

Notes from the Director

What is a Risk Factor?

—*Marc Braverman*

From a statistical point of view, the identification of a risk factor is a relatively straightforward affair: it is a characteristic or condition that, when present, is associated with a higher chance of some particular negative outcome. For example, at the level of the family, the death of a parent and parental divorce are both considered to be risk factors for problems in behavioral adjustment and mental health later in life.

Yet as it turns out, researchers who study resilience in children have become increasingly dissatisfied with the tendency to rely on statistical relationships as the basis for our understanding about risk, because they don't help us understand what is actually happening to create the negative outcome. When examined closely, a suspected risk factor may sometimes be found *not* to create problems directly, but to be frequently associated with some other factor that does. In those cases researchers may draw the wrong conclusion about the nature of the problem that requires our attention. Therefore we need to look at the patterns of social interaction and other processes that lie behind the statistical correlations.

A case in point: Michael Rutter (1994), one of the foremost researchers in developmental psychiatry, notes that a careful review of research findings will show that the death of a child's parent does not inevitably pose a direct risk for long-term mental health problems. The more critical problem is that a child whose parent has died has a higher probability of experiencing lower-quality parenting and deteriorated family functioning in future years. If those factors can be resolved successfully, the intense experience of a parent's death, although extremely painful,

will not necessarily place the child at long-term risk for later psychological adjustment difficulties.

Another example is the case of divorce. Emery and Forehand (1994) describe several factors that typically accompany divorce. One of the most critical is the degree of parental conflict that exists in the family. Since conflict tends to be a chronic situation rather than an acute event, often existing for a long time both before and after a divorce takes place, the risk processes might not be dependent on the actual separation even though a statistical correlation can make it appear that way. Furthermore, parental conflict and divorce are not perfectly correlated. Destructive conflict can exist

in a home in which parents stay together, while conflict between divorcing parents may be relatively nondestructive if they manage to demonstrate respect for each other and sensitivity to their children. Thus divorce turns out to be a demographic marker that is a less-than-perfect predictor of actual risk.

Why is this discussion important for youth development and family professionals? One reason is that it helps us understand where we may be able to intervene successfully. A family counselor may not be able to prevent parents from getting a divorce but may be able to influence how they express and resolve their conflicts, thus giving children some protection from the most destructive aspects of divorce. A second benefit to this kind of analysis is that it can help us to better identify and understand resilience in children. For example, some children of divorced parents who demonstrate healthy psychological adjustment might not necessarily be more resilient than their peers; they may simply have been exposed to lower levels of the most serious forms of stress because of how their parents handled the divorce.

The above examples pertain to family structure variables but, more generally, a focus on risk and protective processes instead of static predictors can provide numerous forms of insight to help us improve youth programs. Researchers are finally beginning to look carefully at the potential protective effects of community-based programs (e.g., Quinn, 1994), and many Extension professionals are designing new programs specifically to serve youth growing up in high-risk environments. Our best chance to have a positive impact on their lives will depend on our ability to understand *why* certain variables seem to have powerful effects on youth development, and to target improvements in functioning at the individual, family, and community levels.

Norman Garmezy from the University of Minnesota has discussed three stages of resilience research. The first is the identification of children who have been exposed to multiple risk factors but have still managed to develop successfully, i.e., *resilient* children. The second is the identification of the assets and other protective factors that seem to characterize these children in comparison to their more vulnerable peers. The third stage is the attempt to understand the actual processes of risk and protection, with an eye toward understanding how environments might be changed to provide greater support. After a great deal of progress in the first two stages, research in child and adolescent development has now begun to move into this third—and potentially most productive—stage of investigation.

Emery, R.E., & Forehand, R. (1994). Parental divorce and children's well-being: A focus on resilience. In R.J. Haggerty, L.R. Sherrod, N. Garmezy, & M. Rutter (Eds.), *Stress, risk, and resilience in children and adolescents: Processes, mechanisms, and interventions*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press (pp.64-99).

Quinn, J. (1994). Positive effects of participation in youth organizations. In M. Rutter (Ed.), *Psychosocial disturbances in young people: Challenges for prevention*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rutter, M. (1994). Stress research: Accomplishments and tasks ahead. In R.J. Haggerty, L.R. Sherrod, N. Garmezy, & M. Rutter (Eds.), *Stress, risk, and resilience in children and adolescents: Processes, mechanisms, and interventions*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press (pp.354-385).

Spring Conference '97

—Ella Madsen

This year, as the Spring Conference plans fall into place, we are especially excited about the presenters who will be joining us. On Tuesday, May 20, the conference will open with a keynote address by **Sanford Dornbusch**, current Chair of the Advisory Board for the Stanford Center on Adolescence, Stanford University. Dr. Dornbusch is an eminent scholar in the field of adolescent development. His recent publications in journals and books cover a broad range of topics including domains of achievement, adolescent adjustment to divorce, structure of schools, family-school relations, and the impact of ethnicity and community context on personal relationships and academic achievement.

Also on Tuesday, we are very pleased to have several Advisors presenting workshops. **Eric Jorgensen** and **F e Moncloa**, YD Advisors in Santa Clara County, have developed a highly interactive workshop designed to teach 4-H leaders how to plan and carry out productive meetings. YD Advisors **Shelley Murdock** (Contra Costa), **Faye Lee** (San Francisco) and **Carole Paterson** (Solano) will present a workshop on training teens as cross-age teachers. These are train the trainer sessions. Instructions and materials will be provided so that these workshops could be replicated on the county level.

Human and Community Development (H&CD) faculty members and Extension specialists who will be presenting workshops are:

Xiaojia Ge is an Assistant Professor on the H&CD faculty specializing in adolescent development. Several journal articles by Dr. Ge have been included in our *Research you may have missed.....* publications. His

focus is on adolescent development within the family context, particularly the influence of parental dysfunction on adolescent development.

Carol Rodning is an Associate Professor and Director of the Child and Family Studies Center here on the Davis campus. Dr. Rodning is especially interested in attachment organization in parent-child relationships across the life span.

David Campbell, Economic Public Policy Analyst for Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program (SAREP) and Director of the California Community Program study (H&CD), will describe welfare reform provisions and plans in California and discuss the preliminary results of the welfare reform planning efforts in five counties.

Francine Bradley, Extension Poultry Specialist at UC Davis, has been heavily involved in the avian sciences for the past 12 years. She has received much recognition for her work with youth in the area of poultry and in the encouragement of scientific scholarship among young women. She will be discussing ethics and youth projects.

Tom Zurcher, Extension Education Specialist at the University of Minnesota and Coordinator for the 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System (4-H CCS), will present two workshops on curriculum development. Since California has just joined CCS, these workshops will be most helpful in understanding the curriculum development process and the function of design teams within the CCS framework.

The first day of the conference will close with a **Share Faire/Reception**. We are looking forward to the many displays that various youth staff have offered to present!

On Wednesday, May 21, **UC Vice-President "Reg" Gomes** will present a keynote on "Youth Development in a Changing University." His remarks will be followed by a **Town Hall**. Four topics have been slated for discussion: (1) the role of the club program, (2) educational delivery issues, (3) organizational issues, and (4) the national ad campaign. A **panel presentation, "UC Resources for County 4-H Programs"** will round out the conference program.

We are really looking forward to seeing you on May 20 and 21!

Welcome, Dan Desmond

—Marc Braverman

We welcome Dan Desmond as the new 4-H YD Program Coordinator. Dan, of course, is a longtime friend and colleague to all of us who have been involved over the years in 4-H and other UC Cooperative Extension programs in California. This new position will give him the opportunity to work on a statewide scale to strengthen inter- and intra-organizational relationships and bring his creative ideas to fruition.

Those of us who had the opportunity to hear Dan's presentation were impressed by his energy, vision, and enthusiasm. All of us at the 4-H CYD, in particular, look forward to working with him over the next several years to support our county and statewide youth development programs.

Thank you, Steve Mendivil

—Marc Braverman

We'd also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Steve Mendivil, who served as 4-H YD Program Coordinator from fall 1994 through this past March. Steve put particular priority on building strong relationships within the program and bringing different 4-H audiences together. He traveled tirelessly around the state to represent the 4-H program and forge positive working collaborations. We hope to be able to build on the good work he started, as well as to make use of his knowledge and expertise in the future. We thank Steve for his energy, ideas, and commitment, and we wish him much success in his new projects at the UC Office of the President in Oakland.

Out and About Around the

—Sally Stanley

National Network for Child Care Meeting
(1/14/97):

Anna Otto attended the final day of the National Network for Child Care meeting in Tucson. The day's activities included an update on the "Caring for Kids" project.

CYFAR Conference in Tucson, Arizona
(1/15-1/17/97):

USDA/CSREES sponsored a conference for 4-H staff nationwide who are participating in the Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) initiative. The initiative includes local youth at risk sites, state-strengthening projects and five National Networks. 4-H CYD staff who attended the conference were Marc Braverman (who is evaluating the National Decisions for Health Network) and

Anna Otto (who has a curriculum grant from the National Network for Child Care). Also in attendance from California were San Diego 4-H staff Steve Dasher, Sue Manglallan and Michelle Castognola (who administer a youth at risk site in San Diego County), and Consumer Education Specialist Karen Varcoe. Anna presented a workshop describing her curriculum for high school students on child care careers.

Curriculum Development Committee (1/15-1/16/97):

Ella Madsen attended the meetings on curriculum development, while Marc Braverman attended the CYFAR conference in Tucson.

Leader Training Workshop in San Benito County (2/1/97):

Anna Otto, Sally Stanley and Steve Mendivil were invited by San Benito County to present workshops on leadership skills, experiential learning and policy procedures. The volunteer leaders attending the workshops were very appreciative of the training, and felt the training would be useful.

North Central Region Youth Staff meeting (2/11/97):

Ramona Carlos represented the Center at this meeting.

Child Development Policy Advisory Committee meeting (2/20/97):

Sally Stanley attended the CDPAC meeting at the State Capitol in Sacramento. The morning presentation was given by Pulitzer Prize winner Ronald Kotulak on *Early childhood brain development and its impact on state politics*. The afternoon involved discussions on the impact of welfare reform on child development.

Focus groups on careers with children (3/5/97 and 3/9/97):

Anna Otto led discussions with seniors at Woodland High School on 3/5/97 and with a troop of Senior Girl Scouts on 3/9/97. Information on what youth want and need from a program on careers with children was discussed. Anna hopes to develop a program of career development that will meet the needs of youth in this area.

State Leadership Conference Planning Meeting (3/22/97):

Anna Otto and Ella Madsen have attended a few of the planning committee meetings for the 1997 State Leadership Conference.

National 4-H Advertising Campaign Update (3/24/97):

Anna Otto attended this meeting in Los Angeles. In the morning the group learned more about the national campaign. In the afternoon, the steering committee met to formulate California's response to the national agenda.

Upcoming event (5/7 - 5/9/97)

Invited paper on resilience and tobacco prevention: Marc Braverman has been invited to prepare a paper on resilience theory and its implications for tobacco prevention research for a conference entitled "Partnerships and New Paradigms for Tobacco Prevention Research." The conference, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, will bring together researchers from medical research, public health, developmental psychology, sociology and other disciplines. It will be held May 7-9 in Sundance, Utah.

California Receives CYFAR Grant From U.S.D.A.

—Marc Braverman

This past month we received word that the California 4-H YD Program has received funding for a State Strengthening grant project from the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Initiative of USDA-CSREES. Funding for the first year will be \$233,000. The project will focus on building local programs that can strengthen child-adult interaction patterns in families living in high-risk communities. The Request for Proposals from USDA specified that up to three local county sites should be selected to establish projects in low-income communities during the first year. Accordingly, we implemented a within-state proposal and review process, which resulted in the selection of Glenn, San Francisco and Santa Barbara counties for the first year, with our intent being to add new counties in succeeding years. A number of excellent proposals were received from Advisors, and we were sorry that the number of sites had to be limited. The local community projects will provide a variety of approaches to program structure and delivery for their participating families, including afterschool programs (Glenn), college preparation and exploration (San Francisco), and computer literacy (Santa Barbara). The statewide coordination component at UC Davis will provide a range of programmatic support for these new projects and for previously funded Youth at Risk project sites in the state.

The grant will continue for up to five years. Recruitment will begin shortly for a Project Coordinator and Evaluator, who will be based at the 4-H CYD. We hope that the programs, resources, and networks developed through this State Strengthening project will expand our capacity to deliver

high-quality programming for children, youth and families in all areas of the state.

An update on the volunteer leader screening survey

—Ramona Carlos

We would like to thank the youth staff members who have been very prompt in completing the volunteer leader screening survey and returning it to us. The information you provide will inform the Program Policy Group of the screening procedures that are most appropriate for the statewide 4-H youth program, and youth development staff of each region. We hope every youth staff member will see this as an opportunity to provide insight into how well the screening process is working, and to make suggestions, based on your expertise, for procedural change. If you haven't yet done so, please be sure to return the survey as soon as possible. The statewide picture of how leader screening operates will not be complete if there are pieces missing! Thank you!

WOW: The World of Work: An update on the research project examining adolescent work transitions

—Sally Stanley

The collaborative project "Preparing Adolescents for the World of Work" is well underway and keeping the team members involved in the project quite busy. The high school version of the survey questionnaire has been much improved through extensive piloting of the survey. Piloting took place in **San Joaquin, Marin, Solano and El Dorado Counties.**

In January, Ella Madsen was able to work with youth in the San Joaquin area thanks to Ann Brosnahan, Youth Advisor for San Joaquin County, and at the Walker Ranch

Conference and Education Center with the assistance of Jane Chin Young, Youth Advisor, Marin County.

In March, Sally Stanley met with a group in Vacaville as well as youth from the "Fighting Back" group in Vallejo. These pilot sessions were arranged through Carole Paterson, Youth Advisor, Solano County. Carole also set up a pilot study in Fairfield. Rob Weisskirch, a Ph.D. student in Human and Community Development and a research assistant for the study, administered this survey.

Ella Madsen and Sally Stanley met with a group of older youth in Placerville. These out of high school youth were in various stages of work transition and provided information that was quite valuable to the final version of the survey questionnaire.

On March 18th, Ella Madsen and Sally Stanley administered the survey questionnaire to seniors at Del Norte High School in Crescent City. This first study was arranged by Teresa McAllister, Humboldt County Youth Advisor. Teresa also administered the survey to youth in the California Conservation Corps and to Adult Education Classes.

We were delighted that the administration of the survey was trouble free. This was most likely due to the assistance received from all the youth who participated in the piloting of the survey in the last few months.

Caring for Kids: An Update

—Anna Otto

The *Caring for Kids* project continues to move forward. During winter quarter, Anna taught a class, HDE 198: Child Care Careers, to a group of undergraduate students at UC Davis. The class provided a

preliminary pilot testing opportunity for activities being designed as part of the *Caring for Kids Project*. During March, Anna, with Sally Stanley's assistance, also conducted two focus groups with high school students. Currently, members of the collaborative team are in the process of providing further review of project activities. Final pilot testing of the curriculum should occur at the end of spring 1997.

County Spotlight: 4-H Programming in its varied forms: 18 years and going strong! Catching up with Imperial County

—Ramona Carlos

Andrez (Andy) Montiel, 4-H Youth Development Advisor for Imperial County recently shared some information about two community outreach 4-H programs he implemented in Imperial County. The **Summer 4-H Program** was started nearly 18 years ago, when Andy, with the intent to begin a 4-H program in a low-income housing community, applied for and received a grant from a local Housing Authority. Andy hoped to begin a 4-H program for children living in this community, and offer them project opportunities which were available to children in other communities. By receiving a grant of approximately \$12,000, Andy was able to hire a Program Coordinator and begin a club for children who hadn't had similar opportunities made available to them. The Summer 4-H

Program, one of the first of its kind in California, has proved to be extremely successful and popular. It serves approximately 300 children every summer! The projects the program offers include: **Arts and Crafts, Clothing and Textiles, Electrical projects, Nutrition, and Woodworking.**

Over the years, there have been concerns that funding would be cut off for the Summer 4-H Program. However, the program has continued to receive strong support from both parents, youth and the community. Parents who have been surveyed about the Summer Program have emphasized the value of having a program like this in a low-income housing community and appreciate that 4-H actually came into the housing projects to set up the club. It is a compliment to 4-H that some of the youth who have been a part of the Summer Program and enjoyed being a part of 4-H, join city clubs once the Summer Program finishes.

“4-H Reaching for Success” is an outreach program now in its eighth year, which was started from a grant awarded to a local Housing Authority. The Housing Authority wanted to have a 4-H club which would develop a mentorship program for older youth in Imperial County and contacted Andy, who began the program. Some of the goals of the program are to encourage older youth to teach younger members about drug awareness and assist with their homework. Teachers have also been enlisted to assist, if necessary, with computer literacy projects.

“4-H Reaching for Success” is a year-round program which is supported by a grant totaling almost \$250,000 per year. Originally geared toward high school youth, it became a challenge to keep many teens interested and enrollment numbers began to drop. One solution has been to lower the enrollment age for this program to 6th grade, as a way to attract other youth. This has

resulted in enrollment numbers of around 300 kids.

Echoing a common sentiment heard throughout many 4-H clubs in California, keeping older members involved has proved to be a challenge. Older youth are encouraged to maintain good grades and high attendance in school. For those youth who meet these goals, Andy is instrumental in applying for and securing scholarships for them to attend the State Leadership Conference. He usually brings 7-8 youth to the annual conference and has taken groups to visit other university campuses, as well. Andy is deservedly proud to report that this type of program has been emulated throughout California. We wish him continued success with both of these programs!

CYD book, “Advances in Research and Innovative Programming on Youth Development Topics,” is taking shape

—Ramona Carlos and Sally Stanley

We are very encouraged and pleased to report that we have had a number of manuscripts submitted for consideration as chapters in the forthcoming CYD book, “Advances in Research and Innovative Programming on Youth Development Topics.” We are moving forward with the peer review process and have submitted a proposal to have the book published through DANR Communication Services. We will keep everyone updated on the progress of the book.