YOUNG & RESILIENT RESEARCH CENTRE

Y&R 2024 SEMINAR SERIES

11 December: Dr Donna James

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Precarious labour geographies of Working Holiday Makers: deepening inequalities among young temporary migrants



Working Holiday Makers (WHMs) are young people (18 – 35) who come to Australia from over 40 countries on a temporary visa that permits them work rights. Research over the previous decade has highlighted that they are a highly precarious group of young temporary migrant workers. Due to successive policy changes, which have aligned the Australian Working Holiday program (originally a cultural exchange program) to Australia's unskilled labour needs, WHMs experience high mobility and transience, and are commonly shut out from stable employment in city centres. The production of these conditions alongside changes to the WHM cohort has resulted in WHMs becoming increasingly more vulnerable to exploitation and sexual harassment, among other harms. This presentation draws on data from a national survey (n. 573) and interviews conducted with WHMs (n.11) in 2020 - 2021. I illustrate how the conditions produced by the contemporary policy framework underpinning the Australian Working Holiday Program (AWHP), contribute to pervasive exploitation and patterns of (im)mobility that undermine broader goals toward achieving social and mobility justice. I will also explore how these conditions intersect with particular social contexts (i.e. rural areas) to exacerbate WHMs' vulnerability to gendered and raced harms. These findings contribute to a growing evidence base which suggests that using temporary migrant labour to address labour shortages is an unsustainable approach that risks deepening existing inequalities.

Biography

Dr Donna James is an Early Career Academic at Western Sydney University. Her research interrogates precarious labour and its implications for equity and social justice.

11 December, 12:00 to 1:00 PM

Parramatta South EB.G.22 & online