

University of Washington School of Social Work
mkim03@uw.edu

When I came to the US originally to study issues and prevention strategies regarding child maltreatment, my understanding level of social justice issues at that time was very shallow. Because awareness of privilege and oppression heavily depend on dominant environmental factors, including societal, cultural, and belief systems, it is often not easy to perceive one's privilege when in certain systems. Before living in the US, I grew up in South Korea where diversity issues were very seldom discussed (although some things have currently changed a lot there), so I had few chances to think deeply about my skin color and sexual identity. But because of experiences in my MSW and PhD programs in Social Work in the US, I have come to be aware of the many privileges I have as a heterosexual immigrant Asian male living in the US.

In terms of research, my previous and current projects have focused on examining how specific childhood adversity types and accumulative adversity affect those who experienced maltreatment, poverty, and other adversities. The ultimate aim of my research is to prevent or at least alleviate child maltreatment and the subsequent negative outcomes after maltreated experience. These directions and aim are aligned with social justice issues because child maltreatment is often intertwined with poverty and structural oppressions. In the child welfare system, racial disproportionality in terms of CPS reports and foster care entries remains prevalent among Black and American Indian populations (and for Latino children in certain communities) (U.S. DHHS, 2018, 2020). Some national and state-level studies have found that the racial disproportionality in child maltreatment reports and substantiations is closely related to poverty (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, Drake et al., 2011; Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2013). Families involved in the child welfare system may also face institutional racism and racial bias that plays out in who is reported to CPS, how those reports are handled, service quality, and the outcomes achieved such as legal permanency (Lorthridge et al., 2011). By focusing on maltreatment experiences of children and youth, my future research will inevitably explore the interactive complexity among racial disproportionality and poverty.

I care much about social justice and diversity as a teacher as well. In my sole instructorship in the research methods course last winter, I encouraged students to critically think how their research projects could be connected to promotion of social justice or equity issues in our society. My students were also invited to freely discuss any microaggressions they found in class or in their personal communications with me. In addition, I am particularly interested in interacting with students who do not seem to participate in class discussions. As an Asian immigrant student, I was also one who was very passive to vocalize what I agree with and what I want to say in class. This was because of my language barriers and some social norms in my cultural background. Because there are other reasons than mine for why students might be hesitant to engage in classroom activities, I try to provide them with alternative ways to participate in class by using online discussion pages and reflection papers to express their thoughts and perspectives after the class.

As a social work researcher and teacher, I care about the privileges and oppressions around me, and will continue learning and applying concepts to advance diversity and social justice.