Family Resilience: Moving into the Third Wave

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**IMPLICATIONS FOR COOPERATIVE EXTENSION:** Family resilience is characterized by competence functioning after challenges. The Family Resilience Model suggests that a combination of the specific details of family risk, protection, and vulnerability within family meaning systems and broader ecosystems explain variation in how well families and their members function after adversity. Family resilience approaches assume all families have strengths that can be cultivated or mobilized to address adversity. These strengths are components of family adaptive systems that emerge over time to help families fulfill key functions relating to emotions, control, meaning, maintenance, and adapting to change.

Four fundamental strategies are available to foster family resilience. *Risk-focused strategies* involve altering and reducing the likelihood of risk exposure to a system. *Resource-focused strategies* highlight the strengths families possess and their ability to moderate the negative consequences of risk. *Process-focused strategies* engage multiple levels of family systems and family adaptive systems to facilitate competent family function despite stressors. Finally, intervention can focus on *turning points* in families that offer the opportunity to change trajectories from vulnerability to risk toward protection and resilience.

Family resilience programs focus on the “wholeness” of a system, rather than focusing on individuals or smaller subsystems as the areas for improvement.

Family resilience focuses on how families can function well in the face of adversity. Early research (Wave 1) identified family system strengths that were correlated with positive adjustments to stress such as families who value family time and routines, who show acceptance, loyalty and respect, and who are confident in their family perseverance.

Wave 2 integrated ideas from family stress theory, general systems perspectives and individual resilience. Wave 2 of family resilience involved conceptual advances, where terminology from family stress theory and individual resilience was incorporated, and emphasized protection, ecosystems, and specific risks. *Protection* includes family strengths that can be applied during significant risk. Specific risks include *vertical risks*, or ongoing stressors, which include risk statuses, such as race or SES, and family interaction patterns, such as poor communication or conflict resolution. *Horizontal risks* are time specific stressors that disturb the on-going family interaction patterns, such as an illness in the family, military deployment, or economic stress. *Ecosystem factors* (the outside context in which families exist) can also contribute to family stress.

**Directions for Wave 3:**

There are early signs that Wave 3 of family resilience is emerging. The authors offer a summary consolidating and refining family resilience terminology, introduce the Family Resilience Model, recommend focusing on how family adaptive systems foster resilience, and recommend a greater emphasis on cascades and trajectories of family resilience.
Family Resilience Model:

The Family Resilience Model (FRM) integrates concepts from individual and family resilience, as well as family systems perspective. This model emphasizes the importance of considering multiple levels of families (i.e. overall family systems, subsystems, ecosystem) as well as multiple systems (human adaptive systems, family adaptive systems), and interdisciplinary approaches.

The FRM includes four basic interrelated elements of resilience: 1) family risk; 2) family protection; 3) family vulnerability and 4) short adjustment and long term adaptation. These elements are nested in family meaning systems and broader ecosystems. When applying this model, the authors recommend increased distinction between family promotive and family protective processes to distinguish family variables that foster competence from those that foster resilience. Also, the authors recommend increased distinctions between family protective processes and family adaptation.

Family Adaptive Systems:

Family adaptive systems (FAS) gradually develop within a family system over time to help regulate day to day life, and moderate the potential negative effects of risks when they arise. FAS provide structure and expectations for family members, and help to balance stability and change in family processes as stressors occur. Family meaning, emotional, control, maintenance, and stress response systems are family adaptive systems that involve the promotive and protective processes that can be mobilized to help families respond positively to stress and fulfill their functions.

Family emotion systems

Family emotion systems represent the basic affective climate in family systems that socialize individuals about emotion-related processes (e.g., positive emotional expression, bonding, supportive communication patterns) and emotional regulation. Emotion regulation involves the internal and external processes people experience when faced with certain emotions, and impacts how well they are able to adapt to various situations. Being “emotion coaches” by helping children to identify, label and process through emotions is one way that parents can positively benefit their child’s development in this area.

Family control systems

Family control systems develop and regulate family authority, power, boundaries, roles, rules and behavior patterns. The more clearly each of these aspects of family functioning is defined, the more potential a family has for resilience. Similar to authoritative style parenting, it is important that parents establish a clear hierarchy of authority and a well defined rule structure. However, it is also important that family members be given a voice to participate in family decisions when it is developmentally appropriate.

Family meaning systems

Family meaning operates at three levels: (1) family world view (incorporates the ecosystem and culture; can include spiritual beliefs and a shared ideology or purpose); (2) family identity (shared values and expectations, can be influenced by earlier generations of the family), (3) family situational meaning (incorporates the family world view and identity to understand specific incidents of family stress). Positive family meaning systems facilitate family adaptation through a sense of family cohesion and hardiness.

Family maintenance systems

Families face societal expectations regarding what functions they to serve for society. For example, certain countries may have regulations regarding minimum requirements that must be met for adequate infant care. Families who develop interaction patterns that allow them to fulfill their functions and with cultural competence will be more able to adapt proficiently to continue fulfilling these roles when stressors occur.

Family stress response systems

As families progress through developmental changes and unexpected events, their "normal" ways of fulfilling their family functions are often challenged. Each family has an acceptable range of variation in how they accomplish their family functions (e.g., it is
acceptable to reheat frozen food for dinner when the primary cook is sick). Yet, significant risk in the family (e.g., the kitchen in the family home damaged by fire) may require a change in how the family meets the maintenance function of providing food for the family. Each family develops family processes for how change is managed with significant stress occurs.

**Cascades and Trajectories**

Wave 3 of family resilience calls for further development of the concepts of cascades and trajectories in the scope of a family system, rather than simply within individuals. Trajectories describe the paths of adaptation families can take through different life transitions or stressors. Cascades look at the patterns of risk, protection and adaptation to across domains of family life (e.g., families who are resilient in multiple aspects of family functioning after adversity experience cascades of resilience across domains). When applied to a family system, developmental cascades are able to look at within and across-time processes, in multiple levels of the system, identifying opportunities for protection or breaking down risk chains.