

# Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk

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## Editors' Introduction

Brian Southwell

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Guest Editors' Introduction

***Healthcare Misinformation and Child, Family, and Community Health***

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Academic literature on misinformation has exploded in recent years and yet popular discourse on misinformation has varied even in how it defines misinformation. Moreover, much of the published work on misinformation that is available either tracks the prevalence of misinformation generally or points to population-based interventions intended to reduce that prevalence. That means the current literature lacks key insights about misinformation as a force specifically complicating the work of healthcare professionals who seek to improve family health and child wellbeing. Considerable work has focused on parental acceptance of clinician recommendations for children's health such as vaccination recommendations. Less work, though, has considered how and why families are vulnerable to medical misinformation in making decisions or the implications of that vulnerability for intervention development.

We can define scientific misinformation as publicly available information that is misleading or deceptive relative to the best available empirical evidence at the time and that explicitly counters the work of scientists without adding accurate evidence for consideration (Southwell et al., 2022). From that vantage point, there is a wide range of scientific misinformation that families regularly encounter in their information environments as they strive for good health and wellbeing. Such misinformation can be misleading in various ways: it might explicitly misrepresent important facts or might omit crucial facts, for example. A range of misinformation can undermine good decision-making. We need more work to document what misinformation families encounter as well as insight as to how we can guide them away from the influence of misinformation.

This special issue of the *Journal of Applied Research on Children* will feature papers that advance our understanding of misinformation in the family health context and what might be done about it. The papers will feature empirical data that advances our understanding of what steps might be taken to reduce the effect of misinformation on family decision-making, patient-provider relationships, and population welfare in the future.

*Reference*

Southwell, B. G., Brennen, J. S. B., Paquin, R., Boudewyns, V., & Zeng, J. (2022). Defining and measuring scientific misinformation. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 700(1), 98-111.