

Mary K. Zimmerman

Mary Zimmerman was born in a US Army Hospital during the last days of WW2. She spent her early childhood in Ann Arbor, Colorado Springs, and then Emporia, Kansas where she had what can be considered the classic 1950s nostalgia childhood. Determined to discover the world, she graduated in Sociology from the University of Michigan in 1967 and spent that historic summer in Europe with a college roommate, working as a nanny in London's Notting Hill district and then backpacking across the continent. She made it to San Francisco by September and caught the tail end of the "summer of love," although for her it meant finding a weekday job and transforming to a flower child on weekends. The next year she entered graduate school in Sociology at the University of Minnesota where she studied under a NIMH Traineeship in deviance and social control. Her Master's thesis (1971) focused on the juvenile justice system and how probation decisions for first offenders varied significantly by gender.

The social construction and consequences of gender became a central interest in both her teaching and research as she took her first tenure-track position at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in 1972 and began work on her doctoral dissertation. Her dissertation, completed in 1976 and published as a book in 1977, was an in-depth study of the legal abortion experiences of 40 women in the immediate post-Roe v. Wade period. Interested in the interface of social and medical, in 1977 she was awarded an individual post-doctoral fellowship in cardiovascular epidemiology from the National Institutes of Health. The following year she took a position in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine Duluth Campus. In 1982, she moved to the University of Kansas to help launch the new Department of Health Services Administration (later Health Policy and Management). She also joined the Sociology department as a Courtesy member and later became a regular faculty member for several years. She was active in early efforts to establish a Women's Studies program and later a WS major at the University.

In 1989, she was awarded Fulbright Research Fellowship and spent most of 1990 at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and University of Helsinki examining welfare state support for families of children with cancer. She continued that research in the US during the early 1990s. Also, during that time Mary held several national service positions in Sociology including Associate Editor of the Journal of Health and Social Behavior, chair of the founding committee for the journal Gender & Society, and election to the ASA Publications Committee. She served on the US delegation to the 1996 Canada-U.S. Forum on Women's Health and wrote the conference white paper on women's health in medical education. In 1997, she also served as President of Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS). In 2001, the HSA department moved to the KU School of Medicine. In 2009, Mary became the founding director for a new health services research Ph.D. program, a position she held until she entered phased retirement in 2017. From 2013-16, she was the Joy McCann Professor of Women in Science and Medicine in the School of Medicine.

Over her career, Mary's scholarly work has focused on comparative analysis of health care systems and social policies in terms of how they impact gender arrangements and the lives of vulnerable populations (women, children, and the elderly). This work also extends to special interests in care work and the advancement of women in medicine. She has authored two books, 45 journal articles and published research reports and reviews. In 1989, she received the Outstanding Woman Faculty award on the Lawrence campus and in 2000 the William T. Kemper

Teaching Excellence Award. For two decades she led a KU Office of Study Abroad summer course on health and social care in Sweden and Finland. She has served in a voluntary capacity for the American College of Healthcare Executives and local groups, including the Children's Mercy Cancer Center, the Gift of Life Foundation, and the Health Forward Foundation. Professor Zimmerman has two children (a social worker and a lawyer) and one grandchild.