



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 Kimberly French.



Kimberly French, Ph.D.

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Experts Panel Link:

<https://wfrn.org/expert/kimberly-french-ph-d/>

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

Kimberly - I grew up in a military family, which means we moved around quite a bit. There were times I was separated from each (and one time both) of my parents for days, weeks, or months. The impact of my parents' work on our family was highly salient and shaped my perspective of work and family expectations for myself growing up. Although I took courses in IO Psychology and Family Studies in college, it wasn't until I was earning my master's degree in IO Psychology that I realized work-family was an area of research. I was fortunate to land at an institution where a couple of faculty members introduced me to work-family research. I worked closely with one faculty member, Mark Agars, on some of his research related to women's advancement. He opened my eyes and gave me my first opportunities to engage in the work-family field. I loved every article, every discussion, and I was immediately hooked!

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

Kimberly - At the time I started working with Mark (2010-2012), WFRN was just becoming an organization. Mark and I coauthored a commentary in *Industrial Organizational Psychology Perspectives*, and all of the commentary authors were invited for a presentation at the first WFRN conference in 2012. I remember feeling terrified to present our ideas in front of a room full of scholars whose work I so admired. Simultaneously, I felt excited and privileged to meet and learn directly from everyone whose work I had been reading for the last year. I've attended every meeting since then and stayed a continual member in the organization. WFRN holds a special place in my academic heart. I value the opportunities WFRN provides to make connections, particularly across geographic and field boundaries that normally confine us. I also love that WFRN is committed to professional development and community outreach. For example, as an Early Career Fellow I had the opportunity to learn from peers and senior scholars that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

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

Kimberly - My work shares several common elements, including a focus on supports for people managing work and family, understanding of the role of time and timing in work-family processes, physical and physiological health underpinnings of work-family experiences, and considering the work-family processes as embedded in family and societal contexts.

The research I'm currently working on is largely in two streams. I have a number of studies right now looking at how work experiences affect parenting and child (adolescent) well-being. In particular, my work is expanding our current knowledge to capture work-to-parenting spillover as a goal-oriented process that unfolds over time, and as something that is shared, or negotiated, by two parents within dual-parent households. I also have some work in this area trying to understand pile-up as a crossover process, whereby accumulation of stressors affects the health over time within parent-child dyads.

I also have some very recent collaborative work looking at organizational health benefit policies (e.g., reproductive care policies, abortion-facilitative policies). Our studies in this area focus on whether and how employees know about these policies, as well as how policies affect employee attitudes and wellbeing.

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

Kimberly - This is an area that I'm starting to work towards and would like to do more in with my work. In one recent collaborative study with my former students, we found childhood psychological maltreatment was associated with increased levels of work-family conflict as an adult, as mediated by low perceptions of control and supervisor support. Relative to other forms of trauma, childhood psychological maltreatment is under-addressed in terms of policy and treatment. Our findings suggest childhood psychological maltreatment implications are not just clinical in nature and may interfere with the ability to obtain financial, employment, and family stability all of which are important for societal viability. We point towards the need for preventative strategies, such as economic and social policies that reduce poverty, racism, and financially support working parents as critical for mitigating downstream societal effects of childhood psychological maltreatment.

In my most recent stream of research on organizational health benefits, my colleague Keaton Fletcher and I are hoping to contribute information on healthcare and organizational benefits needs of employees within the U.S. workforce. I view this as informing local and national policy and law about employee healthcare coverage. We are also hoping to inform strategies or policies that might help U.S. employees better understand or use the benefits available to them.

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

Kimberly - A lot of my work highlights informal supports as critical for individuals managing work and family and points to the need for work-family supportive practices. For example, we recently developed a measure of flextime for shift workers. We found offering flextime and reducing negative interpersonal and scheduling consequences associated with using flextime were associated with a variety of desirable job attitudes, wellbeing indicators, and parenting behaviors. My meta-analytic work on informal supports showed perceptions of organizational support were the strongest correlate of work-family conflict (compared to more specific or family supports), and our estimates were about 26% stronger than previous meta-analyses on the topic. My colleagues and I also showed organizational supports are particularly tied to work-family conflict in national contexts where supports may be perceived as needed or useful (e.g., highly competitive or low collectivism countries).

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?*

Kimberly - I often draw on what we know about flexibility, support, and control when designing my courses and working with students. For example, all of my courses have some level of flexibility built into the requirements that allows students to adjust their learning experience and important dates to best suit their life and career goals. In terms of informal supports, I strive to approach students and their personal or family needs with compassion and understanding, providing instrumental support as I can.

I also try to serve as a role-model and facilitator for managing work and family. For example, I'm vocal and clear about boundaries on my time. I encourage my students to do the same, and I respect the boundaries they set for themselves. I'm open and vulnerable about both challenges and wins managing work and family when they occur. With my graduate students, we set yearly work and nonwork goals to encourage and show support for having lives outside of the lab. When setting our short-term goals, we aim to be ambitious but also realistic about time and feasibility given their different work and family needs.

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

Kimberly - Some of the best career advice I received was shortly after starting my first tenure-track position. First, take a moment and physically write down your vision for your professional future. What do you want to accomplish? What are the major questions you

want to answer? What are the changes you want to make in the field, in organizations, in society? What makes you special or different compared to others in your field? What makes you special or different from your mentor(s)? Summarize what you want to be known for (or do) in 1-2 sentences that anyone could understand. Run it by someone you trust to give you honest, quality feedback to make sure it makes sense, that it resonates with you.

Next post that physical paper somewhere you can see it when you are working. Careers are full of opportunities and decisions, and it can be overwhelming and confusing. Use your paper as a guiding light for all you do. Use it to decide what opportunities you want to say yes or no to. Use it to decide what to start and what to leave behind. Use it to gauge progress. Use it to position yourself strategically for that next position or promotion. Revisit it yearly to check in and make sure this is still your envisioned future self. Although I have not done this yet for myself, upon reflection maybe we could benefit by applying the same types of annual reflections on our family goals and personal goals as well.

Doing this exercise as a brand-new assistant professor straight out of graduate school was overwhelming, but also enlightening. I found it immensely helpful for thinking about my career in a strategic and meaningful way. I still have my paper, and it still guides me.

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/>.