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STRESS and the FAMILY

VOLUME II: Coping With Catastrophe

Edited by

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Dedicated to

our family friends,
Reuben and Marion Hill,

and our families,
Marilyn and Jessica,
and
Marilyn, Todd, and Wendy and Laurie

Preface to the Series

As editors of this two-volume series, we are delighted to introduce the reader to a burgeoning area of research in the social sciences: family stress and coping. The books view the family as both producing and reacting to stress and attempt to identify the sources of stress from either inside or outside the family microsystem. Further, the volumes distinguish between sudden, unpredictable, and overwhelming catastrophic stress and the more "normal," gradual, and cumulative life stressors encountered over the life span. Moreover, the series brings into focus several rich perspectives which effectively integrate the hundreds of generalizations about the functional and dysfunctional methods family members use to cope with stress.

We hope that these volumes will be a unique contribution to the collection of publications already in print or in press by providing conceptual clarity and scholarly direction. This series represents an area of inquiry which has emerged quite recently, though early elements date back over a half-century. We build upon the important contributions of Reuben Hill, Hans Selye, Richard Lazarus, Mardi Horowitz, and many others in an attempt to synthesize the relevant research into an organized set of empirical generalizations. These are designed, among other things, to stimulate new hypotheses and innovations in research and intervention in this growing area.

Moreover, we hope that this series will help move the field of family studies forward by viewing family stress as a predictable aspect of family development and change over the life span. In this preface let us briefly discuss our purpose, beliefs, objectives, organizational structure, and how this nearly three-year enterprise was conceived and produced.

PURPOSE AND BELIEFS

The purpose of the series is to organize a compendium of empirically-based observations about the ways families produce, encounter, and

cope with stress. The intended readers include students and professionals interested in understanding and helping people within the family context.

From the beginning we want our values known; by doing so we alert the reader to the presence of potential bias in our efforts to relate the facts as we find them. For instance, we believe that family members often know better than anyone else what is best for them and their family—better than clinicians, professors, advice column writers and other experts, for example. We also believe that the role of "helping" families is one of helping families attain goals, helping families experience the kind of life together they wish to have, though it may be different from what we wish for our own families. Finally, we believe that consulting with families is superior to directing them, and educating families is superior to indoctrinating them.

OBJECTIVES

In an effort to explicate the nature and consequences of stress for people living within families, we intend that our volumes reach five specific objectives:

(a) to clearly define and provide a framework for viewing the family system as both a stress absorber as well as a stress producer;
(b) to explicate the key concepts and variables associated with this framework;
(c) to identify the important areas of research inquiry which converge into the family stress area of study that facilitates the development of a discrete set of axioms toward which a theory of family stress can be built;
(d) to note the effective strategies of intervention by professionals to either mitigate or ameliorate the impairments of family stress; and
(e) to clearly identify the various sources of stress, stress reactions of family members, stress-coping resources, repertoire, and behaviors.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The reader should be aware by now that *Stress and the Family* is divided into two volumes. The first volume, *Coping with Normative Transitions,* focuses on the everyday stressors families experience, especially those many transitions throughout the life cycle as family relationships change and family members grow and develop. The second volume, *Coping with Catastrophe,* focuses on the extraordinary stressors which strike families suddenly and often overwhelm the family's ability to cope. In each volume, chapters are organized into roughly two groups by the locus of family stressors: either from inside the family system (e.g., birth of a child, death in the family) or from outside the family system (e.g., economic inflation, unemployment).

A large collection of noted experts in various areas have been commissioned to write chapters which utilize the family stress framework to answer 10 questions:

1) What is the family stressor which is the focus of the chapter?
2) Why should there be an interest in this stressor?
3) What are some precepts/principles which make it easier to understand and appreciate the complexities and methods of coping with this stressor?
4) What are the elements of this stressor which are upsetting and require those affected to develop methods of coping?
5) What are the typical, dysfunctional methods individuals and families employ to deal with this source of stress?
6) What are the typical, functional methods of coping?
7) What are the resources available to the family system which are so effective in coping with the stressor?
8) What are some practical prescriptions for dealing with this stressor?
9) What are the effective methods employed by professionals and clinicians to help people and their families cope?
10) How can dysfunctional stress reactions be prevented?

Chapters 1, 10, and 15 in Volume I and Chapters 1 and 11 in Volume II, in addition to the introductions to the volumes, provide important conceptual clarity in an attempt to present an overview of the chapters that follow them. Definitions and discussions of critical concepts and synthesizing models and frameworks are found within these chapters.

HISTORY AND EMERGENCE OF THIS SERIES

To date, these two volumes are the first attempts to provide a textbook for students and professionals interested in a comprehensive understanding of stress and the family. Scholarly discussions of individual and family stress, however, have appeared in a wide range of behavioral, social, and medical publications for the past 60 years. Traditionally, these studies and clinical observations have been limited in scope, focusing on individuals exclusively or isolated circumstances of families in stressful situations. In addition, these previous works tend to underscore the dysfunctional and deleterious effects of stressful life events.

This two-volume series attempts to clarify the nature and processes of family adjustment to stress, with a deliberate and well-placed emphasis on family coping and support. The emergence of this series is due, in part, to the special chemistry which results in the collaboration between colleagues from different scholarly disciplines and interests. Figley is a family psychologist with special interests in how human beings react to traumatic events within the context of the family. McCubbin is a family psychologist with special interest in the family system's reactions to stress mediated by its members' coping responses and community supports. Together we share many basic assumptions about stress and the family, yet differ in our approach to many issues within this area. The former, for example, is more concerned about the clinical intervention implications and the latter more interested in the conceptualization and measurement issues.

Our collaboration dates back to 1975 when we served as co-panelists in a research symposium on the family readjustment problems of returning Vietnam veterans. We were each working in the same area, but within different contexts. Dr. McCubbin was Head of the Family Studies Branch of the Center for POW Studies at the Naval Health Research Center in San Diego. There he directed a major study of the impact of father absence and initial impact of his return among the families of prisoners of war and those missing in action during the Vietnam war. At the same time, Dr. Figley was studying the emotional upheavals associated with the war by studying Vietnam combat veterans and their families in his capacity as founder and director of the Consortium on Veteran Studies at Purdue University.

In 1976 we began to speculate together and separately about the stressors of separation and reunion associated with war, building upon the nearly 30 years of pioneering work of Reuben Hill. Less than four years later we, along with a dozen other colleagues, formed the Task Force

on Families of Catastrophe to assist the U.S. State Department in efforts to care for the families of American personnel trapped in Iran between November, 1979, and January, 1981. At that time we applied what we had learned about the families affected by wars and other traumatic events. We became convinced that a textbook was needed which could pull together the family stress research literature not only to help policy makers and interventionists working with families in crisis, but for the field in general.

The first step in that direction was the 1980 Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family with the theme, "Stress and the Family." Dr. Figley served as program chair and Dr. McCubbin delivered the keynote address. It was from this conference, held in Gatlinburg, Tennessee in May, 1980, that many of the initial ideas and organizational structure of this series emerged. For example, many of the chapters contributed to both volumes (Chapters 2-5 and 12 in Volume I and Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 10 in Volume II) were presented in some form at this four-day seminal conference. Indeed, because of its conception within the Groves Conference and the importance of this society of family scholars and practitioners to future contributions to the social sciences, all royalties from the sale of these volumes are being donated to the Groves Foundation. These and other funds will enable the Groves Conference to continue to sponsor innovative and lively symposia each year, bringing together students of the family to consider the past and present and to speculate on the future as it has for nearly 50 years.

We hope that you enjoy the series and can begin soon to apply its lessons in whatever context is of importance to you.

Charles R. Figley
Hamilton I. McCubbin

Acknowledgments

The enterprise of scholarly inquiry can be an exciting and worthwhile venture, as the reader will discover in this volume. What is less obvious are the numerous individuals who have contributed so much of their time and talent to the creation of this volume.

As noted elsewhere, my collaboration with Hamilton McCubbin nearly spans a decade. We have become trusted friends and colleagues over the years, especially during the process of co-editing the two volumes in this series. His international stature as a family stress scholar is clearly evident throughout this volume and I am deeply indebted to him for his inspirational contributions as well as his editorial expertise.

The Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family deserves special acknowledgment. This society was the first to see the importance of the concept of stress and its relevance to the family and commissioned a national conference on the topic. Many of the chapters in this volume were conceived as a result of that conference.

It would have been nearly impossible to undertake and complete this massive project without the cooperation and assistance of so many at Purdue University. Dr. Norma Compton, Dean of the School of Consumer and Family Sciences, Dr. Billy R. Baumgardt, Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station, and Dr. Robert A. Lewis, Head of the Department of Child Development and Family Studies, provided critical administrative support and encouragement. The faculty of the Department of Child Development and Family Studies and the Child and Family Research Institute were extremely important in the development and completion of the project in various capacities: contributors, reviewers, or sources of encouragement. Also I appreciate the clerical help of Roberta Thayer, Karen Hinkley and Barbara Brecker, as well as the support with various tasks from my graduate students, Joan Jurich, Richard Kishur, and Sandra Burge. But the key person in the project who helped bring it to fruition was Vicki Hogancamp, who served at various times as conference coordinator for the conference on "Stress and the Family,"

editorial assistant, and co-author of one of the chapters in the series. Ms. Hogancamp's extraordinary skills and professionalism were clearly evident in her success at assisting the editors in critiquing, organizing, rewriting, editing, and typing a considerable portion of this volume.

We are also indebted to those who helped us read and review manuscripts, bringing to the task their special expertise on the various topics discussed in this book. Our thanks to Jan Allen, Arthur Blank, Veda Boyer, Bernard Bloom, Ann Wolbert Burgess, Michael Clapman, Richard Clayton, Barbara Dahl, Thomas Drabeck, Robert Fetsch, Richard Gelles, Harold Hackney, Donald Hartsough, James Huber, Anthony Jurich, Daniel Lonnquist, Phyllis Moen, Thomas Saarinen, Nancy Sederberg, Graham Spanier, M. Duncan Stanton, Dena Targ, Richard Venjohn and William Yarber. We would especially like to thank Laura Smart for her careful reading of the entire manuscript and her excellent suggestions on style and organization which improved the readability of this and the previous volume in the series.

I would also like to acknowledge several colleagues who were helpful to me during my sabbatical leave, enabling me to complete work on the series by providing resources of their respective institutions and the stimulation of their respective minds: Ann Wolbert Burgess, Boston University Medical School; Robert Rich, the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University; and John Talbott, Payne-Whitney Clinic, Department of Psychiatry, Cornell Medical College.

Charles R. Figley
Purdue University

This volume would not have been possible were it not for the help of those who shared our commitment to understanding families under stress.

My co-editor, Charles Figley, has long been a colleague and friend, and a prime mover in this project. His skill as a scholar and an editor will long be appreciated by me.

We would not have been able to manage the challenge of integrating the various perspectives into a meaningful whole without the editorial work of Catherine Davidson at the University of Minnesota. Her patience, kindness, and thoroughness played a major part in smoothing out the rough edges and in giving the volume a touch of class. I would

also like to thank Joan Patterson who took the time and offered her professional skills in reviewing several manuscripts.

I am very appreciative of the assistance given to us by key administrators at the University of Minnesota. I would like to thank Dr. Richard Sauer, Director, Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Minnesota, who gave this project the support it needed to see its way to completion. I would also like to acknowledge the continued support and patience of Dean Keith McFarland, and Associate Dean Signe Betsinger of the College of Home Economics at the University of Minnesota. Their encouragement was, as always, greatly appreciated.

Because this volume was prepared in part during a sabbatical leave, I would like to thank the University of Minnesota for allowing me this respite from academic and administrative duties and for continuing commitment to scholarship. I would also like to thank Gardner Lindzey, Director of the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Science at Stanford University for providing a nurturing setting to pursue the completion of this volume while serving as a summer scholar at the Center.

I am also indebted to the faculty and staff of the Department of Family Social Science, especially to Gloria Lawrence, Jane Schwanke, Todd McCubbin, Susan Rains-Johnson, Kay Lapour, Emma Haugan, Alida Malkus, and Dorothea Berggren for their assistance in manuscript preparation.

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Introduction

This second volume of *Stress and the Family* includes 11 chapters focusing on family stress emerging from the catastrophic events which impact families infrequently, but powerfully and without warning. As will be discussed throughout this volume, catastrophes are sudden, unexpected, frightening experiences for the individuals and families who survive them and for all the others who care about them.

In all, 15 scholars from five separate disciplines discuss nine catastrophes which could affect the family. Each chapter begins with a brief case study of a family struggling with the impact of a particular catastrophe. After discussing the case briefly and noting the pervasiveness and significance of the problem, each chapter 1) identifies and describes the primary sources of stress; 2) notes the characteristic ways families attempt to utilize their resources and cope with these stressors—both effectively and ineffectively; and 3) concludes with a discussion of how others—friends, professionals, or policymakers—can best help the family.

As will become evident, there are certain similarities in the ways families cope with catastrophes. In general, families utilize their inner strengths, pull together to confront the crisis—putting aside for a time petty squabbles—and draw upon outside resources among their kin and other social support networks. Some families, however, seem to fall apart when catastrophe strikes, as a water glass shattering after a sudden shift in temperature. These families cope ineffectively with the catastrophe and, depending on the extent of the crisis, recover more slowly, if at all.

As any experienced helper knows, s/he can only have limited impact on improving a family's situation, but a great deal of impact in disrupting it. Helping a family requires extremely sensitive judgments about when and when not to intervene and how much support, guidance, education, protection, or therapy to give. In most instances, a family will recover from a catastrophe, regardless of the quality of intervention.

We believe that to be effective in helping families affected by catastrophe the helper must understand the dynamics of family stress and coping, which are discussed thoroughly in this volume, so that

(a) the signs of stress and strain in the family can be detected;
(b) the functional and adaptive methods of family coping can be recognized and distinguished from dysfunctional and maladaptive methods;
(c) the family's progress from disorganization to crisis resolution can be detected; and
(d) the family's call for help can be recognized and provided.

The help provided can then be effectively evaluated and improved for families who request it again.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Family reactions to crisis are both predictable and complex. The resources available to the family, both tangible and intangible, within and outside itself, are important to developing effective, functional coping methods, irrespective of the catastrophe or stressors.

Catastrophes

In Chapter 1 Charles Figley provides a blueprint for understanding the intricate patterns of individual and family reactions to catastrophes. He notes that a catastrophe is a classification of events which is associated with a wide gamut of stress-related consequences, affecting the individuals who survive them and those the survivors turn to for comfort—the family in particular and the social support system in general.

The central thesis of the chapter is that catastrophes affect not only individuals, but also the families within which the survivors reside and that, paradoxically, our membership in the family both exposes us to the catastrophes of other members and helps us to deal with those that affect us as individuals. In other words, our families—and other support systems for that matter—both treat us for and infect us with the effects of catastrophe. Specifically, the chapter has three major functions: 1) to define and discuss the significance of catastrophe and its crisis-inducing qualities; 2) to define and discuss several key concepts relevant to this discussion (e.g., trauma, victim, and survivor); and 3) to present a the-

oretical model which accounts for both immediate and long-term emotional reactions of both individuals and families associated with catastrophe.

Illness

Joan Patterson and Hamilton McCubbin, in Chapter 2, discuss the catastrophe of chronic illness in children and its impact on the family. They note how the family is fundamentally transformed by this catastrophe, straining its energy for coping. The authors point out that there are few existing guidelines for these families; most often they are left to fend for themselves. The authors discuss the sources of stress, which include concern about the welfare of the child, efforts to manage the demands of the illness (including both securing competent medical care and providing home treatment), and the pressures within the family associated with the illness.

Drug Abuse

Richard Needle, Thomas Glynn and Marian Needle (Chapter 3) have not only been involved in the research on adolescent drug abuse, but have also designed and administered drug treatment and prevention programs. In their chapter they note that teenage drug and alcohol use is widespread in this country, more than ever before in history. Indeed, drug *experimentation* by youthful family members would be a topic more appropriate for consideration in Volume I of *Stress and the Family;* and to a limited extent it is (see Volume I, Chapter 5). As the authors point out, families of teen drug *abusers* are, at least in the beginning, clearly experiencing catastrophic stress. The typical family reactions include some or all of the following: shock, fear, denial of the problem, rage and hostility toward the teen—even though the drug-abusing child may be close to death.

In reviewing the drug use literature, the authors note first the contributions of the family *to* adolescent drug abuse before proceeding to identify the impact of abuse *on* the family. They go on to present the primary sources of stress for these families, most of which are eventually able to mobilize their natural resources and, with the assistance of sources outside the family, help their children overcome the impairments and habits of substance abuse. Finally, the authors discuss the variations and effectiveness of professional intervention, emphasizing the importance of viewing and treating substance abuse as a *family* problem.

Abandonment

In contrast to the first two catastrophe chapters, which focus primarily on the child's disability, Chapter 4 by Douglas Sprenkle and Catherine Cyrus focuses on parents and the aftermath when one abandons and seeks a divorce from the other. The Academy Award-winning movie, *Kramer vs. Kramer,* for example provides an eloquent illustration of the issues and dynamics considered by this chapter: divorce, single parenthood, financial strains, and resentment toward the abandoning spouse are examples.

The authors first delineate the subjective experience of being emotionally abandoned—"dumped," as some have described it. The sources of stress for the abandoned spouse overlap considerably with the stressors of anyone experiencing a divorce, which has been discussed more fully in Volume I (cf., Chapter 7 by Ahrons); however, emotional abandonment includes additional stressors. The authors utilize the ABCX model of adaptation to family crisis (see Chapter 2) to conceptualize the abandonment experiences, and present a series of hypotheses. The latter portion of the chapter outlines the fundamentals of divorce therapy, which can help the client to revise self-destructive meanings attributed to the abandonment experience, and maximize resources so as to develop alternatives to the now-defunct marriage relationship.

Death

A substantial percentage of families is able to avoid the catastrophes of drug abuse, illness, and divorce; none can avoid death. As John Crosby and Nancy Jose point out in Chapter 5, death is nearly always ranked as one of life's most stressful events, with the death of a spouse *the* most stressful of all. After noting the specific sources of stress for the family, they discuss and contrast dysfunctional and functional methods of coping with death and grief. They note that family members who continue to avoid acknowledgment of the death, or conversely continue to obliterate the memory of the deceased, or inordinately idolize the deceased are in different ways resisting the critical and natural process of grieving. In contrast, the authors point out, the survivors who soon accept the facts and consequences of the death, the feelings associated with the deceased (e.g., guilt about relating to and surviving the deceased), and provide support and acceptance of other family members' reactions to the death will adapt to the death most effectively.