



## 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 Eiko Strader



### Eiko Strader, PhD

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Experts Panel Link: <https://wfrn.org/expert/eiko-strader-phd/>

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

**Eiko** - Born and raised in Japan, I grew up watching countless women, including my own mother, withdraw from the labor force to care for their loved ones. Japanese men in contrast face one of the longest working hours in the world and the majority do not take the time off to care for their families. I have always been interested in Japan's stubborn gender inequality problem, but I didn't have the words to explain why things were the way they were until I began pursuing a doctoral degree in Sociology. During my first summer at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I had the opportunity to work with two amazing work-family scholars, Joya Misra and Stephanie Moller Smith. Under their guidance, I learned to build a cross-national work-family policy database, merge it with micro datasets, and conduct cross-national comparative research. This experience became the catalyst to deepen my understanding of work-family policies and gender inequality across divergent contexts.

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

**Eiko** - I first got involved with the WFRN in 2012, when I presented a paper with Joya Misra at the inaugural conference. Although I haven't been able to join the meetings for the past few years due to the pandemic, what I appreciate about the WFRN is that it is an interdisciplinary organization and attracts both practitioners and researchers working on work-family issues. To develop solutions to work-family challenges, it is important to have a venue, such as the WFRN, to foster interdisciplinary and cross-sector conversations.

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

**Eiko** - Broadly speaking, my research focuses on the role of welfare states in shaping differential life chances across groups. Framing it as an extension of the welfare state, I also study about the U.S. military and its role in reducing or exacerbating social inequalities.

One of my current projects examines how globalization of domestic services in the U.S. may be associated with wage dispersion among full-time employed native-born women, given the classed and racialized nature of labor processes and divergent patterns of outsourcing household production. Because the U.S. continues to lag behind other wealthy countries in implementing work-family policies at the federal level, I've been

focusing my attention on local work-family resource contexts and differential labor market outcomes among women. My long-term goal is to understand how global care chains shape regional and global inequalities.

I am also studying how inequalities by gender and parenthood manifest within the U.S. military where families technically have access to paid leave and government-subsidized childcare programs. I say “technically” because even though the military has been a leader in providing high-quality childcare options and supporting working parents in the U.S., many military families struggle to balance work and family. With the help of my brilliant doctoral students, we have been cleaning the military occupational specialties (MOS) data to see if sex composition at the unit level may be associated with differential likelihood of leaving the military by gender and parenthood status. I want to know whether and how unit-level context matters in explaining differential life chances within this unique work-family environment.

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

**Eiko** - In my recently published paper in *Family Relations* (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/fare.12680>), I examined the association between state-level work-family resources and earnings differentials by gender and parenthood in the U.S. Although working mothers earned more in states with more work-family resources, my results also indicate that the gender wage gap between mothers and fathers remains robust because fathers similarly earned higher wages in states with better work-family context. Because work-family issues are often framed as women’s issues, my findings could be seen as unexpected by some scholars and policymakers, but those who recognize the fragmented nature of work-family support in the U.S. may see my findings as not that surprising. Regardless, I hope these insights facilitate discussions to develop more comprehensive intervention strategies to reduce the gender wage gap and support working families in the U.S. and elsewhere.

**WFRN - How can your research guide the formulation of social policy?**

**Eiko** - I hope my research helps to reveal differential impacts of social policy and encourages us all to question the assumptions underlying the formulation and implementation of specific policy options. I think my research findings can be used to facilitate informed policy conversations about addressing various forms of social inequality rather than exacerbating them.

**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?**

**Eiko** - I have a joint appointment in the school of public policy and public administration and women's, gender, and sexuality studies, so I fortunately get to integrate work-family topics into every class I teach! In my policy analysis class, I have my students develop a policy memo wherein they are asked to distill a social issue down to the most important bits for a specific stakeholder. As an example, I often use gender inequality to illustrate how one may go about measuring and describing it as a policy problem. My students also learn to develop their own policy solution ideas and make policy recommendations to various stakeholders. For projecting policy outcomes, I use low uptake of paternity leave in Japan as an example of actual policy outcomes being different from the intended outcomes. It is a lot of work, but I really enjoy helping students conduct their own policy analysis because it gives them the opportunity to be creative and solve complex problems that they are passionate about.

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

**Eiko** - I am still trying to establish myself as a scholar, so I don't really have much advice for those in similar life stages, but I can say mentors are important. I have been very fortunate to have had several amazing mentors in my life, and each one of them helped me get here. If you don't have any, then I hope you can find one. If you are not sure how to go about finding the right mentor, I think identifying short- and long-term professional goals may help you to figure out what kind of mentor you need. Knowing what kind of mentoring you are most interested in helps you make the ask a bit less nerve-racking since you are focusing on WHAT you need rather than WHO you are (impostor syndrome!). If you have one mentor, then find another one by considering different skills you want to nurture to achieve various goals. Ideally, you want to develop a network of mentors because challenges and problems you face can be complex and may require diverse skills and perspectives to solve them.

## **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.

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/>.