Interdisciplinary and Innovative Approaches to Strengthening Family and Individual Resilience:

An Introduction to the Special Issue

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Implications

Many of the articles focus on intervention and policy implications of family and individual resilience. Researchers are hoping to establish theoretical models integrating family systems, dyads, and individual approaches to resilience. The combination of literature reveals that both individuals and families at risk can show positive adaption by engaging in protective processes at multiple levels of the system (individual, family, and community). By focusing on interdisciplinary collaboration, we will be better able to understand the complex issues regarding resilience in the multiple levels of the system. It is only through the use of interdisciplinary approaches that we will better understand resilience at the individual and family level.

This article provides an overview of the special issue of *Family Relations* (February, 2015, co-editors, Carolyn S. Henry and Michael M. Criss, associate co-editors Amanda W. Harrist and Robert E. Larzelere) was designed to demonstrate how resilience can be greatly enhanced through the integration of different perspectives, measures, and methods used in multiple different disciplines and areas of research. The article provides an overview of the 11 conceptual and empirical articles of the special issue and an overview of the articles organized by four categories: families as contexts, families as systems, intervention and policy implications, and methodological considerations. In addition, a section addresses varying definitions of resilience used by the authors of the 11 articles.

Families as Contexts

One prominent approach to bridging individual and family resilience is to focus on individuals within the context of family. Masten and Monn describe this approach as using five core components and processes that bridge these two literatures together: 1) criteria for positive adaption in children and families, 2) pathways of adaptation and resilience that may vary by type, method, and level, 3) promotive processes, 4) protective factors, and 5)
challenges, disturbances, and risks. Families play a crucial role in nurturing and promoting child resilience and well-being. Researchers assessed families as contexts by using three empirical articles focusing on families as contexts for individual resilience. Researchers used a sample of low-income families from different areas (rural, urban, and suburban areas) and investigated protective factors from these three different domains and how these domains impacted childhood development.

**Families as Systems**

Two of the articles (Henry et al., McPhee et al.) focused on families as systems of individual family members interacting with each other developing qualities that are more than a composite of individual qualities. These authors propose 1) examining family resilience as involving multiple levels of family systems through a focus on multiple interacting family adaptive systems, 2) increased depth, breadth, scope, and consistency in family resilience terminology, 3) support for the newly developed family resilience model, 4) a greater emphasis on trajectories and cascades, 5) focusing on the regulation of stability and change in individual and family systems, and 6) enhanced prevention, intervention, and policy approaches. The authors propose these 6 approaches through the use of a case study involving active duty military families in an effort to develop profiles of family functioning to identify protective family dynamics versus adverse family functioning.

**Methodological Considerations**

There are four methodological considerations relevant to the investigation of family and individual resilience: Card and Barnett (2015) discuss 1) the importance of considering reliability, validity, and measurement equivalence in resilience research, 2) the challenges of establishing causality in nonexperimental studies are highlighted with recommendations for how longitudinal models can be utilized in the study of resilience, 3) an overview of continuous and categorical approaches used to test models of resilience, and 4) an argument is presented for focusing on multiple levels as this approach better captures the complexities of family and individual resilience.

**Definition of Resilience**

According to the authors, resilience was conceptualized in many different ways throughout these articles. Some authors viewed resilience as positive or adaptive outcomes in the presence of some type(s) of risk, stress, adversity, daily life, challenges, or trauma. Alternatively, some articles described resilience as an outcome where others focus on resilience as a process occurring over time. Another distinction within the articles is whether resilience was conceptualized as a dynamic or static process. Meaning, some view resilience as an ongoing process that never stops, whereas other view resilience as a specific moment in time.