

Research \ Action

Midyear Brief

Q&A: COVID-19 and Paid Leave

Deniz Çivril, Ph.D., joined WCW in 2020 as a research scientist in the Women in the Workplace Research Initiative. Her research interests center on labor economics, international trade, and corporate finance, and her current projects at WCW explore the effects of state paid leave laws.

Why are you interested in the issue of paid leave?

We all need to take time away from work for various reasons: either because we are sick or we want to bond with a new child, or maybe we need to deal with a serious personal or family health condition. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides important job protections, but it is unpaid and less than 60 percent of workers can benefit from it (and many eligible workers can't afford to take it). A relatively small percentage of workers have access to employer-provided paid family or sick leave. In other words, the system is such that we are forced to choose between a paycheck and our health or our family's health. Furthermore, the negative consequences of limited paid leave rights mostly fall on women and create systemic gender inequalities. This outcome is the reason why I am particularly interested in this subject.

Can you explain the study you're working on related to COVID-19 and paid leave?

Our project is investigating whether state-mandated paid sick leave helped control the early spread of COVID-19 and



ameliorated the economic distress caused by the pandemic. In particular, we're exploring whether people in states with guaranteed paid leave fared better in the pandemic and were better able to adopt social distancing measures compared to those in states without such a guarantee. We're able to do this by looking at cell phone location data, which shows how much people were moving around versus staying home, and COVID-19 incidence data.

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NIOST Study Offers Strategies to Engage Girls in STEM



We know it's important to engage youth in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). But some groups, such as girls, youth of color, and youth from rural areas often find themselves marginalized

and underrepresented in STEM learning opportunities and career pathways.

GEMS (Girls Excelling in Math and Science), an international network of hands-on out-of-school time clubs, works to increase girls' curiosity, interest, and persistence in STEM,

and wanted to know more about how girls were experiencing the program. With funding provided by the McElhattan Foundation, under the sponsorship of the Bridge Builders Community Foundation, the **National Institute on Out-of-School Time** (NIOST) stepped in to study how GEMS was engaging girls in STEM activities and to see what strategies could be shared with others trying to do the same.

Findings from the study of two GEMS clubs in Venango County, Pennsylvania, helped identify strategies to keep STEM engagement strong for girls during their early experiences in informal STEM learning. Recommendations include engaging girls directly in the scientific process, encouraging girls to work together, and making connections between what the girls are doing and what professional scientists do in their jobs.

More recommendations at wcwonline.org/researchandaction

Q&A: COVID-19 and Paid Leave (continued)

Will there be any impact of this research beyond COVID-19?

The research has the potential to inform both immediate questions about extending federal paid sick leave during this pandemic, and longer-term questions about the effects of having more comprehensive and permanent paid sick leave measures in place. If contagious people go to work because they cannot afford to stay home, they can infect others, and this has the potential to reduce economic activity overall, as well as to increase health costs and human suffering. It is critical to know whether having such policies in place—either in a pandemic like we have right now or a normal flu season—helps to ameliorate human suffering and loss, and economic distress.

Was there anything in particular that interested you about working at the Wellesley Centers for Women?

The topics studied at WCW are very diverse and timely. I really like that WCW researchers are from a wide spectrum of disciplines, but each aims for data-driven policy solutions. I believe that this interdisciplinary environment is very enriching and rewarding for any researcher at WCW.

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Wellesley Centers for Women

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New Research on the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQ+ Teens



WCW's research has often focused on the experiences of those who are underrepresented. Several new studies help us understand more about the experiences of LGBTQ+ teens in particular.

WCW Senior Research Scientists **Linda Charmaraman**, Ph.D., and **Jennifer M. Grossman**, Ph.D., and Research Associate **Amanda M. Richer**, M.A., looked at how LGBTQ+ teens talk to their families about sex and relationships as compared to heterosexual teens—a topic on which there has historically been very little research. Their study was published in the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*.

They found that mothers offered more messages about sexual protection methods to their heterosexual teens, and fathers talked less with LGBTQ+ teens about risks of sex and relational sex (meaning sex within the context of a close relationship). Non-heterosexual male teens reported talking to more family and extended family members, while female and non-binary LGBTQ+ teens confided in fewer family members or no one.

In another study, published in *JMIR Mental Health*, Charmaraman, Wellesley College student **Rachel Hodes**, and Richer examined how LGBTQ+ middle schoolers use social media, who they are connected to and for what purposes, and the associations between these behaviors and their mental wellbeing, compared to their heterosexual peers.

They found that LGBTQ+ teens reported having smaller networks on their favorite social media sites, and less often responded positively when friends shared good news or tried to make friends feel better when they shared bad news. However, unlike heterosexual youth, LGBTQ+ teens more often reported joining a group or online community to make themselves feel less alone.

“These results help us understand where LGBTQ+ teens are getting support, and where support is lacking, both online and offline,” said Charmaraman. “We can share that information with families, schools, and community organizations so they can help these teens get what they need to thrive.”

Virtual Social Change Dialogues Bring Critical Issues to the Forefront



In a series of virtual Social Change Dialogues held this past spring, experts from WCW, Wellesley College, and beyond discussed ways that the U.S. can work to advance gender equality, social justice, and human wellbeing.

In **Letting All Voices Be Heard: New Directions for K-12 Education**, panelists talked about the daunting challenges facing educators and students, and what must be done to support them. “There needs to be a way to ask every single teacher in every single classroom what they need both materially and spiritually—humanely—in order to come back and be their whole selves,” said **Emmy Howe**, M.Ed., co-director of the **National SEED Project**.

In **Crisis and Opportunity: Building a Better Child Care System**, panelists spoke about what the Biden-Harris administration has done so far to support the U.S. child care industry, and what still needs to be done. “We need to not just listen to families and educators, but to put what they say into actual policy,” said Senior Research Scientist **Wendy Wagner Robeson**, Ed.D.

In **Overcoming the She-cession: Supporting Women in the Workforce**, panelists discussed how government policies can help women overcome the challenges of the pandemic and move the needle forward on gender equity. “This is an opportunity for us to drive policy solutions not only to go back to what we had, but also to ask for an equitable recovery such that everybody can fulfill their potential,” said Research Scientist **Deniz Çivril**, Ph.D.



Research Transformed into Action for Student Parents in Oregon

When WCW Research Scientist **Autumn Green**, Ph.D., spoke at a hearing on a proposed bill to collect data on college students who are parents in Oregon, she brought a wealth of research and personal experience to the table.

As a student parent who attended both Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon, and the University of Oregon, she knew what it was like to be a student parent who sometimes felt invisible on campus. And now, as a researcher, she knows how important it is to have data on student parents.

“Many institutions don’t know how many student parents attend, and therefore don’t have the data they need to provide services like childcare, family housing, or student parent resource centers,” she said. “Supporting student parents with these kinds of services is critical to helping them graduate.”

The bill will allow students to identify whether they are parents or acting as parents on forms used to collect demographic information at community colleges and public universities. Green testified in support of it, and also released a report based on the findings of a preliminary landscape scan of Oregon’s college and university resources and state policies with regards to student parents.

In May, the bill passed and was signed by the governor of Oregon. Green hopes to see similar bills pass in other states.

“It’s exciting to watch our research, along with the work of many other advocates, be transformed into concrete action,” she said.

Law student and single-mother Michaela Martin celebrates her graduation from Oregon State University with her mother and son. Martin created and championed SB 564 to support Oregon student parents.



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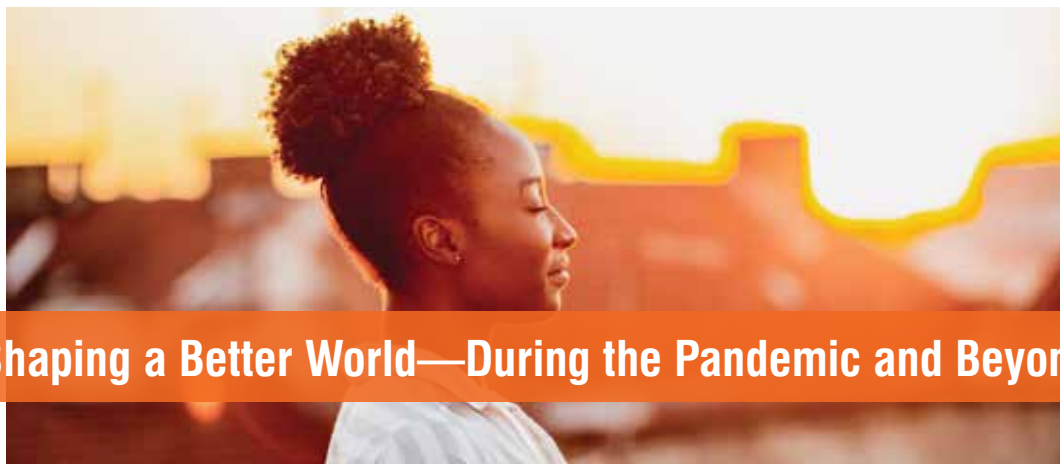
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