University) described the results of one company's survey of employees' work and family needs and the efforts to develop a strategic policy response. Don Edgar (National Key Centre in Industrial Relations, Monash University) discussed the New Links Workplace project aimed at changing the corporate culture and work practices in two companies to reduce work and family conflict.

A majority of the United States and European participants were conducting action research studies in

individual large corporations and then attempting to work with management to implement change. The Swedish research appeared to have a more direct focus on determining the impact on fathers and whether policies encouraged fathers to take on more family caring roles.

The seminar posed the question: 'How can organisational culture and structure be transformed to promote gender equity?' The answers, as explored in the seminar sessions, encompassed the far more complex notion of universal social change as reflected in the attitudes and values of men and women regarding gender, family and work identities. These aspects of change are incorporated in but extend beyond the boundaries of organisational culture and structure change.

**– Ilene Wolcott  
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