

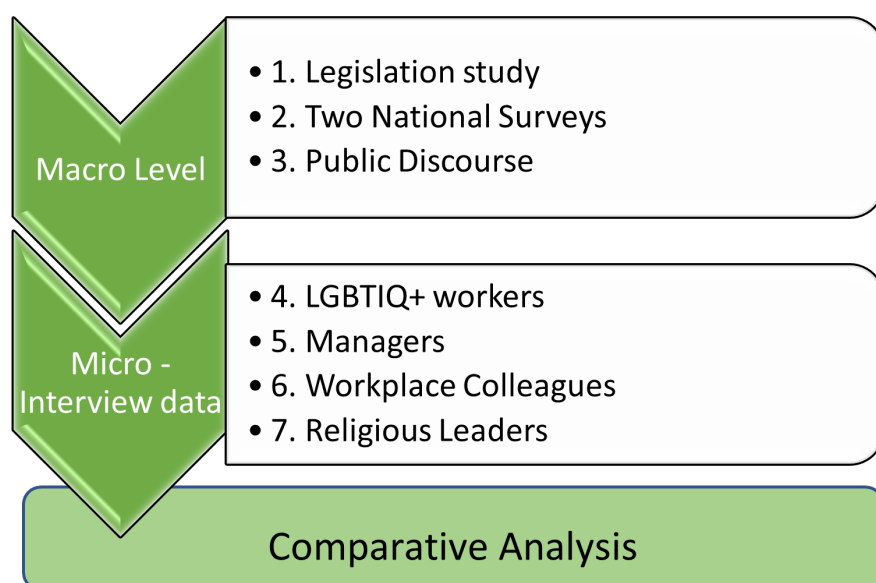
Project Information

Religious freedom, LGBTQ+ employees, and the right to discriminate - Research Project

This research project aims to identify strategies to manage tensions between religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights in the workplace in Australia. The project is being led by Prof Douglas Ezzy from the University of Tasmania, School of Social Sciences in conjunction with colleagues from University of Sydney and University of Ottawa and is funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant. The project is comprised of seven small studies (see diagram 1) with a final comparative analysis.

We are seeking support from your organisation for 'study 2' - a national survey of LGBTQ+ employees in religiously affiliated schools, social welfare providers and health providers. Your support and distribution of the survey link will aid us in reaching as many of your members as possible thereby making the outcomes robust and comprehensive, and providing a broad overview of the range of experiences and attitudes.

Diagram 1.



Aims and Background

As noted, this research aims to identify strategies to manage religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights in the workplace. Religiously affiliated employers in Australia can legally discriminate against LGBTQ+ employees in some circumstances (Rees, Rice, Allen 2018). These policies have a profound impact on LGBTQ+ employees, their co-workers, and their religiously affiliated employers in social welfare, education, and health care. There have

been calls to protect the rights of LGBTQ+ employees by removing exemptions that allow religiously affiliated employers to discriminate. There have also been calls for new federal legislation to further protect religious freedom. These policy debates are framed by legal debate about the extent to which international human rights law supports religious exemptions from anti-discrimination legislation (Vickers 2016), and philosophical debates about the relative merits of tolerance and respect (Richardson-Self 2015). The larger project will combine empirical social research about workplace experiences and managerial practices with legal and philosophical analysis. It will produce findings that organisations and policy makers can immediately use to guide their responses to religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights. The proposed research will be the first major study of this kind in Australia.

The survey aims to evaluate the effects of legislation and institutional strategies on the experience of LGBTQ+ employees in religiously affiliated workplaces. Such empirical evidence can then be used to inform legislative reform, government policy and management practice.

Recruitment

To attract as many respondents as possible, we will predominantly employ an online approach to survey distribution using Facebook, Twitter, and email, and via LGBTQ+ community organisations, religious bodies and workplace associations such as your own. The survey will help us understand the issues faced by the LGBTQ+ workers in various states of Australia. These issues will be further investigated through up to 70 interviews (Study 4).

Research team for Study 2 and 4.

The team comprises of the lead investigator Professor Douglas Ezzy, Associate Professor Ange Dwyer and Research fellow, Dr Bronwyn Fielder. Ezzy has published extensively on religion, including the experience of Anglicans, LGBT Christians, and the impact of religious anti-discrimination legislation (Ezzy 2013, 2017, 2018; Collins, Collins, and Ezzy 2016; Fielder and Ezzy 2018) and has considerable management experience both in administration and research. He is lead investigator of a current ARC Discovery on “Religious Diversity in Australia”. Dwyer is a national expert on dealing with sexuality, gender, and sex diversity in workplaces such as policing and criminal justice. She has provided training for LGBTQ+ awareness and policy in the workplace to senior managers from the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Tasmania and for Tasmania Police and Tasmania Fire Service. She has also been extensively involved in mentoring police officers as part of their training and in the management of LGBTQ+ staff. Fielder is a Research Fellow at the University of Tasmania. Her research focuses on the reproduction of

inequalities in society and ways in which these inequalities can be addressed. Her publications include her co-authored book (with Ezzy) 2017, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Christians; Authentic selves*, which outlines how LGBT Christians negotiate seemingly disparate identities and seek to live a life that is both authentic to their sexuality and/or gender, as well as their religious selves. Her recent work includes co-authored chapters in *Bisexuality, Spirituality and Identity* (2019) and *Same-sex Relationships, Law and Social Change* (2020). Other members of the team include Professor Simon Rice (a human rights lawyer from the University of Sydney), Rev Angus McLeay (an Anglican priest, also completing a PhD at the University of Tasmania), Dr Louise Richardson-Self (a philosopher at the University of Tasmania), and Professor Lori Beaman (from the University of Ottawa in Canada).

Benefit

The overall project will provide immediate benefits through identifying effective Australian policies, strategies and practices for managing religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights in the workplace that can inform decisions by policy makers and organisational managers. Religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights are a major and ongoing site of political and community tension. An empirically rigorous analysis of the issues will provide essential information to inform this public debate, guide policy makers in developing legislation, and assist managers in framing institutional responses.

Communication of Results

Information about project publications will be available on the project website <www.lgbtandreligiousfreedom.com.au>. Results will be disseminated via reports, journal articles, book chapters and presentations at conferences. Resources will include downloadable results summaries for policy makers, case studies, summary sheets for international researchers, links to academic publications, and recordings of symposia presentations.