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Editorial

Families as Stress Buffers and Resource Providers

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This issue of the e-journal of Applied Psychology is focused on the psychology of families. Papers addressing clinical, health and social issues in relation to family functioning were sought, in particular those that considered how families coped or did not cope with both external stresses (e.g., migration) and internal stresses (e.g., illness, childhood transitions). Articles which addressed ways to strengthen family functioning, and factors contributing to resilience in families, were also invited. Our aim was to present papers reflecting a range of approaches, including both qualitative and quantitative research and empirical and review papers.

This aim has been well fulfilled in this bumper edition of e-jap. The ten papers approach the topic of 'families' in many different ways, but an over-arching theme is the role of families as stress buffers and resource providers. Families do more than socialise and nurture children; at their best they seem to have the capacity to turn around adversity and make it into strength. Maria Yunes tried to explore the nature of this type of family resilience among poor families in Brazil by talking to their health care workers and educators, but found it hard to pin down. She presents a challenging paper which I interpret as asking the question of whether professionals who work with families may need to undergo some sort of paradigm shift if they are to isolate the 'essence' of family success over and above material success. A further paper on resilience by Annette Mutimer, John Reece and Jan Matthews demonstrated that families can experience quite high levels of stress without child adjustment necessarily suffering. These families had better 'general family functioning' scores than those for whom stress is high and child adjustment poor, but the study was unable to pinpoint the specific strengths of resilient families. A major contribution of this study however was to present and pilot the Resilience Classification Framework for individuals within families. Taking a different approach again, Stefan Gruenert and Ros Galligan asked the oft-neglected question 'what about fathers?' Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, they showed that secure young men with good adult friendships and a strong sense of well-being recalled their relationships with their fathers as intimate, positive, communicating, supportive, consistent and approving. There is a huge

potential for further studies on the role of fathers in strengthening family resilience and supporting child rearing.

But a family's strength or weakness may be more than the sum of the characteristics of individuals within it. Some families pull together to buffer stress, some may be overwhelmed by social pressures or the social roles imposed on their members. Four papers in this edition of e-jap isolate social factors by considering cross cultural issues and families. Kathy Jackson and Okey Abosi use their wealth of experience working in Africa to comment on some of the social norms which have the capacity to delimit opportunities for children African families, particularly for girls. An understanding of these factors provides a useful background for professionals in western nations working with African immigrant families. Issues concerning the stresses of migration are directly addressed in two papers. In the first, Cynthia Leung, Shirley Leung and Ruth Chan surveyed parents of preschool children who moved from mainland China to Hong Kong. Their study demonstrated that both personal factors (self efficacy) and environmental factors (perceived social support), along with an acculturation strategy favouring integration into the new culture, were conducive to more positive parent and child outcomes. In the second study of migration Renu Narchal interviewed immigrant stresses. university students, and measured their attachment styles. She describes the sense of loneliness and attack on identity that the migration experience can engender. On a positive note, this paper also shows how the gradual establishment of new friendships and renegotiation of relationships with 'left behind' families can lead to the development of a new but altered identity, a process that is likely to be more successful in those with secure attachments to their family of origin. The final cross cultural paper, by Sophia Zervides and Ann Knowles, presents an empirical study of Greek-Australian and Anglo-Australian parents reflecting on their own and their parents' methods of child rearing. The strong message of this paper is that general social trends - or fashions in child rearing - may sometimes be more powerful predictors of parenting style than cultural differences. The authors argue that generational change in parenting styles towards more lenient and

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democratic practices reflects an overall societal trend toward authoritative (as opposed to authoritarian) child rearing.

Two papers explore family responses to specific stressors. Melinda Polimeni, Amanda Richdale and Andrew Francis present a thorough review of the literature on children's sleep problems, noting the wide ranging impact of childhood sleep disturbances, not only on children's daytime functioning, but also on parental stress and marital relationships. The relative success of interventions to reduce childhood sleep disturbance, and the corresponding improvements in family quality of life, make this an area for which it is important to raise professional awareness. The stress of having a seriously ill or disabled child in the family is examined via an empirical study by Meredith Rayner and Susan Moore. Factors which potentially exacerbate this stress largely relate to the ill child's behaviour. Parents often find it difficult to set limits on the behaviour of their ill children, given that these boys and girls already have so many life constraints with which to cope. However the importance of supporting parents of ill children in adopting parenting styles high on both

warmth and limit setting is underscored by the results of this study.

Finally, Anne and Railton Hill, in a theoretical paper, present a model for evaluating parenting interventions. They discuss the construct and measurement of parental stress, and link it with parenting confidence and satisfaction. Their paper is likely to be useful for those contemplating development and evaluation of parenting interventions.

Thanks are due to all the contributors. You wrote good papers, took the reviewers' comments seriously, duly improved your manuscripts, and returned them within the time frame. You were a great group of authors to work with. Special thanks also to the reviewers. You were thoughtful, conscientious and prompt. You made a significant contribution to the quality of this edition, and your time and effort is much appreciated. Finally, my heartfelt thanks to an 'invisible angel', Sarah Egan, whose backroom work as the editorial assistant for this issue kept me on task and sane. Without Sarah's efficient and careful work the edition would not have happened. Thank you Sarah!