

OBITUARY

Tanya Maree Carney 25 September 1972–24 September 2024

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From late 2019 until her death in September 2024, Dr Tanya Carney was the beloved, quietly capable, and always calm Assistant Editor of *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*.

Tanya began her undergraduate studies when in her early 30s. As the mother of two young boys, she travelled across Sydney to the University of New South Wales (UNSW), from a distant but close-knit South-West Sydney community, whose character changed over her lifetime from one housing young families growing up in subdivisions of former farmland to a manufacturing hub, and then to one whose dominant occupation today is health and social care work. During her final years, Tanya herself worked in the latter sector, combining part-time work as a coordinator in the National Disability Support Scheme with her *ELRR* work, and fitting both around frequent rounds of intensive chemotherapy. From conversations with her office colleagues in disability support who attended her large funeral on 1 October 2024, it was clear that they had huge respect for Tanya and placed heavy trust in her, just as we at *ELRR* relied on her calm problem-solving and coordinating skills. We all remembered her oft-repeated catchphrase, ‘no worries’: nothing was too much trouble, and she could always find a solution. Tanya had a wide-ranging and long-standing social network, based on her many interests and skills outside academia. For example, as a prize-winning lacemaker, she displayed the capabilities that made her such a good researcher and research administrator: the capacity to visualise intricate patterns and to build and document them methodically.

Tanya used these skills to explore the research subject dearest to her heart: patterns of mothers’ labour market participation. In her undergraduate studies, she quickly progressed to a first-class Honours degree in Industrial Relations, Social Science and Social Policy, winning a PhD scholarship. Her 2005 Honours thesis, supervised by Emeritus Professor Ralph Hall and me, was titled ‘The career transitions of mothers with young children’. In this study, Tanya used the early waves of the then-new large-scale Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) panel survey to establish an important new concept: that of care security, as opposed to job security. Tanya showed how the Australian labour market was structured in such a way that the mothers of young children were forced to choose between secure jobs providing little flexibility for family care (care insecurity) on the one hand, and more flexible jobs that accommodated care but were insecure in terms of tenure (job insecurity).

Beginning her PhD studies, again at UNSW, and again supervised by Emeritus Professor Hall and myself, Tanya finessed this important concept of care insecurity. She tested her

ideas at Australian and international conferences, and which were then accepted and published in an authoritative Australian journal (Carney 2007, 2009a, 2009b).

Now approaching the age of 40, Tanya encountered the need to trade job security for care security – the need she had documented as the experience of many women. She was combining paid work and study with parenting the two fine boys who were her pride and joy, as well as also needing to provide care for a parent who was then undergoing complex treatment for a serious illness. At this time, Tanya was tutoring part-time in applied social statistics, and it was a joy to observe how even number-phobic students responded to her calm, cheerful, reasoned, and problem-solving approach in the classroom. In her PhD, Tanya further explored the conceptualisation of motherhood as opposed to gender more broadly, as a feminist issue, focusing on care and work time. She analysed occupational segregation from the perspective of women's career transitions, using fine-grained longitudinal analysis to identify how the working time norms of different occupations serve as significant barriers to, or enablers of, mothers' capacity to enter and remain in various occupations. Her PhD was awarded in 2012 and again, her research was peer-reviewed and accepted for publication (Carney 2012; Carney and Junor 2014).

Between 2012 and 2017, Tanya worked with the UNSW Media Unit to publicise her findings. For example, her research was cited in the Australian Broadcasting Commission's national evening current affairs programme, *The Drum* (Cannold 2014). At this time, Tanya was employed part-time in the UNSW Industrial Relations Research Centre, providing important Research Assistant support for the administration of small- and large-scale surveys, undertaken as part of grant-funded and pro-bono projects. While this work was not directly linked to her key gender focus, she was able to provide evidence of the link between skill under-utilisation and de-motivation as part of a pilot study of regional skill shortages we were undertaking for the South West Sydney Manufacturing and Engineering Skills Taskforce. Tanya also contributed to a survey-based study of the Australian civilian aircraft maintenance workforce as part of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project. Her meticulous documentation provided us with great coding frames and data files, and she contributed to the writing-up of summary reports and the final report. She helped organise industry conference events and co-authored one of the project's academic publications (Quinlan et al 2016). During these years, as is the typical fate of insecurely employed Research Assistants, and as illustrative of her research on maternal job insecurity, Tanya also worked simultaneously on ARC grant-funded projects at Sydney University (on Household Risk and Securitisation of Household Debt) and at the University of Newcastle (on Employment Activation and the Changing Economy-Society Relation). In these projects, she participated in the full range of quantitative and qualitative analysis methodologies that she had formerly studied and taught.

In 2018, Tanya began what promised to be her ideal job, as an economist with the Australia Institute's Centre for Future Work. However, she almost immediately fell ill with the as-yet undiagnosed symptoms of what would turn out to be multiple myeloma. It is impossible to convey the distress Tanya experienced at inexplicably not being able to perform at her best, as well as her gratitude for the kindness and understanding of the Centre's staff, who supported her in this period before anyone understood the source of the dramatic change in her stamina. Reluctantly, she resigned, then received the diagnosis (an unusual one for a person aged under 60), and faced her first bone marrow transplant.

In 2019 and 2020, Tanya put her academic skills to good use, characteristically being engaged to review the Cancer Council's publication on myeloma (Cancer Council 2022). In 2019, she also began her career for the next five years: publications reviewer and Assistant Editor for *ELRR*. In due course, she was able to combine this work with Disability Support management, carrying forward yet another combination of insecurely funded part-time jobs, such as those that were the subject of her research, until she finally became too ill to work, in August 2024, just a month before her passing.

On hearing of Tanya's death, Dr Jim Stanford, Director of the Centre for Future Work, wrote:

I was honoured to work with Tanya during her tenure as a researcher with our Centre for Future Work. She was one of our very first staff members, as we embarked on building our team of progressive labour policy experts. Tanya was a tremendous member of our team: not just her first-rate writing and advocacy skills, but her collegial, friendly, and straight-up way of being. She added immensely to our project, and I am grateful for her friendship and commitment to it. She fought a valiant battle with this unforgiving menace of a disease, showing her courage and compassion to the end. Her memory is a blessing. I will miss her, and offer my profound condolences to her sons.

All of us involved with *ELRR* also send our profound condolences to Tanya's two sons, now very impressive adults in their twenties, and to Tanya's parents and sister who provided such strong support.

The journal will greatly miss Tanya's practical and optimistic approach to finding a solution to any problem. Tanya was a painstaking editor, drawing out the author's intention even from convoluted expressions, and always taking pains to be consultative. She had been hoping to resume her own research, partly because she had so much unrealised intellectual potential, and partly because, in Australia at the moment, there is a strong policy focus on her chosen field: gender and care. Yuvisthi Naidoo and I had been in the midst of working with Tanya to curate a Themed Collection on Gender and Work for *ELRR* when she was hospitalised for the final time. We are sad to be completing this task without Tanya's insightful presence. We are sure that by dedicating the collection to Tanya's memory, we will be working on material that was very close to her heart.

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