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How Family Stability Affects Children

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The following commentary serves as a response to the article, "Family Stability and Childhood Behavioral Outcomes: A Critical Review of the Literature." The review article provides a good overview into family factors affecting children, but falls short in discussing how modifying family factors could change specific child behavioral outcomes. The next step in this field of research is a unified definition of family stability, a standardized measure of family stability, and discussion of how child behavior affects family stability and how changes in family stability could affect child behavior.

Too often we conceptualize child behavior at an individual level, not taking into account family-level factors. Family stability is an overarching theme when thinking about family factors affecting child behavior. Conversely, it is important to assess how a child's behavior has affected family stability. Specifically, caring for a child with a behavioral disorder stresses a family system (Gyamfi, 2004), and may result in an already stressed family system decompensating further, thus further impacting child behavior. Additionally, parents and children both play important roles in family cohesion (Eakers & Walters, 2002).

In a discussion of family stability, it is also important to consider strengths an individual child brings to a family. While Baldridge's review was specific to child problems, future research could assess factors that help some children to thrive, even in the presence of family instability. Additionally, some families report that major family changes bring about family strength, rather than chaos and instability. Regardless, an important addition to the literature would be to link specific family dysfunction or strength to specific child outcome.

Baldridge's review briefly discusses the importance of a two-parent family to a child's development (Carlson, 2006; Crockett, Eggebeen, & Hawkins, 1993). When discussing family roles, it is important to take a multicultural perspective. In some cultures (e.g., African American, Asian), it is common for extended family to serve very important parenting roles. The role of extended family in family stability and child behavior is important to consider in our multicultural environment.

An excellent point is made about the need for a standardized measure of family stability. This would assist in further research in this area, and, perhaps more importantly, will assist clinicians in measuring family chaos and change and considering family stress associated with instability.

This review points out various aspects of family stability that affect child behavior, and is a good resource for clinicians working with families and children to ensure they are considering all variables that may be

impacting child behavior and implementation of clinician recommendations. From a public policy perspective, this review summarizes a body of literature important to consider when making public policy affecting children and families.

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