

Practical Tips and Useful Resources for Family Researchers



KATHLEEN KNAFL, PHD, FAAN

MARCIA VAN RIPER, PHD, RN, FAAN



UNC
SCHOOL OF NURSING

Founded in 1789 – Oldest public university in the United States



School of Nursing Carrington Hall



Tip #1 – Make a compelling case for taking a family focus

Study Justification

- Importance of topic & the contribution of study to knowledge
- Value-added of family perspective
- Expected outcome
- Fit with priorities of funding source

*“I am having trouble seeing clearly what the research “problem” is for this study. **What is the condition that is intolerable and how will your “take” on it lead to useful impact?”***

Making the Case for Family

“ A child’s death places the health and functional status of parents and thereby **families at highest risk**.

The intent of this study is to provide the **evidence base to create a communication intervention** for use by hospital-based clinicians with parents of children who will not survive their illness or trauma. This future intervention will be designed to prevent or diminish the documented adverse parent and family health outcomes.⁴⁻¹⁰

This research is consonant with the call for research that produces findings to guide end-of-life care and that produces findings that could minimize psychological and physical burdens on family caregivers from **three Institute of Medicine** reports and as reflected in the **strategic plan** of the **National Institute of Nursing Research**.

“How Parent Constructs Affect Parent and Family Wellbeing after a Child’s Death” National Institute of Nursing Research awarded to P. Hinds.

Tip #2 – Do your homework

- **Consider a scoping study to:**
 - “Map the territory”
 - Specify how you are building on and extending prior research
 - Determine knowledge gaps and conceptual and methodological trends
 - Identify possible measures
 - Avoid the limitations of prior studies

“We conducted a scoping study of approximately 350 research reports on family life and childhood chronic conditions retrieved from PubMed and published between 1/1/00 and 6/30/10. **The intent of this scoping review was to delineate further the domain of family research related to childhood chronic conditions.**” *(Excerpted from research proposal).*

Tip #3 – Clarify your family focus

- **Family research defined** (Feetham, 1991)
 - Family-related: Focus on family roles & relationships
 - Family: Focus on family system (e.g., functioning, processes, environment)
- **Positioning of family**
 - Primary focus; what we are seeking to describe, explain, or change
 - Contextual focus; influence on something else

Family as Primary vs. Contextual Focus

- **Primary focus**

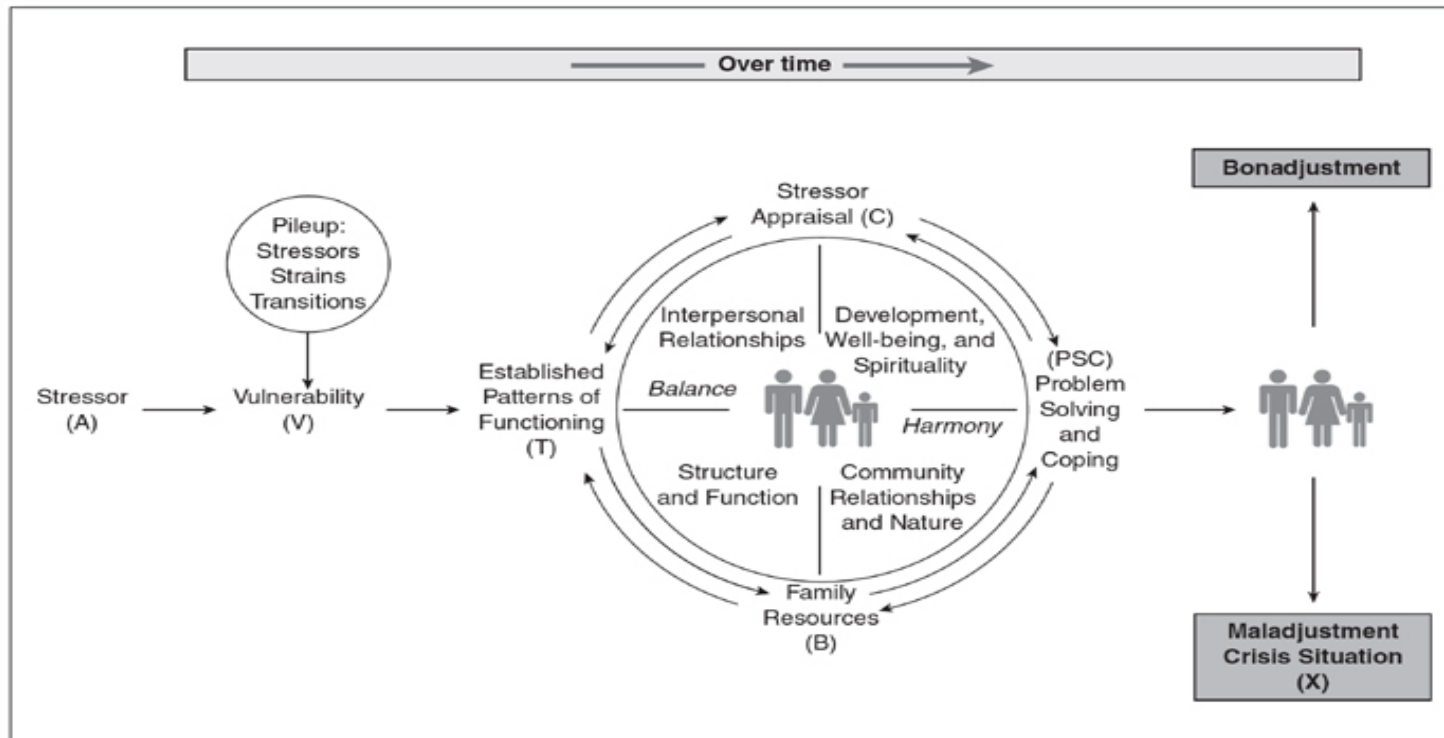
“The intent of the study was “to describe the impact of the diagnosis on **parental relationships** in stepfamilies. ... Parental relationships changed, which shifted **family boundaries**, creating instability in families who were trying to cope with a very stressful life experience” (Kelly & Ganong, 2011)

- **Contextual Focus**

“The aim of this study is to test a hypothesized model: better caregiver health, better survivor health, and better **family functioning** contribute directly to fewer **caregiving demands**, which in turn contribute to greater **caregiver competence**” (Deatrack, et al., 2013).

Tip #4– Align Your Family Focus and Conceptual Grounding

Family system as the conceptual focus



Source: McCubbin, H., Thompson, A. & McCubbin, M. A. (1996) Resiliency in families: A conceptual model of family adjustment and adaptation in response to stress and crises. In H. McCubbin, A., Thompson, & M. A. McCubbin, *Family assessment: Resiliency, coping and adaptation* (p.15), copyright 1996 by Hamilton McCubbin, Anne Thompson, Marilyn A. McCubbin, and the Board of Regents, University of Wisconsin System. Reprinted by Permission of Hamilton McCubbin.

Tip #4— Align Family Focus and Conceptual Grounding

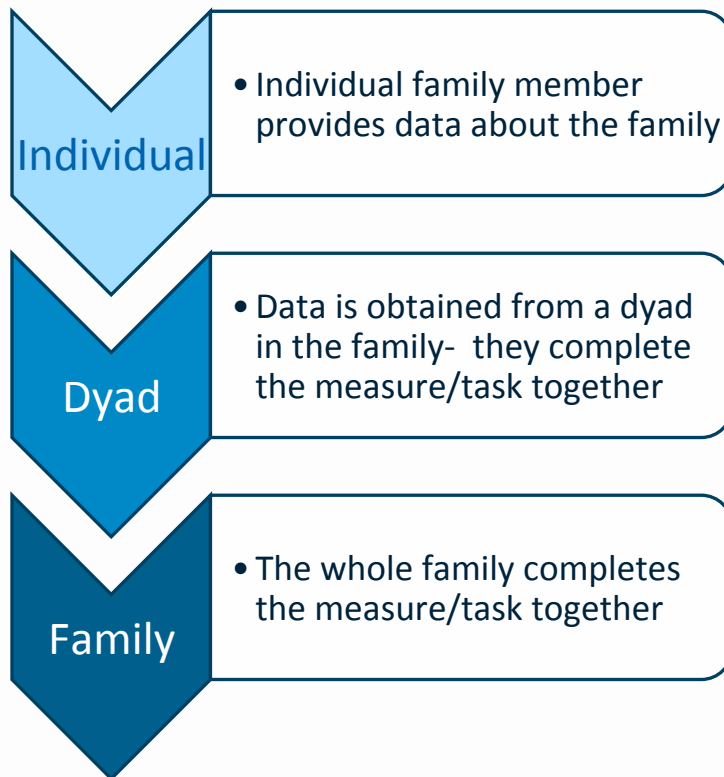


Tip #5 – Align Your Family Focus and Definition of Family

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Biological | Bi-directional genetic & environmental influences on mother & child behavior (Mills-Koonce, 2007) |
| Structural | Depressive symptoms in patients with ESRD & spouses (Pruchno, 2009) |
| Functional | Health status, stress, & social support in grandparents parenting grandchildren (Butler & Zakari, 2005) |
| Subjective | Grief experience of same sex couples (Glackin, 2008) |

Tip #6 – Determine Unit of Measurement and Appropriate Measures

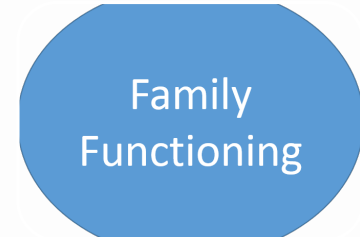
Unit of measurement



Appropriate Measures (4W's)



Who



What



When



Where

Appropriate Measures: The 4 W's

- **Who** is your target population?
 - Family members (parent, sibling, grandparents) of individuals with
 - Families living with
- **What** variables do you want to assess?
 - (e.g., family functioning, quality of life, adaptation)
- **When** will data collection occur?
 - (e.g., shortly after diagnosis, 6 months after diagnosis)
- **Where** will data collection take place?
 - (e.g., in the family home, on the telephone, online)



Tip #7 – Adapt the Analysis to Family Data

- Specify unit of analysis (individual, dyad, family)
- Adapting analysis often is desirable when data come from multiple family members
 - Issues of loss of independence; intra-familial correlation
- Family-friendly analytic approaches
 - Actor Partner Interdependence Model (Campbell & Kashy, 2002)
 - Accounting for intra-familial correlation
 - Cluster analysis
 - Case summaries and matrix display (qualitative)

Tip #8 – Remember Family Research Is a Team Endeavor

- Likely members of the team include experts in:
 - Content – research and clinical
 - Conceptual underpinnings
 - Methods
 - Data management
 - Analysis of (family) data



Tip #9- Seek input from non-family researchers

- Is this “really” a family study; why aren’t data being collected from all family members?
- Why are certain kinds of families being included or excluded?
- Why are family members being interviewed individually/jointly?
- Why does the analysis focus on individuals?



Tip #10 – Keep Calm, Carry on, & Remember to Celebrate



Resources for Family Researchers



<http://www.ncfr.org/>

Resources for Family Researchers



International Family Nursing Association
(<http://internationalfamilynursing.org>)

