

In P.C. McKenry and S.J. Price (2005) *Families and Change: Coping with Stressful Events and Transitions*, 3rd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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050729-022

Everyday Hassles and Family Stress

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For many American families, daily life involves negotiating a maze of activities that includes cooking, cleaning, running errands, dropping off and picking up children, commuting to and from work, tending to pets, scheduling appointments, attending events (community, religious, and school related), returning phone calls, caring for aging family members, and remembering birthdays—often while parents also fulfill the duties of full- or part-time jobs. These routinized experiences define the rhythm of family life, and family members can experience them at times as rewarding and at other times as hassles. Whether family members perceive a particular event to be a hassle, a pleasure, or both can depend on any number of factors. For example, women and men define and react to hassles differently, socioeconomic resources make it easier for some families and harder for others to deal with daily hassles, and differences in personality characteristics and coping resources influence how individual family members experience and respond to everyday hassles.

In this chapter, we discuss the everyday hassles that researchers have examined in studies of daily stress and family life. We first define the kinds of events that constitute such hassles and then describe the methods researchers use to study them, including the means by which researchers explore *invisible* dimensions of family work. We then examine how daily stress and hassles are associated with family functioning, paying particular attention to the variability in family members' experiences. We introduce Karney and Bradbury's

(1995) vulnerability-stress-adaptation model as a helpful way to frame the research on daily hassles and family stress, focusing on the diversity that exists both across and within families in each of the three domains proposed in the model. Given the gendered meanings attached to many routinized family activities and the often divergent experiences of women and men in families (Ferree, 1990), our approach is necessarily feminist. We close the chapter with a discussion of how existing social policies and practices in the United States fail to mesh with the daily reality of most American families and some suggestions for policy interventions based on the research findings.

What Are Everyday Hassles?

Everyday or daily hassles are the proximal stressors, strains, and transactions of day-to-day life that can be viewed as common annoyances. These events are relatively minor and arise out of routinized daily activities, such as the everyday tasks involved in maintaining a home, caring for family members, working at a paid job, and participating in community activities (DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982; Serido, Almeida, & Wethington, 2004). Both anticipated and unanticipated events constitute daily hassles (Wheaton, 1999). For example, commuting to work in morning traffic, chauffeuring children to and from school and activities, and working longer hours at particular times of the year (e.g., holiday season for retailers, tax season for accountants) are all daily hassles that families routinize and anticipate. Unanticipated daily hassles, in contrast, are distinct in their episodic nature. Examples of such hassles include an argument with a spouse, the arrival of uninvited company, and a midday phone call concerning a sick child who needs to be picked up from a child-care center. In an article focused on time and family life, Erkel (1995) relates some of his own experiences with unanticipated daily hassles and family stress:

I had just ended a two-week run during which I bounced a check, joined a basketball league, spent part of a weekend unable to relax with friends, twice missed my evening Italian class, got pulled over for running a stop sign, logged 32 hours of overtime, left the trash cans out in the rain, woke in the middle of the night to anguish over a job change, forgot my brother's birthday, and collapsed into bed most nights after some wasted minutes staring at the television with my equally exhausted wife. (p. 33)

As this narrative illustrates, although many unexpected daily hassles are relatively minor, they often disrupt the flow of everyday life and thus add to family stress.

Whether anticipated or unanticipated, everyday hassles are distinct from the major life events or transitions discussed in other chapters of this book (e.g., death of a loved one, divorce, job loss). Daily hassles are different from major life events in several ways (Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullan, 1981; Wheaton, 1996). First, everyday hassles represent a more frequent and continuous form of stress than the relatively rare events that constitute major life changes. In addition, a growing body of research suggests that everyday hassles may be more important determinants of family stress than major, but less frequent, life events (e.g., DeLongis et al., 1982; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin, 1993; Repetti & Wood, 1997b; Serido et al., 2004). Furthermore, hassles are characterized by relatively minor ongoing stressors that occupy daily living and typically occur in the absence of major life events or discrete stressors (Serido et al., 2004). However, families experiencing major life changes may also confront daily hassles and continuous stressors. For example, a member of a family that is currently adjusting to a chronic stressor such as divorce or job loss may feel heightened stress if he or she misses an appointment or gets a speeding ticket.

Methods for Studying Everyday Hassles and Family Stress

Researchers who study the links between everyday hassles and family stress have utilized a variety of methods to assess family members' experiences of daily stress. In early studies, researchers often defined hassles as "those irritating, frustrating, distressing demands and troubled relationships that grind on us day in and day out" (Miller & Wilcox, 1986, p. 39). Participants in these studies were presented with lists of various kinds of hassles and were asked to rate the frequency and severity with which they had experienced each hassle in the past month. For example, Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, and Lazarus (1981) used the Hassles Scale, which comprises 117 possible hassles across seven domains (work, health, family, friends, practical considerations, the environment, and chance occurrences), including not getting enough rest, planning meals, misplacing or losing things, and dealing with inconsiderate smokers. One criticism of this method is that it does not take into account the complexity of individuals' experiences of daily hassles. For example, Lazarus (1999) argues that the likelihood of an individual's experiencing a particular event as a hassles depends on the person's appraisal of the event as well as his or her coping resources. Using this line of reasoning, scholars should not view daily hassles and stress as a single variable, but as a complex system of interdependent processes (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988).

To account more fully for individual differences in appraisals of daily hassles, DeLongis et al. (1988) revised Kanner et al.'s (1981) measure of daily hassles to enable respondents to rate how much of a hassle or an uplift they found each category to be on a particular day. The revised scale provides the following introduction:

Hassles are irritants—things that annoy or bother you; they can make you upset or angry. Uplifts are events that make you feel good; they can make you joyful, glad, or satisfied. Some hassles and uplifts occur on a fairly regular basis and others are relatively rare. Some have only a slight effect, others a strong effect. . . . You will find that during the course of the day some of these things will have been only a hassle for you and some will have been an uplift. Others will have been both a hassle and an uplift. (DeLongis et al., 1988, appendix)

Following this introduction, respondents rate how much of a hassle and/or an uplift they found each of 53 items to be at the end of a particular day. DeLongis et al.'s revised checklist demonstrates an important shift in scholars' thinking about daily hassles, from viewing hassles as inherently stressful events or activities to viewing them as events, experiences, and interactions that individuals might appraise as hassles, uplifts, or both.

Although they have not focused explicitly on daily hassles and family stress, feminist scholars who have used qualitative methods to study everyday, routinized experiences within families have also emphasized the multidimensional nature of daily hassles. Focusing on the routine, gendered experiences of everyday family life, feminist researchers have conducted in-depth, open-ended, face-to-face interviews, often of several hours' duration, and have uncovered valuable insights regarding daily hassles (e.g., Allen & Walker, 2000). These studies provide rich sources of information about the nuances of daily family life that include participants' own, often quite complex, appraisals of their experiences. Through the use of these methods, feminist scholars have learned that although women may label many of the routinized tasks of daily life as essential and often unpleasant hassles, they also view these tasks as expressions of care for the people they love (e.g., DeVault, 1991; Dressel & Clark, 1990; Rubin, 1976, 1983; Thompson, 1991). For example, caring for an elderly partner or parent may include providing transportation to activities and doctor's appointments, grocery and clothes shopping, cleaning, and help with personal care. Women are more often responsible for carrying out these types of tasks than are men, and, on average, experience them as more stressful than do men, yet, regardless of the stress that comes with the added responsibilities of caregiving, many women derive meaning and satisfaction from attending to the needs of their loved ones (Walker, Pratt, & Eddy, 1995).

In addition to underscoring the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of family members' experiences of daily hassles, research using qualitative methods has uncovered routinized aspects of daily family life. Drawing from detailed accounts of everyday activities in families, feminist scholars have expanded the list of potential daily hassles beyond the collection of activities typically identified in survey studies. This expanded view of hassles directs our attention to a consideration of emotion work (Dressel & Clark, 1990; Hochschild, 1979, 1983), kin work or kin keeping (DiLeonardo, 1987; Stacey, 1990; Stack, 1974), marriage work (Oliker, 1989), the scheduling of family time (Daly, 1996), the feeding of the family (DeVault, 1991), household labor (Coltrane, 2000), child care and care for aging or sick family members (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2000; Rossi & Rossi, 1990), and volunteer or service work (Daniels, 1988; Hunter, Pearson, Jalongo, & Kellam, 1998).

Over the past decade, researchers have begun to examine whether—and how—fluctuations in daily stress and hassles affect interactions in families on a day-to-day basis (see Larson & Almeida, 1999). These labor-intensive studies generally feature precise temporal sequencing of the experience of daily stressors and subsequent interactions with family members. The development of innovative research tools such as time diaries and experience sampling has permitted researchers to obtain detailed accounts of occurrences of daily hassles and resolved problems associated with retrospective recall. In addition, these methods capture dynamic daily experiences that are otherwise static in survey or cross-sectional designs (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999).

Influenced by family systems theory and ecological perspectives, several researchers have conducted daily experience studies focusing on how one family member's (i.e., parent or spouse) daily stress is linked to another family member's (i.e., spouse or child) affect or behavior, as well as the reactivity of men versus women to daily stressors. For example, Larson and Richards (1994) collected data on mothers, fathers, and their adolescent offspring using the experience sampling method, an approach in which family members carried electronic beepers throughout the day and were paged at random moments. When paged, they completed brief questionnaires about their activities, companions, and emotional states at those moments. In a study with married couples, Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Wethington (1989) used a different approach, asking participants to complete daily diaries for 42 consecutive days. In each diary entry, a participant completed items in a short questionnaire about a variety of daily stressors, including the experience of "overloads" and "tensions or arguments" both at home and elsewhere. The researchers' analyses focused on the variability in husbands' and wives' experience of hassles and stressors across a series of days. Repetti and Wood

(1997a) examined daily stressors in the workplace (i.e., overloads and negative interpersonal interactions) by using a creative sampling strategy and multiple methods to ensure that the moods recorded by the mothers in their sample at the ends of their workdays were caused by work hassles, and not by long commutes, errands, or other daily hassles they might encounter after work hours. The researchers identified their study sample through a work-site child-care center where participating mothers picked up their children immediately after their work shifts ended. Using self-report mood data collected at the ends of the mothers' work shifts and observational data collected in the first minutes of the mother-child reunions at the child-care center, Repetti and Wood examined how mothers' experiences of hassles at work affected their interactions with their preschoolers at the end of the day.

The studies described above have been criticized for their reliance on relatively small, nonrepresentative samples, their use of self-administered checklists to assess daily hassles and stressors, and the time-intensive demands placed on respondents, which often lead to attrition or missing data (Almeida, Wethington, & Kessler, 2002). To address these concerns, Almeida et al. (2002) developed the Daily Inventory of Stressful Events (DISE), a semistructured telephone interview protocol, which they used with a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 adults ranging in age from 25 to 74 years (i.e., the National Study of Daily Experiences). The DISE methodology involves eight consecutive daily telephone interviews in which participants respond to a series of semistructured, open-ended questions about the occurrence of daily stressors across several domains, including arguments or disagreements, work or school, home life, discrimination, and issues involving close friends or relatives. As is common in qualitative studies, participants are asked to provide narrative descriptions of all the daily stressors they mention as well as the perceived severity of the stressors. All interviews are tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded. Almeida et al.'s methodology diverges somewhat from qualitative approaches in that rather than relying on participants' self-report appraisals of stressors, it uses investigator ratings of objective threat and severity to determine the type of threat each stressor poses (i.e., loss, danger, disappointment, frustration, and opportunity) as well as its severity (rated "none" to "severe"). Participants' highly specific, brief narratives provide detailed explanations about the types of events that men and women typically experience as daily hassles, and the investigator ratings reduce some of the bias associated with self-report appraisals of stressors. In addition, interviewing participants over eight consecutive days enables researchers to compute estimates of daily hassles across several days and examine their cumulative effects rather than rely on single reports about particular days or subjective estimates of daily hassles over several days.

Understanding the Links Between Everyday Hassles and Family Stress

In this section we examine how family members manage daily hassles and discuss the links between daily hassles and individual and family functioning, paying particular attention to the diversity that exists both between and within families. We begin with a discussion of Karney and Bradbury's (1995) vulnerability-stress-adaptation model, a theoretical framework that provides a useful way to think about everyday hassles and their links with family stress. We then use the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model to frame a review of the literature on the effects of everyday hassles for families and their members.

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model

The application of theory to the study of everyday hassles and family stress is as varied as the methodologies used. Studies range from the atheoretical to research grounded in life-course theory (e.g., Almeida & Horn, 2004; Moen, 2003), the ecological perspective (e.g., Repetti & Wood, 1997a, 1997b), feminist perspectives (e.g., Daly, 2001; DeVault, 1991), and emotional transmission paradigms (e.g., Larson & Almeida, 1999). Originally designed to provide an integrative framework for understanding the empirical research on marital quality and stability, Karney and Bradbury's (1995) vulnerability-stress-adaptation model is helpful in that it parsimoniously integrates and expands principles from varying social and behavioral theoretical perspectives, including the ABC-X model, to explain the ways in which family members' experiences of potentially stressful events may be linked to relational outcomes. In our application of Karney and Bradbury's model, we treat everyday hassles as stressful events and explore how they interact with enduring vulnerabilities and adaptive processes to predict family stress. In addition, we view the opportunities and constraints afforded by the ecological niches that family members inhabit to be central to each element of the model, and we symbolize this by enclosing our illustration of the adapted model in a box (see Figure 15.1).

At the most basic level of their model, Karney and Bradbury (1995) identify three elements that can contribute to our understanding of the links between everyday hassles and family stress. *Adaptive processes*, which play a central role in the model, are the ways in which individuals and families cope with everyday hassles. They are critical to our application of the model because they moderate the associations between daily hassles and family stress. Family stress changes as a function of the way family members behave

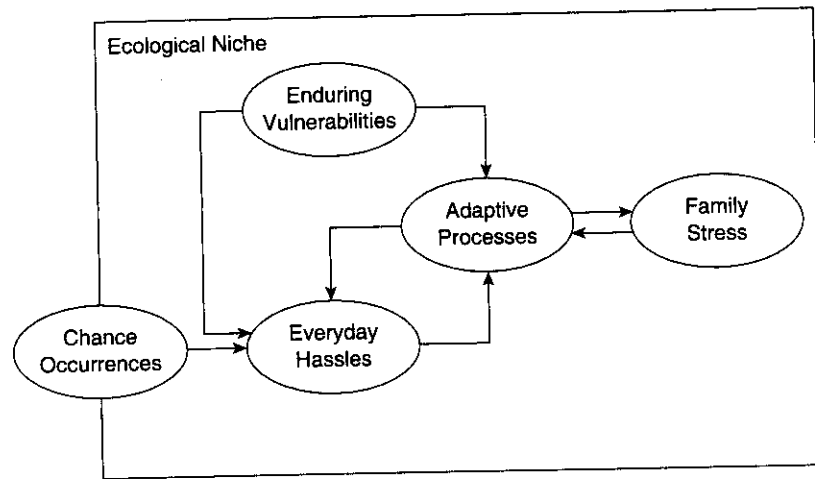


Figure 15.1 Adapted Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model

in response to everyday hassles, and, in turn, family stress can affect how family members appraise daily hassles. For example, some studies suggest that employed spouses and parents withdraw from family interaction emotionally following interpersonal difficulties and when they have high work loads during the day (Repetti, 1994; Repetti & Wood, 1997a). Additional findings suggest that this type of social withdrawal has short-term benefit in that solitary time can rejuvenate spouses and parents and buffer children from the transmission of their parents' negative emotions (Larson & Gillman, 1999). Rejuvenated parents and protected children are then better able to deal with additional hassles as they unfold. However, the short-term benefit of emotional withdrawal for the individual and the family may be offset over time as repeated instances of withdrawal may erode feelings of closeness in the family, leading to negative interactions, resentment, and more hassles—culminating in higher levels of family stress (Repetti & Wood, 1997b).

The model also proposes a reciprocal relationship between adaptive processes and *everyday hassles*. The level of family stress is partially determined by the number, severity, and centrality of daily hassles that the family and its members encounter (Almeida, Wethington, & Kessler, 2002; Gruen, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988). Further, the manner in which family members deal with hassles can exacerbate or alleviate family stress. In a study of divorced single mothers, Hodgson, Dienhart, and Daly (2001) found that careful planning, scheduling, and multitasking were important coping strategies for these mothers of young children. To the extent that the mothers in the study sample were able to navigate daily hassles in this manner, the

maintained a sense of control over their family routines. Hodgson et al. quote one of their participants:

I have a certain amount of minutes allotted to get in and out of the daycare center . . . then I have half an hour to get to work so I have it timed to about, I have like six minutes to get them in and out to get to work on time. . . . I can't always, things don't always go that way, smoothly, you know those six minutes to get him dropped off in the morning, I can't guarantee that that happens five days a week, 52 weeks of the year. . . . if I didn't leave the daycare right at the right minute then there's a school bus that I follow all the way down [Highway] 21 . . . and there was construction last fall on 21, you know, and there have been situations where I've forgotten things or (child) hasn't settled into daycare. . . . He needed a few extra minutes of comforting. . . . I drop him off the minute it opens and the minute it closes is the minute I'm there to pick him up. (pp. 14–15)

This mother's words illustrate that, as the model suggests, even with the most careful planning around rigid work and child-care schedules, chance events (e.g., bad weather, road construction, forgetfulness, an upset child) can lead to unanticipated hassles, disrupting plans and requiring additional adaptation. For single mothers with young children, backup plans and the anticipation of the unexpected are essential coping strategies for dealing with unanticipated daily hassles.

A family's ability to adapt to daily hassles is also influenced by the *enduring vulnerabilities* that the family and its members possess. Karney and Bradbury (1995) define enduring vulnerabilities as family members' relatively stable intrapersonal characteristics (e.g., personality, child temperament) and family background variables (e.g., structural and behavioral patterns in family of origin). For example, the extent to which parents are able to refrain from engaging in negative interaction with their children following high-stress days may depend, in part, on the parents' own general level of psychological functioning. In a study examining mothers characterized as high on type A behavior, depression, or anxiety, Repetti and Wood (1997a) found that the mothers' daily hassles at work were linked to negative interactions with their children. Such enduring vulnerabilities can both contribute to family members' appraisals of daily hassles and affect how they adapt to those hassles.

In the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model, adaptive processes are hypothesized to be inversely related to family stress; that is, families and their members experience less stress to the extent that they deal with daily hassles in constructive ways. In addition, the model proposes positive associations among family stress, enduring vulnerabilities, and daily hassles. High levels of enduring vulnerabilities and daily hassles are linked with high levels of family stress. However, adaptive processes are expected to moderate this link in such

a way that families with average levels of enduring vulnerabilities and daily hassles have higher levels of family stress when adaptive processes are poor and lower levels of family stress when adaptive processes are average or good (Bradbury, Cohan, & Karney, 1998).

One strength of the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model is that it provides an integrative framework that scholars can apply to gain a better understanding of everyday hassles and family stress. The components of the applied model—daily hassles, enduring vulnerabilities, and adaptive processes—and the general paths in the model can help us understand the complex processes and reciprocal associations operating among the model components. The model is limited by its inattention to the ecological niches that families and their members inhabit, which leads it to ignore the potential variability that may exist in model paths based on important between- and within-family differences. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to develop an exhaustive and comprehensive model that can better account for these limitations, but we suggest that the current model can be expanded to include the consideration of contextual factors and thus better reflect the growing body of research on everyday hassles and family stress.

Everyday Hassles

A growing number of researchers using widely varying methodologies have explored the prevalence of everyday hassles that family members typically experience as well as the different meanings that men and women ascribe to these hassles. With a sample of 1,031 adults, each of whom completed an average of seven daily phone interviews, Almeida and Horn (2000) found that women reported experiencing everyday hassles more frequently than did men. They found no differences, however, in the numbers of daily hassles that men and women reported experiencing multiple daily hassles. In addition, these researchers discovered a negative relationship between age and reports of everyday hassles, with a decrease in reports of everyday hassles occurring in old age (i.e., ages 60–74). Compared with older adults, young and midlife adults reported experiencing a hassle or multiple hassles on more days, and they perceived their hassles to be more severe.

The content of the everyday hassles that individuals reported included arguments or tensions, overloads, and hassles regarding respondents' social networks. The most frequent type of hassle reported—arguments or tensions—is illustrated in the words of one midlife father in the study:

I had a problem with an employee. And also today she called and had cancelled something I had ordered three months ago and now I have to start running and

searching and waiting for something. It was a big disappointment. It wasn't an argument, it was her fear that she had ordered the wrong thing and she didn't want to go through the stress and stuff. Nor did I obviously. Since she had doubts that she had done the right thing, she cancelled an order. So, it was very stressful for me. (p. 436)

Respondents in Almeida and Horn's study reported similar arguments or tensions in one-fourth of the 7,221 daily interviews, with most of these tensions involving spouses or partners. Overload and network hassles were much less common, occurring on 6% and 8% of the study days, respectively. Examples of overloads and network hassles are illustrated by the words of two middle-aged women in the study sample:

I was helping to open and close the store so I had to get up this morning, get my son ready, drag him to work, pick up somebody who didn't have a car, pick them up, take them to work, open the store, make sure they were okay, take him back to kindergarten, drop him off at the bus, go back to work, pick him up from the bus, run to swimming lessons for 45 minutes and then go back to work to close the store. (p. 436)

I have a close friend who has emotional problems. My friend also suffers from migraine headaches. I spent quite a bit of time with her today. I tried to comfort her. Yah, it interrupted my routine because I could not be at home to do things. (p. 436)

Compared with older adults, the younger and midlife adults in Almeida and Horn's study experienced a greater proportion of overloads and reported that hassles caused greater disruption in their everyday routines.

In contrast to researchers who have used daily telephone interview techniques to examine daily hassles, feminist scholars have focused on gender differences in family members' experiences and the subjective meanings that family members ascribe to routinized hassles. For example, feminist researchers have demonstrated that women perform the bulk of family labor (e.g., cooking, housecleaning, doing laundry, shopping for groceries and household goods), parenting, and caregiving (Coltrane, 2000), and this work has multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings for the individuals who perform it. Most women experience caring and providing for children, partners, parents, and other family members as simultaneously pleasurable, rewarding, stressful, and exhausting. Much of this work is repetitive and invisible (Daniels, 1987; Ferree, 1990; Thompson & Walker, 1989), and it is never done. Studies involving national surveys and time diaries have shown that women in the United States spend an average of 38–40 hours per week on

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these activities; wives perform two to three times as much housework as their husbands (Coltrane, 2000; Demo & Acock, 1993; Robinson & Godbey, 1997), and mothers spend substantially more time than fathers in parenting activities (Arendell, 2000; Coltrane, 1996).

To understand daily hassles and family stress, one must recognize that family labor is multidimensional and time-intensive, involves both routine and occasional tasks, and is highly variable across households (Demo & Acock, 1993). Further, because much of the work is mundane, tedious, boring, and generally performed without pay, most women and men report that they do not like doing it (DeVault, 1991; Robinson & Milkie, 1997, 1998). The sheer volume of family labor and caregiving, as well as the ongoing and relentless nature of many of these responsibilities, requires planning, preparation, scheduling, and multitasking. Thus, although caring for and providing for family members includes enjoyable aspects, the work itself often creates hassles—both anticipated and unanticipated—and family stress. For example, a mother may feel hassled when she has to get up from the dinner table several times to refill a child's glass of milk, serve her husband a second helping of food, answer the phone, and clean up a spill on the table. Or a mother who is performing several tasks simultaneously—caring for her preschool-age daughter, preparing a meal, doing laundry, and talking on the telephone with her teenage son all at the same time—may confront an unanticipated hassle when her washing machine springs a leak.

One explanation for the differences between women and men in the way they experience everyday hassles focuses on the extent to which individuals interpret their involvement in family labor to be freely chosen or voluntary (Larson & Richards, 1994). Exploring the contextual conditions surrounding family members' experience of emotions, Larson, Richards, and Perrin-Jenkins (1994) collected data from married couples using an experience sampling method. Their rich data on the contrasting moods of husbands and wives at work and at home underscore how differently men and women experience these contexts and the everyday hassles they encounter in each domain. For example, employed wives recorded their most positive moods while at work; wives' emotions were generally more positive than were husbands' when they were on the job. However, wives experienced an emotional decline at home during the evening hours, which were filled with housework and child care. In contrast, husbands recorded their most negative emotions in the workplace; at home their moods lightened, in part because nonwork time included leisure activities. However, even when men performed housework or child care, their moods while they did these tasks were more positive than were those of their wives when they performed the same activities. Further analyses revealed that performing housework at

child-care tasks elicited more positive reactions from husbands than from wives because the husbands perceived that they had more choice regarding their involvement in these domains than did the wives.

The reverse is true for paid work. Husbands in Larson et al.'s study reported low levels of choice while at work, which may be related, in part, to constraints associated with gendered expectations for men to be providers. Employed wives reported more positive moods at work than did employed husbands. For many (but not all) women, an unhurried work pace and a friendly work environment contributed to their positive moods while on the job, underscoring the importance of social support in the workplace for women's mental health. Collectively, these findings suggest that the transfer of women's and men's routinized experiences in the workplace or home to emotional distress is a gendered process. The translation of work and family experiences into emotional health or distress may depend in part on the degree to which the individual perceives the activity to be freely chosen and whether it provides opportunities for positive social interaction, rather than the characteristics of the activity per se.

In sum, the studies reviewed above suggest that scholars may achieve a better understanding of everyday hassles by considering the ecological niches or contexts in which the hassles occur. A family's construction of gendered expectations is one such context (Allen & Walker, 2000) and contributes to differences in women's and men's perceptions of and reactions to daily hassles. In addition, research has shown that other factors, such as the family's socioeconomic status (e.g., Grzywacz, Almeida, Neupert, & Ettner, 2004), exposure to chronic stressors at work (e.g., Repetti, 1994) or at home (e.g., Serido et al., 2004), and nonstandard work schedules (e.g., Almeida, 2004), influence the sheer number of everyday hassles that family members experience as well as family members' perceptions of the severity of the hassles.

Adaptive Processes

According to the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model, the processes that family members use to cope with everyday hassles have important implications for how those hassles affect family stress. In a daily diary study of 166 married couples with children, Bolger et al. (1989) found that on days when husbands experienced an argument at work with a coworker or supervisor, they were more likely to return home from work and argue with their wives, but not their children. The researchers found no significant associations between arguments at work and subsequent arguments with spouses or children for wives, however. These findings suggest that parents are generally able to buffer their children from their work-related, everyday hassles.

However, wives tend to be more successful in buffering their spouses from their interpersonal hassles at work than are husbands, whose interpersonal hassles on the job are often catalysts for marital arguments and marital stress.

How do family members buffer others from the effects of the everyday hassles they encounter? Repetti and Wood's (1997a) research suggests that children are protected from the transmission of their parents' negative work experiences by parents' behavioral and emotional withdrawal. For example, Bolger et al. (1989) found that when husbands experienced greater-than-usual demands at the workplace, they performed less household labor and child care when they returned home, and their wives compensated for the withdrawal by performing more of the work at home. The parallel pattern did not occur when wives experienced overloads at work. When wives experienced overloads at work, they too performed less work at home (i.e., behavioral withdrawal), but their husbands did not reciprocate by performing more. Bolger et al. label this an "asymmetry in the buffering effect" (p. 182) and suggest that, in the short term, wives' stepping in for husbands may alleviate husbands' stress and avoid the transmission of stress from husbands' daily hassles to children. However, this short-term adaptive process may prove harmful over time for families—most particularly for wives. Coping in this manner in repeated instances over time may be one factor explaining the consistent finding that marriage benefits the emotional health of men more than that of women (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Roger, 2003; Bernard, 1972). To the extent that women's emotional health plays a key role in child well-being (Demo & Acock, 1996), a pattern of asymmetrical buffering may be detrimental for children in families as well.

Recent research from a 10-year, multisite qualitative study suggests that buffering children from the effects of parents' everyday hassles may be a luxury afforded only to middle-class and better-off families (Dodson & Dickert, 2004). In their study of low-income families, Dodson and Dickert (2004) found that these families involved children, most typically eldest daughter in child-care and housework tasks as a strategy to compensate for the inflexible work hours, low wages, and nonstandard shifts of working-poor parents in a labor market dominated by service sector jobs and no-tolerance workplace policies. Whereas studies of both working- and middle-class families have found that girls, more than boys, assume household labor responsibilities when mothers' work demands are high (e.g., Crouter, Head, Bumpus, & McHale, 2001), low-income families differ in that girls' contributions to family labor are essential for family survival because the demands of parent work render mothers and fathers unavailable to attend to even the most basic everyday hassles of family life. In this way, parents' workplace demands have direct impacts on eldest daughters' daily experiences in that these girls

must contend with the everyday hassles and responsibilities customarily assigned to parents. As a teacher of the low-income adolescent girls participating in Dodson and Dickert's study observed, "They have to take their little brother to the bus stop in the morning and sometimes that means getting to school late or they are baby sitting . . . they are like little mothers" (p. 326). One 15-year-old daughter's own words illustrate that the girls themselves are keenly aware of their responsibilities as child-care providers and assistant housekeepers: "I have to take care of the house and take care of the kids and I don't go outside. I have to stay home. They have to go to work so I take over" (p. 324).

The results of Dodson and Dickert's study suggest that although this adaptive strategy has both short-term benefits (i.e., children are cared for and household tasks are completed) and long-term benefits (i.e., family cohesion or loyalty, higher levels of social responsibility for adolescents), families use it at considerable cost to eldest daughters. When eldest daughters assume responsibility for the everyday hassles associated with family caregiving, their own education and goals are viewed as secondary to the needs of the family. In Dodson and Dickert's study, teachers, parents, and the girls themselves described lost opportunities for education and extracurricular involvement, and, perhaps most disconcerting, lost hope for the eldest daughters' futures. Thus this strategy, deemed necessary for survival in families with few resources, comes with a high cost for daughters.

Enduring Vulnerabilities

Individual differences or enduring vulnerabilities in personality and emotional functioning can both contribute to everyday hassles and affect how family members adapt to them. For example, enduring vulnerabilities play an important role in determining how family members process, interpret, and react to the everyday hassles they encounter. In addition, the extent to which individuals possess, or fail to possess, relatively stable traits or qualities (e.g., type A personality traits, neuroticism, depression, self-esteem, extroversion) can render them resilient or vulnerable to the transfer of stress from everyday hassles. For example, studies have found exaggerated stress responses to daily hassles among individuals with higher levels of negative affectivity, neuroticism, and introversion (e.g., Almeida, McGonagle, Cate, Kessler, & Wethington, 2002; Bolger & Schilling, 1991; Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Marco & Suls, 1993) and lower levels of mastery and self-esteem (e.g., Almeida, McGonagle, et al., 2002; DeLongis et al., 1988; Pearlin, 1999).

Repetti and Wood's (1997a) research further underscores how psychological traits and functioning moderate the links between everyday hassles and

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family stress. Using mood data collected at the ends of study participants' workdays as well as self-report and observational data collected in the first few minutes of mother-child interaction at a work-site child-care center, Repetti and Wood found that mothers with higher levels of type A behaviors, depression, and anxiety were more likely to engage in aversive interactions with their preschoolers on days during which they had experienced either overloads or negative interpersonal interactions at work. Similarly, the results of other studies suggest additional family vulnerabilities or strengths (i.e., marital problems, child conduct problems, overly controlled parenting, marital trust, marital intimacy) that may influence the extent to which daily hassles transfer to family stress (Almeida, McGonagle, et al., 2002; Larson & Gillman, 1999; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996).

Recent research suggests that the extent to which enduring vulnerabilities moderate the links between daily hassles and family stress may differ for men and women. Almeida, McGonagle, et al. (2002) asked 166 married couples to complete daily diaries for 42 consecutive days. In each diary entry, participants responded to a short questionnaire about a variety of daily stressors, including arguments with spouses, as well as a questionnaire designed to assess psychological distress. The researchers' analyses addressed the moderating effects of psychological characteristics (i.e., neuroticism, mastery, self-esteem, and extraversion) on the link between marital arguments and psychological distress. They found that the extent to which wives felt distressed following marital arguments was exacerbated by high levels of neuroticism and attenuated by high levels of mastery, self-esteem, and extraversion. In contrast, self-esteem alone moderated the link between marital arguments and psychological distress for husbands. Almeida, McGonagle, et al. suggest that because personality has been shown to be particularly salient for coping with stressors that are highly threatening or uncontrollable, the different patterns that emerged for husbands and wives in the sample imply that wives may perceive marital arguments as more threatening than do husbands.

Intervention: Toward a New Family-Responsive Policy Agenda

Feminists argue for gender equity in daily tasks as a solution to the disproportionate burdens that mothers, wives, and daughters carry in families (e.g., Thompson, 1991), but they also warn that even with gender equity, many contemporary families would still have too many hassles to manage on their own (Coontz, 2000). In contrast, those ascribing to structural-functional

views suggest that families function best when women focus on children and home management and men focus on breadwinning (Popenoe, 1993, 1996). Still others emphasize government or employer-subsidized child- and elder-care services as a mechanism for outsourcing many of the everyday hassles associated with caregiving (Bogenschneider, 2000). We argue that contemporary American families need better opportunities both at home and in the workplace to meet family members' diverse needs, and we support Moen's (2003) conclusion that we must "re-imagine and reconfigure work hours, workweeks, and occupational career paths in ways that address the widening gaps between the time needs and goals of workers and their families at all stages of the life course on the one hand and the time available to them on the other" (p. 7). For example, some families may want to devote more time to paid work outside the home and therefore need ways to simplify aspects of their daily home lives and outsource everyday tasks to readily available, high-quality substitutes. As Valcour and Batt (2003) note, for parents who want to focus more of their time on family obligations, flexibility in the workplace is of paramount importance. They quote a mother of three children (including 4-year-old twins) who has been married to a business administrator for 15 years:

I was lucky to work out a job sharing arrangement because there was another woman in my department who did the same thing as me and was also struggling after she had her second baby. So we went to the human resource person and she was supportive but said the company doesn't have this in place. So we did the research and went to the president of the division and we went through a couple of struggles, but eventually they accepted it. I'm so glad it worked out, because it has been great for me and my family. (p. 320)

As this woman's experience illustrates, workplace policies that enable family members to care for the everyday needs of their members without jeopardizing their financial security or careers are likely to be particularly salient for families caring for young children or sick or aging family members.

Although the needs and desires of family members in diverse family forms are likely to change over the life course within families, they exist in a socio-historical context that has seen little development in family-responsive workplace policies. For example, the everyday hassles that today's families encounter are situated in a society that is still predicated on a breadwinner-husband, homemaker-wife script in which the breadwinner is assured an adequate wage for family provision and a full-time, linear rise up the occupational ladder, while the homemaker manages the everyday, nonwork aspects of her husband's life as well as the daily hassles of managing a home and family (Coontz, 2000; Moen, 2003). This outdated script contrasts starkly with the

contemporary reality that the majority of American families (e.g., single-parent and dual-earner families) experience as they work in an economy where family-wage jobs are reserved for the highly educated, secure manufacturing jobs are few, job growth is limited to low-wage service sector positions with little security or hope for advancement, and income gains are disproportionately situated within the top 20% of the U.S. income distribution (White & Rogers, 2000). In addition, existing government and workplace policies have been slow to recognize that working family members have legitimate family demands on their time that may require greater flexibility in the workplace. This point is underscored by the words of a father of two children (ages 8 and 14) who is employed as a manufacturing production supervisor and married to a part-time educational coordinator:

I wish there were more flexibility, especially in our production environment. I've worked all my life around a rotating-work schedule, but this year alone I lost three excellent employees. They had each become single parents for one reason or another, and there's no way you can get child care in off hours and weekends. It just breaks my heart. Traditionally production has been a male-oriented thing, where one partner stays home with the children and the other one works crazy schedules. . . . the world is changing and the schedule is not. (quoted in Valcour & Batt, 2003, p. 310)

The mismatch between the work environments that family members inhabit and the needs of contemporary families creates a context in which everyday hassles emerge and multiply.

Valcour and Batt (2003) suggest that employers begin by adopting a family-responsive attitude toward employees and demonstrating this attitude through company policy. Such an attitude recognizes that all employees, regardless of whether they have spouses, partners, or children at home, are members of families and experience everyday hassles and demands from personal involvements outside the workplace. Valcour and Batt note that family-responsive employers must offer employees the following:

1. A broad range of work-life programs that provide employees with control over their working time and support in meeting their family and personal needs
2. Adequate pay, benefits, and employment security
3. Work designed to provide employees with discretion and control in meeting work and life demands
4. A workplace culture, transmitted formally by organizational policies and informally by supervisors and coworkers, that values and supports the work-life integration of all employees (pp. 312-313)

Moen (2003) further argues that it is not enough for corporations to list such policies on the books. Employers must make continuous efforts to enforce and implement these policies in order to cultivate a corporate climate that is truly responsive to the needs of families. Moen also suggests that employers and government officials need to keep better records of the variations (and the reasons for them) in employees' work-hour and career-path arrangements in order to track the implications of these variations for employees and corporations. The information gained through such tracking may help to convince employers and politicians of the heterogeneity in employees' experiences both at work and at home and thus persuade them to change outdated workplace assumptions and policies based on the breadwinner-homemaker template. Finally, and perhaps most important for families' experiences of everyday hassles and stress, employers and policy makers must view employees' vulnerabilities and family circumstances as key human resource, workforce, and labor issues. For family members struggling in uncertain economic times and working in low-wage jobs with inflexible work schedules, everyday hassles such as minor car accidents, sick children, friends in need of assistance, and parent-teacher conferences scheduled during work hours can add strains that they may find hard to manage. Policies that focus on the risks and vulnerabilities of workers in addition to being responsive to workers' family lives are likely to attenuate the transfer of stress from everyday hassles to family life.

Suggested Internet Resources

Cornell Careers Institute (sponsored by the Sloan Foundation): <http://www.blcc.cornell.edu/cgi/default.html>

Council on Contemporary Families: <http://www.contemporaryfamilies.org/media/about.php>

Families and Work Institute: <http://www.familiesandwork.org>

Institute for Women's Policy Research: <http://www.iwpr.org>

Michigan State University Extension Services, Furthering Families: <http://www.fcs.msue.msu.edu/ff/familystress.html>

National Partnership for Women and Families: <http://www.nationalpartnership.org>

Office of Personnel Management (U.S. government's human resources agency), information on the Family and Medical Leave Act: <http://www.opm.gov/ocaf/leave/html/fmlafac2.asp>

Sloan Work and Family Research Network (at Boston College): http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/wfnetwork

University of Illinois Extension, Family Works: <http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/familyworks/stress-00.html>

Work and Family Connection: <http://www.workfamily.com>

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