

FEATURED SCHOLAR

Each month the Work and Family Researchers Network spotlights the contributions of a scholar who is making significant advances in understanding work-family concerns. We are delighted to present the following interview with Professor Jaeseung Kim.



Jaeseung Kim, Ph.D.

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Experts Panel Link: <https://wfrn.org/expert/jaeseung-kim/>

WFRN - How did you first get introduced to work-family issues and become a researcher in this field?

Jaeseung - *While working as a social worker at the WeStart program in South Korea, a Korean version of Head Start, I realized that low-income parents had difficulty managing childcare demands and work responsibilities. Moreover, these challenges gradually eroded their ability to provide stable parenting and participate in the program. The conflicts and challenges they experienced motivated me to further study how public and employment policies can help reduce such burdens and improve the work-family balance and well-being of working parents. In my PhD program at the University of Chicago, I was fortunate to work with and receive guidance from Drs. Julia Henly and Susan Lambert, renowned work-family scholars. Their expertise and passion for the precarious work and caregiving issues that low-income workers and parents struggle with shaped and guided my research journey as a work-family scholar who examines precarious work conditions and work-family policies for low-income workers and parents.*

WFRN - How did you first get involved with the WFRN? What do you value most about the organization?

Jaeseung - *Since my doctoral program, the WFRN community has provided me with valuable opportunities to present my preliminary research findings and network with researchers from all over the world. The first WFRN conference in which I participated was in 2016. I presented my research findings on the association between workplace flexibility and work-family balance for working parents and received a warm welcome and insightful comments from scholars with diverse backgrounds. From that moment, I felt that I had found my home conference. I particularly appreciate and value the WFRN's role in providing ample opportunities to interact with and build relationships with other work-family scholars. At the conference, I was able to meet some of my reference "rock stars" and communicate with scholars with similar research interests and a similar passion for work-family issues. This WFRN engagement led me to participate in the 2017 Work Autonomy, Flexibility and Work-Life Balance project organized by Dr. Heejung Chung in London. We jointly presented our research findings related to flexible arrangements and their implications for gender equality. In collaboration with work and family experts at the WFRN, I was able to produce research articles in *Social Indicators Research* and *The Journal of Marriage and Family*.*

WFRN - Tell us about your current research, what are you studying?

Jaeseung - *My research centers on precarious work conditions and caregiving challenges for low-income families and how work-family policies, both private and public, can help mitigate such challenges and contribute to the well-being of low-income working parents and their children. More specifically, I study how precarious work conditions—unstable and unpredictable work schedules as well as inadequate work hours—undermine work-family balance and workers' well-being. Recently, another renowned work-family scholar and my*

dear colleague, Dr. Lonnie Golden and I have been exploring how underemployment (i.e., involuntary part-time employment) influences workers' health and well-being. I am also investigating how workplace flexibility (i.e., flexible schedules and working from home) can promote (or impede) work-family balance and parenting for working parents. My recent research examines whether and how parents' access to flexible work arrangements increases time investments in activities that promote parent and child health, and how this can be leveraged to reduce socioeconomic inequalities among families. In addition, I am studying childcare subsidy programs that provide critical financial support to low-income families and promote their economic independence and children's development by subsidizing childcare costs. My colleagues and I are exploring how participation in these programs helps promote economic well-being and stability in childcare arrangements.

WFRN - How does your research connect to social policy?

Jaeseung - *Overall, many working parents struggle to manage work and caregiving challenges, and their unstable and unpredictable work schedules and lack of access to flexible work options aggravate such challenges. Thus, public policies and programs should be implemented to improve the quality of work and address childcare challenges for working parents, particularly low-income parents. Therefore, it is crucial to expand fair workweek laws in the US, which aim to promote the predictability and stability of work schedules and give workers the right to request flexible work arrangements without fear of retaliation. Such changes would improve work-family balance for working parents and promote the well-being of their family and children.*

My research findings also suggest that policy efforts to stabilize participation in childcare subsidy programs can have economic benefits for low-income families. New policy provisions in the 2014 reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant, such as implementing a minimum 12-month eligibility period for all families and extending subsidy benefits for three months to cover job searching during unemployment, have the potential to improve the stability and length of program participation. Therefore, as states have implemented these provisions since 2014, this may have contributed to subsidy continuity and improved the material well-being of subsidized families.

WFRN - What are your big findings? Did you make any unexpected discoveries?

Jaeseung - *My research has consistently demonstrated the importance of workers' control over their work conditions, such as scheduling and location of work. Workers with access to such control in their workplace are more satisfied with their work and financial conditions and experience reduced work-family conflict. These flexible work arrangements help increase working parents' quality time with their children, and they are particularly beneficial for single mothers who are constrained by work and caregiving demands. I also identify some gender differences in this context. One of my unexpected findings is that working from home can be a double-edged sword for women, as it allows them to engage in more housework and childcare activities and can intensify women's traditional gender role as the primary caregiver.*

Regarding childcare subsidy programs, my research team has found that restrictive program rules and cumbersome application processes, as well as limited control over work schedules, make it difficult for low-income parents to maintain participation in the program. We also identify how unstable use of subsidy programs, such as an early exit from the program or on-and-off engagement with the program, can lead to an increased risk of material hardship and unstable childcare arrangements for low-income working parents.

WFRN - What advice would you give to graduate students or those early in their professional careers?

Jaeseung - *An academic career is a long journey, and you are often the only one who can push your work forward, well, in addition to your dissertation deadline. You need to develop different ways to motivate yourself to keep walking and enjoying this journey. Therefore, choosing a research area and topic that you are excited about and have a passion for or that you are personally related with and care for is crucial. There are times when you lose interest in your research topic or feel doubtful about your topic in the face of rejections of your articles or grant proposals. At these times, your inner motivation and curiosity for the topic help you move forward. Also, as your research interests keep evolving over time, it is recommended that you keep reflecting on how your research trajectory is developing over time and where it is heading. Building networks with mentors and colleagues through conferences such as the WFRN and taking part in collaborative work provide valuable opportunities to motivate your research and guide your research journey. Finally, in this academic journey, we need to develop strategies to balance work, family, and self-care. I have found that some work-family scholars, including myself, have sacrificed their family relationships or health due to overworking and tight deadlines. My wife asked me to take out the garbage yesterday, however, I could not do it because of answering this question (or that is just my excuse). I hope this trade-off is worth it. We should learn from our research on the importance of work and family balance for our well-being.*

WFRN - What directions hold the greatest promise for discovery in the work-family field?

Jaeseung - *The pandemic has highlighted the importance of flexible work arrangements, especially the ability to work from home, which has enabled many employees to remain employed and provide homeschooling for their children. Given the expansion of working-from-home options, more research is needed to explore how such shifts of workplace impact workers' performance as well as gender divisions related to household and caregiving responsibilities at home. The pandemic has also underscored the importance of work-family policies, such as paid family leave and childcare support, which help ameliorate work and caregiving challenges. Recently, several new policy initiatives that aim to support working families have been proposed and implemented in the US, such as the expansion of child tax credit, paid family leave for all workers, and universal pre-K. Thus, new studies are needed to test the efficacy of such policy efforts and their implications for working parents and their children.*

ABOUT THE WFRN

The Work and Family Researchers Network's mission is to facilitate virtual and face-to-face interaction among academic work and family researchers from a broad range of fields as well as engage the next generation of work and family scholars. The WFRN welcomes the participation of policy makers and workplace practitioners as it seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of work and family issues among the community of global stakeholders.

During 2021, the WFRN will host a series of virtual conference events. We look forward to our next in-person conference June 23-25, 2022 in New York City.

To learn more about the WFRN, please visit our website [WFRN.ORG](https://wfrn.org). To become a member, please click on this link <https://wfrn.org/become-a-member/>.