
FAMILY RESILIENCE FACTORS IN REMARRIED FAMILIES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND BELGIUM

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to identify and compare resilience factors in Belgian and South African remarried families. A parent and a child from 38 South African and 36 Belgian remarried families participated in the study, which was conducted within relatively the same time frame in the two countries. Participants completed a biographical questionnaire and six self-report questionnaires. The results show differences and similarities in terms of the identified resilience factors between the two populations. The present study contributes to the growing body of literature related to family resilience, specifically within the context of remarriage – a relatively new terrain within the field of family resilience research. Suggestions are made for the strengthening of these families.

Key words:

family resilience, factors, remarried, parent, child, strengthening

INTRODUCTION

Divorce and remarriage are no longer a foreign occurrence in 21st-century South Africa. According to the Marriages and Divorces Statistical Release Report (P0307) of the South African Statistical Bureau (Statistics South Africa, 2011), states that the number of registered marriages fluctuated between 2002 and 2008, after which there was a consistent decline towards 2011. During the period 2002 to 2011, the highest number of marriages was recorded in 2008 (186 522) and the lowest number in 2011 (167 264). In 2011, 7 812 (4.7%) males and 5 385 (3.2%) of the females that got married, did it for a second time. Statistics from the United States of America (USA) show that 75% of men and 65% of women will remarry within four years of divorce (Greene, Anderson, Forgatch, DeGarmo, and Hetherington, 2012). According to Pasley and Garneau (2012), about 60% of remarriages in the USA end in divorce, especially when remarried couples have step-children. Although specific statistics on remarriage in South Africa are lacking, they may be nearing these American ones.

There is a gap in the literature on the formation and quality of newly emerging intimate relationships. This information would assist in providing greater understanding of the impact of divorce and insight into the factors that influence success in any eventual remarriages (Greene et al., 2012). Shek (2008) also highlights the paucity of research related to remarried families in contrast to that on non-intact (divorced) families, and advises that more research could help parents to understand the potential changes in the family processes after remarriage. It is important for researchers to discover the most salient factors associated with improved adaptation in order to assist family practitioners to develop intervention strategies aimed at developing those qualities (Van Eeden-Moorefield and Pasley, 2013). Consequently, the research question for this study is: Are there universal family resilience factors in remarried families that facilitate better family adaptation?

Research suggests that it is not the structure of remarried families that is responsible for the increased likelihood of divorce, but rather family processes and the quality of the relationships between individuals in the family that determine successful adaptation (Pasley and Garneau, 2012). The dynamic processes that foster adaptation within the context of significant adversity, such as divorce and remarriage, are incorporated into the concept of family resilience (Luthar, Cichetti, and Becker, 2000). Walsh (2012:399) defines resilience as “the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges”. Various protective factors, on a personal, familial and community level, may serve as buffers against risk factors that increase the vulnerability of a family.

The traditional clinical perspective of families has been pathologically inclined, examining deficits in family functioning and ignoring potential strengths and resiliencies that can be discovered or fostered (Walsh, 1996). The salutogenic orientation proposed by Antonovsky replaced the more pathological medical model and emphasises the capacity of families to overcome difficult circumstances by using inherent and/or acquired strengths and resources (Hawley, 2000).

Various theoretical models have been developed to explain the development of and factors and processes involved in family resilience. The most recent model is the Resiliency Model of Family Stress, Adjustment and Adaptation (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996), which was used as the theoretical foundation for this study. According to this model, stressors and strains affect four domains of family life and functioning, namely (1) interpersonal relations, (2) structure and functioning, (3) development, well-being and spirituality, and (4) community relationships and nature (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). In this model, the focus is on two processes that families engage in in the face of adversity or challenges such as divorce and remarriage, namely *adjustment* and *adaptation*.

The family's level of adjustment is determined by several important interacting components (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996), namely (1) the stressor and its severity, (2) the family vulnerability, (3) the family's established patterns of functioning, (4) the family resistance resources, (5) family appraisal of the stressor, (6) family coping and problem solving, and (7) the family response. The interaction of these components may result in the more positive *bonadjustment*, when the family moves through the stressful situation with relative ease. If, however, the stressor forces the family to make more substantive changes to their established patterns of functioning, this is referred to as *maladjustment* (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). This state of maladjustment results in a *family crisis*, and new patterns of interaction and functioning are needed. When a crisis situation has resulted in maladjustment, old patterns of functioning are eliminated, modified and restored, and then newly instituted within the family to assist in restoring harmony and balance. These patterns may encompass communication, rules, boundaries and so forth (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). The intra-family and family-to-community processes of support that families engage in are essential to creating, shaping and legitimising newly established patterns of functioning.

Remarriage is one example of such a crisis situation in which a previous family structure, including roles, boundaries, rules and established patterns of functioning, needs to be adjusted. Unrealistic fantasies (such as the myth of

instant adjustment) also place greater expectations and, therefore, strain on remarried families (Van Eeden-Moorefield and Pasley, 2013). The various roles in reconstituted marriages lack institutionalised guidelines or support, as well as the clarity that often accompanies first-time marriages (Pasley and Garneau, 2012).

In a qualitative study on remarried families, Felker, Fromme, Arnaut and Stoll (2002) found that an important aspect in remarried families was 'joining', or establishing unity and cohesiveness between the stepparent and the family. Halford, Nicholson and Sanders (2007) found less positive communication, as well as less negative communication and a greater extent of withdrawal, in second marriages in comparison to first marriages. These findings possibly reflect a tendency to avoid the discussion of sensitive topics within stepfamilies (Sweeper and Halford, 2006). In another longitudinal study of stepfamilies, Beaudry, Boisvert, Simard, Parent and Blais (2004) found that good spouse communication skills contribute towards explaining long-term marital satisfaction for both men and women.

The authors argue that there should be certain universal family processes and factors related to family resilience, despite differences in the cultural heritage or ethnicity of families. Family members' cultural heritage and ethnic background can be a personal resource during the adaptation process (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). Important cultural differences may, however, be present between individuals and families in different countries or populations. People's relationships, behaviour and life course decisions are influenced by cultural and religious traditions (Mortelmans, Snoeckx, and Dronkers, 2009).

Despite apparent cultural differences, many similarities may exist between families in different populations. One way to examine similarities and differences between families of different populations is by means of a comparative study. Since the first author has a research agreement with a colleague in Belgium, it was decided to involve remarried families from South Africa and Belgium in this study. Consequently, the aim of this study was to identify family resilience factors in South African and Belgian remarried families and to compare the findings.

METHOD

A cross-sectional survey research design was used to compare South African and Belgian remarried families with regard to factors that are associated with family resilience. Self-report questionnaires were completed by a remarried parent and a child as representatives of the family. The surveys

were completed more or less within the same time frame in the different countries. Families were identified on the basis of the crisis (remarriage) and the developmental phase of the family (having an adolescent child).

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify participating families according to the following inclusion criteria: (1) remarried within the previous one to five years; (2) at least one spouse's second (or subsequent) marriage, (3) at least one school-going child, and (4) no significant changes in the parents' occupation or living environment. Thirty-eight remarried families living in the Western Cape province of South Africa, and 36 remarried families from the Flemish provinces of Belgium, were included in the study. In South Africa, Stellenbosch University in the Western Cape Province served as the resource pool from which fourth-year postgraduate psychology students doing the Family Psychology module were involved in recruiting families. Each student had to identify and approach a remarried family that met the criteria for participation in the study. In Belgium, students who attended the Principles of Systems and Communication Therapy module at the Catholic University of Louvain were asked to identify families and approach them for participation in the project.

In South Africa, the majority ($n = 34$; 89%) of the participating parents were female and four (11%) were male. In Belgium, the majority of the participants ($n = 28$; 78%) were also female, while eight males (22%) took part in the study. The mean age of the South African participating parents was 42.6 years ($SD = 5.3$), while the mean age of the participating parents in Belgium was 43.1 years ($SD = 5.2$). In South Africa, 12 girls (57%) and nine (43%) boys participated in the study, and they had a mean age of 16.4 years ($SD = 4.7$). In Belgium, 36 children participated in the study – 20 girls (56%) and 16 boys (44%) with a mean age of 17.1 years ($SD = 3.6$). In Belgium the number of children per family ranged from one to eight, and most of the families had between one and five children, with a mean of 3.1 ($SD = 1.60$). In South Africa there were an average of 2.8 children per family ($SD = 1.5$).

In the South African sample, almost three-quarters of the males ($n = 28$; 74%) and more than half of the females ($n = 23$, 61%) were in their second marriage. A smaller percentage of the males (13%, $n = 5$) were in their third marriage, as were 8% ($n = 2$) of the females. In the Belgian sample, 23 parents were in their second marriage (64%), while 12 parents (33%) were in their third marriage. The mean length of current marriage for the South African couples was 3.4 years ($SD = 2.7$), and for the Belgian couples it was 3.3 years ($SD = 1.7$). The majority of the participants in the South African

sample had a tertiary qualification ($n = 28$; 74%), comparable with the Belgian sample, of whom 26 (72%) had obtained a tertiary qualification.

In order to compare the financial positions of the participating families in the two countries, the gross domestic product (GDP) was converted to international dollars using purchasing power parity (PPP) rates (World Development Indicators, 2010). The gross domestic product per capita (PPP) for South Africa was \$10 243 (World Development Indicators, 2010). The majority of the South African sample (84%) in the present study was above the 'average' annual income category. In Belgium, the gross domestic product per capita (PPP) was \$35 421 (World Development Indicators, 2010). The majority of the Belgian families (83%) in the present study were average in comparison with the general population in Belgium. An above 'average' South African in the present study earned R101 000, which equaled about €10 531.80 (World Development Indicators, 2010) and was comparable to a Belgian earning €36 440.04 ($€10 531.80 \times 3.46$). The two samples in this study are thus comparable in terms of their income levels.

Measuring instruments

A **biographical questionnaire** was compiled to gather information regarding the age and gender of the parents and children, the number of children per family, the family's socio-economic status and how long the couple had been married.

The Family Attachment and Changeability Index 8 (FACI-8) was used to measure family adaptation (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). According to the Resiliency Model, the outcome of all the processes shows the level of adaptation of the family. This 16-item scale consists of five-point Likert-type questions on how often each item occurs currently in his/her family. The scale consists of two subscales, namely (1) attachment, which determines the attachment of family members to each other, and (2) changeability, which assesses the flexibility of the family members' relationships with each other (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). The internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the attachment scale is .75 and for the changeability scale it is .78 (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

The Family Time and Routine Index (FTRI) was used to assess the value of activities and routines that families use and maintain (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). This scale consists of 30 items divided into eight subscales, namely (1) parent-child togetherness, (2) couple togetherness, (3) child routines, (4) meals together, (5) family time together, (6) family chores

routines, (7) relatives' connection routines, and (8) family management routines (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). A four-point Likert rating scale was used to assess the degree to which each statement accurately described the respondents' current family situation. The FTRI has an internal reliability of .88 (Cronbach's alpha) and the validity coefficients range from .19 to .34 with the criterion of family functioning (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

The Family Hardiness Index (FHI) was used to measure 'family hardiness'. Family hardiness refers to the internal strength in a family, a sense of control over the outcome of life's challenges, and having an active orientation in adjusting to and managing stressful situations (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). The index consists of 20 items and uses a five-point Likert rating scale to assess the degree to which each statement describes the family situation as it currently is. The scale consists of three subscales, namely commitment, challenge and control (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). Commitment refers to the family's internal strength, ability to depend on each other and ability to work together as a family unit. The challenge subscale measures the family's orientation to a stressor as an opportunity to grow, to learn and to develop new skills. The control subscale measures the family's sense of being in control of the outcomes of experiences and challenges in life, rather than being shaped by outside events and circumstances (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). The FHI has an internal reliability of .82 (Cronbach's alpha), and the criterion indices of family flexibility, satisfaction, and time and routine have validity coefficients ranging from .20 to .23 (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

The Relative and Friend Support Index (RFS) measures the degree to which the family manages stressors and strains by using support from friends and family (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). The scale consists of eight items with a five-point Likert rating scale. The RFS scale has an internal reliability of .82 (Cronbach's alpha) and a validity coefficient of .99 (correlation with the original Family Crises Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales) (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

The Social Support Index (SSI) measures the importance the family attaches to finding support in the community during a crisis, and the family's integration into the community (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). This instrument consists of 17 items rated on a five-point Likert scale and was developed by McCubbin, Patterson and Glynn (1996). The internal reliability of the SSI measures .82 (Cronbach's alpha), and the validity coefficient (correlation with the criterion of family well-being) was .40 (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

The Family Crises Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) identifies the problem-solving and behavioural strategies that are used by families in crisis situations (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). F-COPES consist of 30 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. The scale consists of five subscales, divided into two systemic levels of interaction, namely, internal coping strategies (managing difficulties within the nuclear family unit) and external coping strategies (active efforts on behalf of the family to obtain external support). The five subscales are: (1) acquiring social support, (2) reframing the problem to make it more manageable, (3) seeking spiritual support, (4) mobilising social support, and (5) passive appraisal. The construct validity of the scale has been established and the five subscales demonstrate internal consistency, ranging from .63 (passive appraisal) to .83 (acquiring social support) (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

The Family Problem Solving Communication (FPSC) scale was used to measure family communication, divided into two dominant patterns (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). The two dominant patterns of communication are (1) incendiary communication, which tends to exacerbate a stressful situation, and (2) affirming communication, which conveys support and care and exerts a calming influence. Participants have to complete this 10-item questionnaire using a four-point Likert rating scale. The internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the FPSC is .89 (incendiary communication .78 and affirming communication .86). The validity coefficient has been validated in several large-scale studies (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

Procedure

The procedure in both countries was that, after a remarried family had been identified, an initial appointment was set up with the representatives of the family. After the purpose of the study had been explained to the parent and the child, they were given the opportunity to refuse or accept participation. Confidentiality of information and the anonymity of the participants were assured and informed consent was obtained. If necessary, a follow-up appointment was scheduled. A parent and a child from each family (not for all South African families) then completed the questionnaires in the presence of the student, who returned the questionnaires for data capturing and analysis.

RESULTS

Pearson's correlations were calculated between the measured independent variables (potential family resilience factors) and the dependent variable (family adaptation, as measured by the FACI-8) – an indication of how well

the families adapted after remarriage. Both the parents and the children, in Belgium and South Africa, evaluated their families independently. Multiple regression analyses were then performed on all four sets of data to determine which family resilience factors predicted family adaptation best. The results show that there are differences and similarities in terms of the identified family resilience factors between the two samples. The calculated Pearson's correlation coefficients between the independent variables (family resilience factors) and the dependent variable (family adaptation for the parents and children from both countries) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson's correlations between family adaptation (FACI-8 scores) and potential family resilience factors for parents and children from both countries

Independent variable	SA parents (n = 38)		Belgian parents (n = 36)		SA children (n = 21)		Belgian children (n = 36)	
	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
FTRI	.49	.00**	.45	.01*	.71	.00**	.27	.12
FHI	.69	.00**	.37	.03*	.77	.00**	.62	.00**
RFS	-.12	.48	.15	.39	.44	.03*	.70	.69
SSI	.33	.05*	.18	.30	.28	.18	.64	.00**
FC SOC	-.11	.50	.15	.39	.63	.00**	.36	.03*
FC RE	-.01	.97	.33	.05*	.48	.02*	.36	.03*
FC SPIR	.24	.14	.29	.09	.21	.33	.13	.46
FC MO	.09	.61	.08	.63	.46	.02*	.15	.39
FC PA	-.07	.69	-.14	.41	.27	.19	.19	.28
FPSC IN	-.49	.00**			-.58	.00**		
FPSC AF	.53	.00**			.72	.00**		
FPSC	.53	.00**	0.73	.00**	0.71	.00**	.67	.00**

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

Note. The following abbreviations were used to indicate the independent variables:

FTRI = family time and routines; FHI = family hardiness; RFS = relative and friend support; SSI = social support; FC SOC = acquiring social support; FC RE = reframing a crisis event; FC SPIR = spirituality; FC MO = mobilisation of resources; FC PA = passive appraisal of a crisis event; FPSC = family problem solving communication; FPSC IN = incendiary communication; FPSC AF = affirming communication.

From Table 1 it can be seen that there were three similar variables that have a significant positive correlation ($p \leq 0.05$) with family adaptation for the parent groups from both countries, namely (1) activities and routines that help families spend time together, (2) family hardiness, and (3) affirming communication, which conveys support and care. A few differences between the groups of parents also emerged. South African parents reported that finding support in the community and the family's integration into the community (social support) were associated with family adaptation, while this correlation was not significant according to the Belgian parents. As a coping style, reframing a crisis had a significant positive correlation with family adaptation for the Belgian parents, but not for the South African parents.

For the children in both countries, significant positive correlations were found between family adaptation and four similar variables, namely (1) affirming communication, (2) family hardiness, (3) acquiring social support, and (4) reframing a crisis event. Differences that emerged between the results of the two groups of children included (1) the mobilisation of resources, (2) the degree to which the family used support from family and friends, and (3) family activities and routines that encourage the family to spend time together, all of which were significantly positively correlated with family adaptation according to the South African children, but not according to the Belgian children. Support from external sources within the community, and the family's integration into the community, had a significant positive correlation with family adaptation according to the Belgian children, but not according to the South African children.

Lastly, from Table 1 it can be surmised that the two independent variables, seeking spiritual support and passive appraisal (not reacting to a crisis), were not significantly correlated with family adaptation according to any of the four groups. All four groups shared two similar family resilience factors, namely family hardiness and affirming communication during problem solving.

In order to identify which combination of factors best predicted family adaptation (FACI-8 scores) after remarriage, best-subset regression analyses were done independently for each of the four groups. The combination of family resilience variables that best predicted variations in family adaptation are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Combination of family resilience variables that best predicted family adaptation (FACI-8) according to the South African and Belgian parents and children

Variable	SA parents		Belgian parents		SA children		Belgian children	
	Beta	p	Beta	p	Beta	p	Beta	p
FPSC AF	.32	.03			.57	.01		
FPSC			.78	.00			.38	.01
FHI	.59	.00					.35	.02
FC PA			-.27	.02				
FC RE	-.38	.00			.30	.11		
FC MO	-.34	.01						
FC SOC					.32	.03		
FTRI					.38	.02		

Note. The following abbreviations are used to indicate the independent variables:

FTRI = family time and routines; FHI = family hardiness; RFS = relative and friend support; SSI = social support; FC SOC = acquiring social support; FC RE = reframing a crisis event; FC SPIR = spirituality; FC MO = mobilisation of resources; FC PA = passive appraisal of a crisis event; FPSC = family problem solving communication; FPSC AF = affirming communication.

From Table 2 it is apparent that, according to the South African parents, the following combinations of variables were the best predictors of family adaptation following remarriage: (1) communication that is affirming for family members during problem solving, (2) a sense of commitment, active orientation towards problem solving and control over outcomes, (3) reframing stressful events, and (4) mobilising social support. These variables explained 68% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.68$) in the FACI-8 scores. Reformulating a stressor and mobilising social support were not significantly correlated with family adaptation when using Pearson's product-moment correlations (see Table 1).

According to the Belgian parents, the identified factors explained 61% of the variance in the FACI-8 scores ($R^2 = 0.61$). The variables that were found to be the best predictors of family adaptation were: (1) family communication that is affirming and not incendiary during problem solving, and (2) passive appraisal of a crisis situation (FC PA).

According to the South African children, the following variables were the best predictors of family adaptation: (1) communication that is affirming for family members, (2) reframing stressful life events, (3) acquiring social

support, and (4) activities and routines that encourage the family to spend time together (FTRI). These variables explained 74% of the variance in the FACI-8 scores ($R^2 = 0.74$) and were also identified with the Pearson correlations (see Table 1).

For the Belgian children, the identified factors explained 63% ($R^2 = 0.63$) of the variance in the FACI-8 scores. The identified variables were: (1) family communication that is supportive and affirming, and (2) a sense of commitment, an active orientation towards problem solving and control over outcomes. These variables were also identified with the Pearson correlations (see Table 1).

From Table 2 it is evident that affirming family communication was identified in the regression analyses of all four groups. There were no other similar factors when comparing the South African and Belgian parents, or the South African and Belgian children. Reframing a crisis situation was, however, important for both the South African parents and children.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to identify and compare family resilience factors in remarried families in South Africa and Belgium. The results show that there were differences and similarities in terms of the identified family resilience factors between the two samples.

One family resilience factor that was significantly correlated with family adaptation for all four groups was affirming communication during problem solving (see Table 1). This suggests that even children regard the use of affirming instead of incendiary communication when resolving conflicts as being of high importance. Although previous studies have reported higher levels of negative communication in stepfamilies than in first-marriage couples, this was not confirmed in the study by Halford et al. (2007). Sweeper and Halford (2006) hypothesised that this may reflect a tendency to avoid the discussion of sensitive topics within stepfamilies, possibly related to the experience of destructive conflict in the first marriage preceding the divorce. The results of the present study confirm that, if a family is successful in communicating in an affirming and supportive way that expresses warmth and care for family members when engaged in problem solving, this type of communication can serve as a resilience factor promoting better adaptation in the remarried family. Affirming communication calms tension and thus facilitates greater adaptation, being more than the mere absence of incendiary communication.

Family hardiness was also identified as a family resilience factor by the parents and children from both countries (see Table 1). Hardiness refers to a sense of control over the outcome of events, an active orientation to resolving problems and a view of stressors as challenges to be overcome (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). Professionals need to be aware of this construct and find ways to enhance this factor within families that encounter a crisis situation. This will ensure greater family resilience and improved family adaptation.

Although the Belgian parents indicated passive appraisal of a crisis as a significant predictor of improved family adaptation following remarriage (see Table 2), it is not confirmed by the correlation analysis (see Table 1). However, Greeff and Van der Merwe (2004) found the passive appraisal of crises in post-divorce South African families to be a significant family resilience quality associated with family adaptation. Passive appraisal may be regarded as a defective coping response, as families do nothing when they encounter a crisis. However, it may also indicate the presence of internal family strength, as the family still managed to overcome and transcend the crisis despite no overt, externally observable strategies and behaviours (Greeff and Van der Merwe, 2004).

The reframing or reformulation of a crisis situation was identified as a family resilience factor by both groups of children, although not by the Belgian or South African parents. It is interesting that this factor was not positively correlated with family adaptation according to the two parent groups, as found in a study regarding family adaptation after divorce (Greeff and Van der Merwe, 2004). Perhaps this could be explained by the hypothesis that divorce may be experienced as a more 'negative' crisis for parents, and thus in greater need of 'positive' reframing in order to facilitate a positive adjustment post-divorce. Remarriage, in contrast, would be a more 'positive' crisis experience for parents, thus not requiring reframing to such a great extent. For children, however, both divorce and remarriage may be experienced as quite 'negative' crises, as they have to adjust to a new stepparent, deal with divided loyalties regarding their biological parent, and build on a relationship with their new stepparent (Van Eeden-Moorefield and Pasley, 2013).

Activities and routines done together as a family were also found to be a family resilience factor according to both groups of parents and the South African children. This implies that spending time together within the various sub-systems of a family – whether engaged in a pleasurable or a more functional, routine activity – fosters the internal strengths or resources within

a family and facilitates better adaptation in the remarried family. The present study thus confirms the results reported by Felker et al. (2002) that establishing new rituals is an important contributor to cohesiveness for stepparents, and suggests that even children may benefit from it. This is an important finding, especially within the lower-income South African context, as it is something that does not necessarily require additional money or external resources to accomplish. Efforts should be made to encourage greater awareness of the importance of (1) parent-child togetherness, (2) couple togetherness, (3) child routines, (4) meals together, (5) family time together, (6) family chores routines, (7) relatives' connection routines and (8) family management routines in order to develop this internal resource (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996).

In addition to these internal family resilience factors, the South African parents and the Belgian children indicated that external factors, namely finding support from the community and the family's integration into the community (as measured by the Social Support Index), facilitated family adaptation following remarriage. Social support can serve as both a protective factor and a reparatory factor when facing a crisis situation (McCubbin and McCubbin, 1996). The results of the present study are in accordance with those of the study by Greeff and Van der Merwe (2004), in which divorced South African parents, but not their children, indicated that social support from the community was an important family resilience factor. In the present study, however, both groups of children indicated that actively acquiring social support from neighbours, family, friends and extended relatives was an important problem-solving and behavioural strategy that facilitated adaptation in the remarried family, while this was not found for the parent groups. Greeff and Van der Merwe (2004) also suggested that it should be investigated why social support from the community facilitates family adaptation (according to the parents), but that the same effect is not obtained from efforts at acquiring social support (as measured by the F-COPES SOC). Perhaps, for the parents, the actual esteem and emotional or social support found in the community was of greater adaptive value than the orientation towards, or the process of acquiring, the support.

The South African children also indicated that, as a coping style, mobilising the available family resources contributed towards better family adaptation after remarriage. It was expected that the Belgian children would also view the mobilisation of resources as an important family resilience factor, although this hypothesis was not confirmed. Utilising relative and friend support (measured with the RFS) was positively correlated with family adaptation only according to the South African children, and not for any of

the other three groups. Again, this was in accordance with the quantitative results found in the study of divorced families done by Greeff and Van der Merwe (2004).

Limitations of this study are the small sample sizes, as well as the representativeness of the two study populations. The sampling procedure possibly biased the sample in both South Africa and Belgium to reflect households earning mostly an average to above-average income. This favourable income level may have contributed towards the availability of resources, especially in terms of financial and material resources, in contrast to families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (Luthar et al., 2000). Cultural and religious factors are aspects that were not accounted for in the present study.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this study was to identify and compare two samples of remarried families with regard to family resilience factors that facilitate adaptation after remarriage. The following resilience factors were identified: (1) activities and routines that help family members spend time together; (2) family hardiness – referring to a family’s commitment to work together, their sense of control over outcomes in life and their perception of a crisis as a challenge to be faced actively and as providing an opportunity for growth; (3) affirming communication during problem solving; (4) finding support in the community and the family’s integration into the community; (5) acquiring social support; (6) reframing a crisis event; (7) utilising relative and friend support; (8) mobilising resources; and (9) passive appraisal of a crisis situation.

Therapists and professionals can utilise these findings in their work with remarried families, and thus practice will be informed by research (Shek, 2008), helping to ensure that more effective services are rendered. For example, communication during problem solving could be an important general focus of family interventions. In such interventions, family members can learn the necessary skills to successfully approach and negotiate the many challenges encountered by remarried families. To further strengthen remarried families, additional identified themes (e.g. family hardiness) may be selected and creatively developed and implemented by the professional.

Although these findings were for families from two countries in Europe and Africa, they emphasise that there are similarities among groups of families regarding the importance of fundamental family variables, while sensitising for group-specific differences (countries and generations). This aspect

enhances the contribution and value of the findings even more, irrespective of where in the world one works with and thinks about family life.

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