

Professor Grace James



Biography

Grace James is a Professor of Law at the University of Reading. She is Director of Research and teaches Employment and Discrimination Law. The main focus of her research is work-family reconciliation policies. She has published widely in these fields, including *The Legal Regulation of Pregnancy and Parenting in the Labour Market* (2009: Routledge-Cavendish, London) and *Families, Care-giving and Paid Work: Challenging Labour Law in the 21st Century* (2011: Edward Elgar, Cheltenham (co-edited with Nicole Busby)). More recently Grace has written about the (lack of) children's rights in work-family reconciliation policies (see for example, 'Forgotten children: work-family reconciliation in the EU' *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, (2012) 34(3): 363-379) and is currently writing a book, with Nicole Busby, exploring the history of regulating working families in the UK (*A History of Regulating Working Families: Strains and Stereotypes, Strategies and Solutions* – due to be published in 2015 by Hart Publishing, Oxford) and researching the employment rights of carers with elderly dependents.

Grace James is Co-Director of an AHRC funded research network – Families And Work Network (FAWN) – for scholars, policy makers and practitioners with an interest in researching and improving employment law's engagement with working families. Details can be found at www.reading.ac.uk/fawn.

Talk summary

Jo Swinson, Dept of Business, Innovation and Skills, Minister for Employment Relations has described pregnancy-related discrimination as 'both appalling and illegal' and is concerned that 'no employer should be able to get away with this kind of behaviour' (The Guardian (Women in Leadership Series 03/10/13)). Yet, as a recent report by Maternity Action reveals, many employers do get away with it (Dunstan, R (Dec 2013) *Overdue: A Plan of Action to Address Pregnancy Discrimination Now*). In this paper I (1) discuss the extent of the problem, (2) the gap between those who experience this type of unlawful treatment and those who invoke law as a consequence and (3) reveal how the "problem" and the "gap" have been exacerbated by austerity measures and recent reforms that create more barriers to accessing justice for this cohort. Concluding remarks will place this within its wider context of work/care-giving conflicts and suggest that it may be time to consider alternative approaches to relieving workplace tensions of this kind.