



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 Kaumudi Misra.



Kaumudi Misra, PhD.

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Experts Panel Link: <https://wfrn.org/expert/kaumudi-misra/>

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

Kaumudi - After completing my MBA, I worked as an HR Manager for about 6 years, and always wanted to find ways to have mutually beneficial outcomes for employers as well

as employees. At the time, work-life balance for employees was one of the issues that was discussed in organizational meetings, with little action. That, as well as reflections on my own personal work/life situations over time got me interested in the topic, and I started reading on it.

Seeking to make a difference pushes me towards actionable research. Providing positive work-life solutions for employees allows for that and more! My organizational experience helped me understand the practicalities of work-life challenges and experiences for employers as well as employees alike. My ideas from the real-world became focused with an in-depth understanding of the topic while doing my doctoral studies at Michigan State. Collaborating with work-family scholars like Dr. Ellen Kossek gave me deeper insight into the field, and sparked my interest levels further. For my PhD dissertation, I studied work-life issues for global teams that have to coordinate work across time zones.

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

Kaumudi - I first came across the Sloan Work Family Research Network webpage while working on a project with Drs. Ellen Kossek and Peter Berg. The Sloan website was a very informative source of work-life research and practice, which then led me to the WFRN. I became a founding member of WFRN in 2014, and have participated in the bi-annual conference ever since. When the formation of Special Interest Groups (SIG) was announced, I volunteered to become part of the leadership team for the Technology, Work and Family SIG, and enjoy working with the group very much. I find the rich, interdisciplinary discussions when we meet for the WFRN conference, as well as the research updates posted on the website extremely helpful. I immensely value that the WFRN brings together scholars across different disciplines to work towards a common goal. I think it provides significant opportunities to network and meet like-minded scholars. Through the network, I have made many friends, found research partners as well as met work-family scholars from across the globe who help me learn about different work-family policies and perspectives. Work-life research and practice involves the study of workplace practices as well as what we do as parents, as children of aging parents, and responsible members of the community. More importantly, it informs policymaking as well. It is wonderful how the topic covers so many aspects - both within and outside organizations. Work is necessary but life happens too!

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

Kaumudi - *My current research spans two primary areas of inquiry - (1) the use of work-life flexibility practices as a strategic HR tool; and (2) factors affecting employee productivity, including organizational-level practices and individual perceptions, such as trust in employers.*

One of my current projects is a continuation of my study on the effects of HR practices on the productivity and work-life outcomes of people working across time zones. I am looking at which HR practices can be implemented to have a productive global team, and how. I am also studying the post-Covid impact on employee productivity and how team dynamics might have changed with the Covid-related policies that organizations had to implement. Work-life flexibility practices are an integral part of this study.

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

Kaumudi - *My research on global teams highlighted the use of communication technology as well as flexible work practices for the productivity of employees working across time zones. Quite unexpectedly, I found that teams that have the highest levels of communication technology use had the highest levels of productivity as well as stress. I had expected that the stress would make them less productive, but in the sample I studied, this was not the case. This was an interesting insight - in reality, we do see people working and communicating with their teams on their mobiles all the time. While this makes them report high levels of stress, they also seem to remain productive at the same time. This made me think about the long-term impact of the new tech-driven global economy, along with shorter attention spans seen among the new generations. How far will technology take us, before the world gets overwhelmed?*

WFRN - *How does your research inform workplace practice?*

Kaumudi - *The findings from my research have both managerial and academic implications. Managers need to recognize that, while teams may be productive, they are also stressed at the same time while using technology-based communication. Work-life flexibility practices benefit employees, and by reducing stress levels of employees (which I also found), these flexibility practices can benefit employers as well. Existing research has already shown that stress has negative effects on individuals, contributing to issues such as reduced productivity, absenteeism, turnover and poor health. Employers certainly do not want a sick work force! These effects may not show up in the short term, but stress-related problems do have longer-term and indirect effects on organizational outcomes. For instance, people may quit, or employers may incur higher health costs. All of which are undesirable outcomes for both employers as well as employees. It is important to implement work-life flexibility practices to mitigate some of the negative effects of tech-based communication. Separately, I also study how social contexts affect the implementation of work-life flexibility practices such as flextime or*

compressed work weeks. In order for these practices to be effective, managers must implement practices that fit local norms.

WFRN - How do you integrate work-family topics in your teaching and/or training? Do you have an assignment or approach that is especially effective?

Kaumudi - The most wonderful aspect of work-family topics is that they are relevant to one and all! The majority of our students work full-time, or sometimes are juggling more than one part-time job. Therefore, learning how to balance organizational work, School work as well as life outside of work is important to them. I share my research findings in class since it is practitioner-oriented and speaks to organizational policies and practices. We talk a lot about tech-based communication at work, how to create boundaries between work and life, as well as any challenges in implementing work-life flexibility practices. Apart from in-class discussions, I have found that team case discussions between students are extremely useful. Students work on a specific work-life issue in groups of 3-4 and come up with recommended solutions to an organizational scenario. I enjoy the discussions with the student teams and their solutions are sometimes very innovative, even if only in theory! I have found that students find the topic relatable and hence, exciting.

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

Kaumudi - I would just say - be yourself - always. That is number one. Do not study topics just because they 'seem' interesting, or are currently being discussed the world over. While important, those may not be your calling. Or, if you are in the industry, where do you think you would enjoy working? Google and Facebook may be attractive options, but are those the companies for you? Will you thrive in those work environments? You definitely could. However, whether you are in academia or in the industry, the question needs to be answered - by you, for yourself. Second, ask yourself - what do you want to make an impact on? What's the difference you would like to make in the next, say 5-10 years? That will give you the direction you want to take.

That said and done, seek out opportunities, as well as mentors. I have personally been extremely lucky to have had some great mentors since early on in my life, and have gained the most valuable experiences and insights from them. Sometimes it could be a colleague, sometimes your own professor, or a friend. Asking for help is a great start. Putting in the required efforts to make the best of the help provided, is the crucial part. While there is enough information available out there for someone to be able to navigate their way to success in whatever their chosen field may be, a good mentor helps you find the best version of yourself. So ask, seek, and find!

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/>.