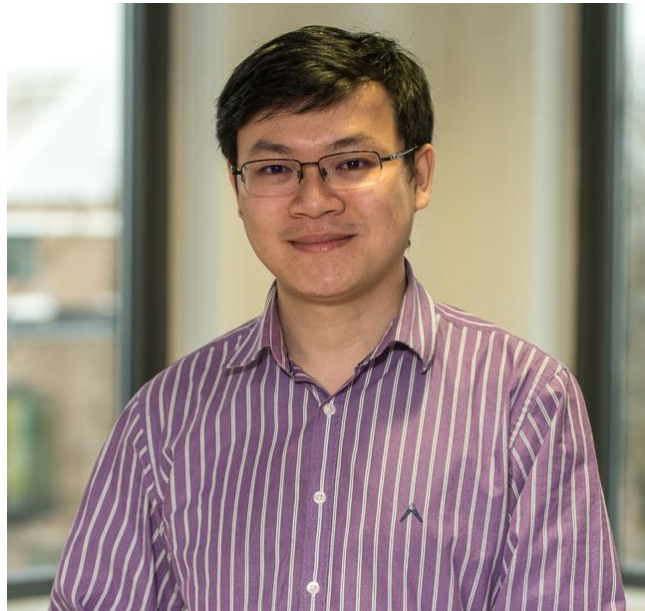




FEATURED SCHOLAR

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 Yang Hu.



Yang Hu

Professor of Global Sociology

Lancaster University

United Kingdom

Experts Panel Link:

<https://wfrn.org/expert/yang-hu/>

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

Yang - My gendered childhood in China and experience of moving to the UK to pursue postgraduate studies played a strong role in shaping my research interest in intersectional inequalities in work-family life. As I grew up, I was always puzzled by, and interested in, understanding how my parents came to the arrangement where my father worked full-time while my mother took on a part-time job and often worked from home. I was also acutely aware of the fact that my female cousins took on very different chores and were expected to do more work at home than I did from a young age. These early observations and experiences inspired several of my studies on the role of [intergenerational relations](#) in shaping children's [housework time](#) and [gendered occupational aspirations](#) in China. As I moved to England for my MPhil and PhD, I learned firsthand how different cultural, socioeconomic, and political contexts powerfully shape people's gendered work-family lives. This was also the time when my inter-ethnic/racial encounters brought the concept of intersectionality truly to life in my academic thinking. I was very fortunate to pursue this interest in my PhD project and research how Chinese-British inter-ethnic couples negotiate intersecting gender and ethnic identities in navigating their work-family life. In 2016, I published this work as my first book [Chinese-British Intermarriage - Disentangling Gender and Ethnicity](#).

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

Yang - I joined the WFRN as an early career fellow (ECF) [in 2017-18](#). As far as I know, the WFRN is one of the few professional organizations that run a dedicated professional development program for early career scholars. The mentorship provided by the then-director of the ECF program, Professor Stephen Sweet, was invaluable. Since then, I have been involved in and enjoyed many wonderful WFRN events and conferences, served on WFRN conference committees, and am now a proud member of the WFRN social media team. Three particular aspects of the WFRN stood out for me: (1) a caring community - the collegial and supportive vibe in the WFRN community is second to none, (2) the WFRN does such an impactful job in translating research into meaningful real-world engagement, and (3) with a global outlook, the WFRN is inclusive of diverse perspectives from across the world.

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

Yang - I pursue two broad lines of inquiry in my current research. Building on my long-term interest, the first examines *work-family inequalities in a global context*. I do so by focusing on relatively understudied contexts outside the Global North and from a cross-

national comparative perspective. For example, [one of my recent papers](#) published in *Sex Roles* (with Mariam Abouelenin) examined the intergenerational transmission of employment stability between mothers and daughters in Egypt. In this study, we highlight the crucial role of Egypt's distinctive sectorial set-up and labor market transformations in giving rise to a mother's employment as a key resource that bolsters their daughters' labor market attachment. In another [recent *Nature Human Behaviour* paper](#) (with Yue Qian), we assembled a large-scale global dataset covering 1.79 million people from 106 societies to reveal the increasingly important, but often overlooked, role of the mother (versus the father) in shaping individuals' educational mobility across the world. In my work, I am keen to de-center work-family research to non-Western and cross-national perspectives.

In the second strand of my research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada), I examine the [implications of artificial intelligence for work-family \(in\)equality](#). When I first began this research a few years ago, artificial intelligence (AI) was largely associated with science fiction, such as *The Terminator* and *Ex Machina*. In a short time, AI is already shaping almost every aspect of our work-family life, ranging from job advertising to CV screening and from candidate interviewing to work scheduling. Working with an interdisciplinary team of sociologists, management scholars, and data scientists, I explore the socio-technological frontiers regarding how we can make AI work for, rather than against, work-family equity.

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

Yang - My research, I hope, guides the formulation of policies by helping policymakers "see" the problems and by providing robust evidence that informs policymaking. My recent projects also help inform the technological design of algorithms. In my [research on AI and work-family \(in\)equality](#), for example, our team is currently developing an AI design toolkit and policy guidelines. A key part of this engagement work is to ensure that work-family justice is reflected and embedded in the design and use of AI in labor market processes such as job advertising, hiring, and workplace interactions. We submitted some early evidence from this work to the UK Parliament, showing how gender biases in digital job advertising shape labor force gender segregation, as well as how we can harness the power of AI to mitigate such biases by attuning automated text processing algorithms to be sensitive to gender, work-family, and equity issues.

WFRN - *Can you tell me about how your research might help individuals or families develop effective personal strategies?*

Yang - We often hear that we need major cultural and structural shifts to eliminate intersectional inequalities (e.g., gender and race) in work-family life. Equally important, I also believe in the power of small changes we can make in our everyday lives as individuals. But we can't change something we don't see. Work-family inequalities can often be taken for granted and go unnoticed and unchallenged. Research translation is crucial to raising public awareness of work-family inequalities. For example, prompted by the #EldestDaughterSyndrome trending on TikTok, I recently wrote a [short article](#) for *The Conversation* discussing the issue of domestic gender inequality among children, building on my long-term research in this area. I'm delighted to hear from a number of readers that they felt "seen," "heard," and "can finally put a name to what [they are] fighting against," and am thrilled to see a new generation of adolescents becoming aware of, speaking out about, and challenging their gendered childhoods. It can be quite nerve-racking to put ourselves and our research "out there," but the many WFRN events on research translation really inspired and encouraged me to start conversations and engage with individuals and families beyond academia.

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?*

Yang - In line with the global scope of my research, I try to foreground global perspectives and experiences in my teaching. At Lancaster, I run a course called "Global Families and Intimacy." The course guides students to explore family (and work) relations and their social, cultural, economic, and political configurations across diverse contexts globally. When I first designed the course in 2016, I thought it was no good for me to talk about "global families" myself. So I started an initiative called "Global Classrooms," whereby I invited my sociologist friends and colleagues (and also their students when possible) from across the world to join my classroom in Lancaster via Skype - that was way before Zoom became mainstream during the COVID-19 pandemic! My students loved the "Global Classrooms" and learning about families in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Asia, Australia, and North America from scholars located in and/or closely researching work-family issues in these regions. I warmly welcome any WFRN members interested in joining "Global Classrooms" to get in touch with me!

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

Yang - It takes a village to grow as an academic! The WFRN has been the village that initially supported and continues to support my growth - colleagues in the WFRN have been most caring and supportive in mentoring me over the years. Through the WFRN, I

have developed friendships and productive collaborations with a number of colleagues across the world. The WFRN also opened my eyes to the many ways of working on work-family issues, for example, through academic research, research translation, and policy and practice engagement, just to name a few. We can't (always) do everything, everywhere, all at once - so let's find out where our passion lies and work for work-family justice together.

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/>.