

# Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Conference 2024

Stream 9:

Empowering Choices: Rethinking Reproductive Leave Policies and Women's Careers

Stream Organisers:

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Please submit your extended abstract (up to 1500 words) for this stream by the deadline of 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2024 via the [EDI registration page](#). You can find a [step-by-step](#) guide here to help you with the submission process. Authors can expect to receive feedback by April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

In the 2024 theme, the EDI conference will seek ways to expand the knowledge of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion from the perspective of "Gender Equality across the Gender Spectrum". This stream explores the ever-changing dynamics of industrial relations concerning reproductive health transitions and their effects on women's careers. We are inviting papers that delve into the challenges and opportunities for women and organisations to create all-encompassing work environments that prioritise initiatives that support women in making choices during their reproductive years. In particular, we are interested in papers on the difficulties women face in balancing their reproductive health needs with their professional aspirations.

Legislation on reproductive health transitions, including those related to menopause and menstrual paid leave, and paid leave in the event of a miscarriage, have significant gaps in industrialised nations like Australia, New Zealand, and European countries (Middlemiss et al., 2023), affecting women's career progression (Baird, 2005, 2014; Baird & Heron, 2019; Huppatz et al., 2019). These studies show, for example, that a significant percentage of women aged 18-25 in Australia experience pain during their menstrual cycle. Specifically, 88% to 92% of women report experiencing discomfort during this time. It is not a typical scenario for male workers to take time off from work due to reproductive health issues, which women commonly experience. The existing personal leave entitlements outlined in the Fair Work Act fail to adequately address this issue, significantly impacting women's professional careers (Carter et al., 2021). Further, studies demonstrate that miscarriages negatively affect women's mental health. According to Lok and Neugebauer (2007), half of miscarrying women suffer some form of psychological morbidity. These examples highlight the need to review the current provisions to ensure they are inclusive and supportive of all employees' needs.

We call for papers that explore the effect of reproductive health and the impact of the corresponding legislative and policy infrastructure on women's careers. These perspectives could include legislation and practices surrounding menstrual and menopause leave, which can impact delayed entry into the workforce, balancing work with caregiving, workplace discrimination and bias, female stigmatisation, occupational segregation, lack of support systems, and long-term career implications. Additionally, we welcome paper submissions focusing on maternity leave and/or examining menstrual and menopause leave policy, practices, and legislation. The lack of appropriate organisational policy or legislative protections for specific gendered health experiences in the workplace can intensify judgments from others and lead to feelings of not belonging, self-stigma and career exit (Kossek et al., 2017). This experience is true even for relatively privileged employees in developed countries (Wilkinson et al., 2023). Such situations often lead to secrecy and gendered silence (Sabat et al., 2022). How can we break taboos and silence around stigmatising topics of women's reproductive health? Recent research highlights the effects of embracing the positive side of menopause in the workplace (Quental et al.,

2023). Additionally, organisations do not tap into the potential of healthcare transition topics. A recent study analysing 763 FemTech companies found that only 4% of FemTech start-ups are addressing stigmatised areas such as menopause, compared to 30% for the subject of maternity (Kemble et al., 2022). We particularly welcome papers that address intersectional issues of women's reproductive health (Riach & Jack, 2021).

This stream aims to facilitate conversation, exchange information, and suggest legislative modifications by examining the overlap of industrial relations on reproductive health, including international regulations on menstrual and menopause leave, with Human Resource Management practices and theories. This stream is dedicated to enhancing our understanding of reproductive leave policies and their impact on career growth. We aim to provide actionable insights that benefit policymakers, organisations, and individuals. Through a diverse range of perspectives, we hope to establish more inclusive and sustainable approaches that empower choices in the modern workplace.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

1. What are the challenges women face in balancing their reproductive health and professional careers, delayed entry into the workforce, and workplace discrimination?
2. What regulatory approaches can companies adopt to support women during reproductive health transitions, such as menopause and menstrual leave?
3. How do the discomfort and health impacts of menopause or menstrual symptoms affect women's careers?
4. How can addressing reproductive health, social protection, and labour market policies contribute to mitigating the prevalence of vulnerable employment?
5. What are the organisational challenges and opportunities in building inclusive workplaces prioritising reproductive health choices and promoting gender equity?
6. How can trade unions and employee representative bodies advocate for industrial protections during reproductive health transitions?
7. What practical recommendations for employers to support employees during their reproductive health transitions, and what policies and resources can be implemented to promote an inclusive workplace culture?
8. How can organisations foster an inclusive environment that supports women across various reproductive health stages?
9. What strategies promote diversity and inclusion in reproductive health initiatives?
10. How can individuals maintain a thriving career while navigating their reproductive milestones?
11. How do we break the silence around taboo topics like miscarriages or menopause in society and within organisations?
12. How can we raise the interest of organisations to take into account stigmatised topics such as menstrual leave, miscarriage, menopause, etc. and their negative consequences on women's mental health?

In summary, this stream aims to facilitate conversation, exchange information, and suggest legislative modifications by examining the overlap of industrial relations on reproductive health, including international regulations on menstrual and menopause leave, with Human Resource Management practices and theories.

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