Mothers-in-Law and Daughters-in-Law: The Effects of Proximity on Conflict and Stress*

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Relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are often depicted as conflictual despite a paucity of research on their interaction. A 1985 exploratory study of 44 mothers-in-law and 55 daughters-in-law in two-generation farm or ranch families found that differences in goals and values and lack of communication skills were frequent problems. Contrary to expectations, however, living in close proximity did not increase the stress levels of either group of women. These and other findings should be useful to extension agents and other applied professionals as they plan programs for and counsel these individuals. In addition, these data provide a base for future research.

Stories about problematic mothers-in-law abound, yet little research attention has been focused on their interaction with other family members. This is surprising given the prevalence of in-laws, the recent interest in work and the family, the fact that over 90% of American businesses are family owned (Rosenblatt, 1985), and that most will be passed on to adult children (Bratton & Berkowitz, 1976; Hedlund & Berkowitz, 1979).

A smoothly running family contributes to a successful family business (Prokesch, 1986), and mothers and daughters-in-law hold critical positions. For example, the daughter-in-law's feelings of acceptance, her perception of how well she, her husband, and her children are treated, their future economic security, and her enjoyment of farm/ranch life may contribute not only to the smooth running of the enterprise, but to the eventual success of an intergenerational transfer. Her unhappiness can disrupt the family and subsequently the enterprise. For example, she could convince her husband to move off the farm which would disrupt the transfer process; or, she may divorce him. A divorce can seriously disrupt or even bankrupt the enterprise depending upon the daughter-in-law's extent of ownership.

Very little research has focused on conflict between mothers and their daughters-in-law and the stress such unresolved conflict may produce in family businesses. This research reports on the mother/daughter-in-law dyad in two-generation farm and ranch families. It will attempt to identify sources of conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and strategies used to cope with this conflict. In addition, the article will explore whether or not living in close proximity increases their conflict and stress. This information should be especially useful for counselors who work with members of farm and ranch families and for extension and other applied professionals who base programs and projects on research.

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature revealed more concern than data about potential mother/daughter-in-law conflict in intergenerational situations arising from living in close proximity, shared labor, and constant interaction between families. Thus, the following review draws heavily upon the few relevant research studies found.

In-Law Relationships

On the basis of her national study of 5,020 American women and men, Duvall (1954) developed a model to explain kin conflict. She suggests that every married couple belongs to three different families. The first affiliation is with the new family that the couple begins together (i.e., their family of procreation). At the same time the couple also belong to both his and her families of origin. Unless a beginning family can form a cohesive family unit that is stronger than the one which ties either of the couple to his or her family of origin, the new family will feel threatened. In order to establish a strong family unit, a newly married couple must realign its loyalties such that their family comes before either his or hers.

According to Duvall (1954), the young couple requires autonomy in order to develop as an independent family unit. Any conflicting force emanating from either parental home that imperils the independence of the new pair may be construed as in-law difficulty. Duvall's model suggests that the greater the autonomy of the married adult children and the fewer the conflicts between the parents and the adult children, the more cohesive the marriage of the adult children.

According to Kieren, Henton, and Marotz's (1975) review of the literature, in most cases of marital conflict both husbands and wives believe that the husband's kin are more frequently the source of the conflict than are the wife's kin. In addition, more women than men report difficulty, and more female in-laws are found troublesome than male in-laws both among distant and close relatives (Duvall, 1954; Kirkpatrick, 1963; Komarovsky, 1964; Leslie, 1976).

In-laws, according to Duvall's (1954) respondents, were meddlesome, interfering, and dominating. Adult children criticized members of the parental generation more often than they were criticized by the older generation. Parents-in-law were often viewed as old-fashioned, resistant to change, uncongenial, and maintaining different traditions. Perhaps adult children were more critical as they were struggling for autonomy. Parents-in-law did not complain that their children were too modern; rather, they

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wished that their adult children would accept them as they were without negatively labeling them.

In sum, according to Duvall's (1954) model, good in-law relationships are problematic for young couples until they have developed their own autonomy. This may be more difficult to do if the young couple live in close proximity to their in-laws. Beavers (1977) found that family members with different values or needs experienced frequent conflict. Thus, establishing autonomy may be especially hard for young couples who work with and live near the older generation as is often the case for adult children of farmers and ranchers. The new wife will probably have more in-law problems because the more meddlesome in-laws are likely to be the husband's and because she is probably living closer to them than she is to her own parents and other relatives. The young couple will be struggling to obtain autonomy by psychologically distancing themselves equally from both her and his families when it may not be possible to change the physical parameters of their daily interaction with his parents with whom they work and perhaps live.

Mother-In-law/Daughter-In-Law Relationships

In-law studies in Western societies consistently indicate that mother-in-law is the most difficult in-law (Duvall, 1954; Schlien, 1985). The intimate bond that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law share with the son/husband is often the only tie between them. There may even be competition between them for his affection if the mother senses she is losing her special place to the daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law, who probably is not as experienced as her mother-in-law in cooking and cleaning, strives to please her husband (see, for example, the review in Kieren, Henton, & Marotz, 1975, pp. 204-217).

Fischer's (1983) case study of 33 daughters, 30 mothers, and 24 mothers-in-law indicates that the daughter-in-law tends to turn to her own mother for help after the birth of a child rather than to her mother-in-law, who may see herself as the primary maternal figure in her daughter-in-law's life. The daughter-in-law's discrimination in favor of her own mother and the orientation of both generations around the child brings more strain to the relationship of the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Living near one's mother-in-law when one has children is associated with greater conflict than when one does not have children (Fischer, 1983).

Like Duvall, Fischer also found that daughters-in-law were irritated more often by the behavior of their mothers-in-law than were mothers-in-law with the behavior of their daughters-in-law. The greatest source of irritation for daughters-in-law was a result of differences over issues involving children. Complaints of mothers-in-law about the mothering practices of their daughters-in-law were often viewed by the daughter-in-law as attempts to subvert her child management practices (Fischer, 1983).

Purpose of Study

Two-generation farm and ranch families share a common economic unit, and in addition to working together to effectively manage that unit, they often live in close proximity. Duvall's (1954) in-law theory suggests that, at least until a new husband and wife have established a cohesive family unit of their own which is stronger than the ties to either's family of origin, a mother-in-law's interference will negatively affect her daughter-in-law's marital satisfaction and stress level.

Since there has been so little empirical research on mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, the research reported below is exploratory. Because this relationship has been stereotyped as one of conflict, descriptive data about typical problems in the relationship between these two generations of women and how they attempted to resolve them were collected to provide background data for this and future research. The correlation between residential proximity and stress levels of the two groups of women was tested. In addition, the relationship between daughter-in-law's stress and marital satisfaction and her perception of her mother-in-law's interference in her and her husband's lives was explored. Since mother/daughter-in-law interaction has been portrayed as rife with potential conflict, the results of this study should be important for counselors and mental health personnel who work with members of farm and ranch families as well as for extension agents, the clergy, and other professionals who present stress management workshops.

Methodology

The sample was obtained with the help of the Montana Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) which provided a 10% random sample of Montana farms and ranches over 200 acres that their records indicated were being operated by more than one household. ASCS records did not distinguish between lineal and collateral kin. Therefore, operations of brothers and sisters were included in the list as well as those of parents and children. Two hundred acres was chosen as the minimum size in order to eliminate hobby ranches. Certain intensive units such as feed lots and poultry operations may have been eliminated by this decision.

Each of the 400 multifamily operations identified by the ASCS was sent a letter explaining the study and requesting the names and addresses of the mother and father in the older generation and at least one married son and his wife who worked on the operation. Of the 253 operations (63% of original sample) who responded after two follow-ups, only 7 or 2.8% were unwilling to participate. One hundred seventy-eight or 70.3% of the operations were not eligible, however, because they were not lineal kin or did not meet the criterion of an intact older generation with at least one married son.

Pretested questionnaires were sent to each adult member of the 68 intact, two-generation families (i.e., father, mother, married son, and daughter-in-law engaged in a farm or ranch operation). After two follow-up letters, 175 people responded. Of these, 44 were mothers-in-law and 55 were daughters-in-law. Although the sample is small, it represents almost all of the eligible daughters-in-law and most of the eligible mothers-in-law identified by the sampling procedure as living in two-generation family farm operations.

Sample

The mean age of the 44 mothers-in-law was 60.1 years and of the 55 daughters-in-law 31.6 years. The mothers-in-law had been married an average of 35.8 years and averaged 4.1 children. The daughters-in-law had been married an average of 10.5 years and averaged 2.5 children.

Fifty-nine percent of the mothers-in-law had a high school education or less compared with 34% of the daughters-in-law. While approximately the same proportion (29%) had some college, more daughters-in-law had a college degree (20.8% vs. 2.6%). Before tax income for both groups of women ranged from below $5,000 to over $80,000 in 1985. The mean income reported by mothers-in-law was in the $30,000 to $39,000 range; by daughters-in-law in the $20,000 to $29,000 range.

Measures

Conflict and conflict resolution strategies were obtained by the following open-ended questions: "When we have problems getting along together, it is usually because . . . ; What strategies have you used that were effective when you were having problems getting along with your daughter-in-law (mother-in-law)?" Respondents frequently listed two or three problems and strategies. All responses were categorized and coded.

Proximity was measured with a forced choice question asking mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law how close they lived to each other in miles and fractions of miles. Differences in child-rearing practices between the generations were measured by a question asking about the occurrence of such differences in the last 2 years. The daughter-in-law's perception of her mother-in-law's interference in her family was measured by seven forced-choice questions. These questions were about jealousy, resentment, bossiness, husband's loyalty to his mother rather than to his wife, whether the mother-in-law tried to run her daughter-in-law's life, if she respected the daughter-in-law's privacy, and if the mother-in-law saw things differently from the daughter-in-law. The forced choice answers were never, sometimes, often, and all of the time.

Stress, defined as tension resulting from lack of adequate accommodation to occupational and general stressors, was ascertained by two measures. The Farm Family Stress Scale (FFSS) (Weigel, Blundall, & Weigel, 1984; Weigel, Weigel, & Blundall, 1987) was used to measure stress between the two generations. The FFSS measures stressors emanating from situations involving several families farming together. Respondents are asked how often 22 situations occurred in the last 2 years and how disturbing each situation was. The authors report the FFSS reliability as .90 for the older generation and .91 for the younger generation using Chronbach's alpha. Validity has not been established.

A factor analysis of the Family Farm Stress Scale yielded five underlying dimensions or factors (Marotz-Baden, 1986). They are Lack of Equal Status, reflecting a lack of equality between the two generations and among family members generally; Family vs. Farm, indicating that the demands of the farm are in conflict with time demands of the family; Financial Concerns; Independence/Dependence, which taps a desire for more independence; and Extended Family Conflict, reflecting concern over time spent together and differing childrearing practices.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) devised by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) was used to measure general stress. This 14-item scale is a more general measure of stress than the Farm Family Stress Scale and is purported to measure the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Coefficient alpha reliability for the PSS ranges from .84 to .86 but falls off rapidly after 4-6 weeks, indicating that stress levels vary as daily hassles, major events, and coping resources change. This suggests that the PSS reliably measures current stress level.

The Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment and Prediction Test was used to measure marital satisfaction. According to Locke and Wallace (1959), the reliability coefficient for the marital adjustment (accommodation of husband and wife to each other at a given time) component was .90 and .84 for the marital prediction (forecasting the likelihood of marital adjustment at a future time) component. Locke and Wallace tested their scale on known maladjusted and well adjusted couples and found it to be a valid measure of marital adjustment.

Results

The data describing the kinds of problems between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and strategies for dealing with them are presented followed by a discussion of the effects on stress and marital satisfaction of proximity, differences in child rearing, and perceived interference.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution Strategies

Because of the lack of research documenting conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in two-generation farm and ranch families, the mothers and daughters-in-law in this study were asked what caused problems in their relationship, what strategies they used to cope with these problems, and to whom they turned for advice and support when they were having problems with each other. These questions were open-ended. Respondents could give as many answers as they wished. The three most frequent responses for both groups of women in each of these areas are reported below, as are responses that were given by at least 10% of either group.

Conflict. Of those women reporting conflicts, differences in values and opinions and lack of communication tied for first place (28% apiece) by the mothers-in-law as the most frequent problem-causing conflict. Neglect of the farm (17%) and outside stressors (14%) were their next most frequent complaints. The most frequent source of conflict for daughters-in-law was differences in values and opinions (50%). The second most frequently mentioned source of conflict for daughters-in-law was lack of family time (11%). There were two problems that tied for third place with 9% apiece: mother-in-law's critical remarks and outside stressors.

Of note is the high proportion of these women, especially mothers-in-law, who said they had no problems with each other. Twice as many mothers-in-law (34%) as daughters-in-law (17%) responded that there were no problems between the two generations of women. These data are consistent with those of Fischer (1983) and Duvall (1954).

Strategies. Both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were asked what strategies they used in getting along with each other. The strategy most frequently used by mothers-in-law (36%) was communication, compared with 19% of daughters-in-law who used this strategy. Ignoring the problem was the most commonly used strategy of daughters-in-law (33%). This was the second most frequently used strategy of mothers-in-law (17%). The second most frequently mentioned strategy by daughters-in-law was to take time out (27%). Only 11% of the mothers-in-law stated that they used this strategy for conflict reduction. Twenty-seven percent of the mothers-in-law and 13% of the daughters-in-law did not list any strategies because they said they had no problems.

Getting Along Together. The most frequently listed reasons mothers-in-law (23%) and daughters-in-law (26%) gave for getting along well together were that the other showed respect and was fair. For mothers-in-law, not having any problems with daughter-in-law, having the same values and goals, and working and living apart were tied for second at 14% apiece. The second most frequent reason stated by daughters-in-law (18%) was having the same values and goals. Not having any

problems with their mother-in-law was third (15%). Non-interference was stated as a reason by 12% of the mothers-in-law and 10% of the daughters-in-law.

Advice. When asked, "To whom do you turn for advice when you are having problems getting along with your mother-/daughter-in-law?" the most frequently listed person by mothers-in-law (32%) and daughters-in-law (39%) was husband. The second and third most frequently listed entities to whom the mothers-in-law turned for advice were their daughters and God, each with 12%. The second most frequently listed person to whom daughters-in-law turned for advice was mother (18%) and the third was friends (16%). Others were also listed as sources of advice by 12% of the daughters-in-law. Twenty-five percent of the mothers-in-law compared to 9% of the daughters-in-law said there was no one to whom they turned.

Support. Husbands were the most frequently listed source of support for conflict with one's mother-in-law or daughter-in-law. About one half (48%) of the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law stated they turned to their husbands for such support. Mothers were the second most frequent source of support for daughters-in-law (15%), friends (13%) third, and others (11%) fourth. Daughters-in-law (15%) were almost the only other person besides husbands that mothers-in-law turned to for support.

Interestingly, almost one quarter (22%) of the mothers-in-law compared to 7% of the daughters-in-law said they did not seek support from anyone. These data and the high percentage (25%) of mothers who said they had no one to whom to turn for advice may mean that mothers-in-law are less willing to talk about such conflict and/or that their social network is smaller than that of their daughters-in-law.

Effects of Proximity, Child-Rearing Differences, and Interference

Twenty-six percent of both groups of women said they lived within 1/8 mile of each other and an additional 13% between 1/8 and 1/4 mile. Sixteen percent lived between 1/4 mile and 5 miles from each other, 16% between 5 and 10 miles, 19% between 10 and 50 miles, and only 10% over 50 miles. Clearly, close proximity was a fact of life for many of these women. Duvall's (1954) theory suggests that close proximity might decrease the young couple's autonomy. This could increase stress between the two women. Measures of stress from two types of stressors were used. To test for the effect of proximity on occupationally related stressors, Pearson product moment correlations were run for daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law between proximity and the Family Farm Stress Scale scores. As can be seen in Table 1, there were no significant correlations for mothers-in-law or daughters-in-law between proximity and the five factors and the total score of the Family Farm Stress Scale which measured stress between the two generations.

Table 1.
Pearson Correlations Between Proximity and the Stress Measures: The Five Factors and Total Scores of Family Farm Stress Scale (FFSS) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

	FFSS Factors					Total Scores	
	1	2	3	4	5	FFSS	PSS
Mother-in-law	.17	.13	.03	.05	.17	.15	.15
Daughter-in-law	.20	.17	.18	.06	.03	.06	.27*

*$p < .05$.

To test the effect of proximity on general stress, Pearson product moment correlations were run between proximity and the Perceived Stress Scale for mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The correlation for mothers-in-law was low ($r = .15$) and not significant (see Table 1). The correlation for daughters-in-law, while low and positive ($r = .27$), was significant ($p = .05$). Thus, as distance from her mother-in-law increased, the daughter-in-law's stress level went up. This finding is contrary to expectations. It should be pointed out, however, that proximity accounts for only .07 of the variance of the daughter-in-law's overall perceived stress score. Thus, these data suggest that proximity has little effect on the stress levels of these farm and ranch women. What effect it has appears to increase with distance. An alternative explanation based on conventional wisdom is that these sons and daughters-in-law chose to locate as close to his parents (and the farm job) as they thought they could satisfactorily tolerate. To the extent that this was true for this sample, if they erred, it was by living too far away.

A couple's identity formation, however, may be more dependent on time than proximity. If this is the case, the longer the couple had been married, the more likely they would be to establish a cohesive family unit separate from both sets of in-laws. All of the young couples except one (who had been married only one year) had been married for at least 2 years and had children. (The mean number of years married was 10.5). To test the effect of length of marriage on stress for daughters-in-law, analysis of variance was used. Length of marriage was arbitrarily divided into the following four categories: 1-3 years, 4-9 years, 10-14 years, and 15 years or more. There were no significant differences on any of the FFS scales or PSS scores by length of time married.

The literature review suggested that differences in child-rearing practices between the two generations would increase the daughter-in-law's stress level. One-way analysis of variance was run on the occurrence of differences in child-rearing practices between the generations and daughter-in-law's general stress level as measured by her PPS score. There were no statistically significant differences in child-rearing practices and stress levels.

Since this result was unexpected, the item measuring the frequency of occurrence of differences in child-rearing practices between the women and the extent to which such differences were disturbing was examined. The majority of mothers-in-law (67%) and daughters-in-law (54%) stated that differences in childrearing practices seldom occurred. A third (33%) of the mothers-in-law and 32% of the daughters-in-law said they occurred sometimes. Only 14% of the daughters-in-law, but no mothers-in-law, said they were frequent.

Not many of these women viewed differences in child-rearing practices as very disturbing. Forty-six percent of the mothers-in-law and 41% of the daughters-in-law said they were not disturbing, and 48% of the older and 44% of the younger women said they were either slightly or moderately disturbing. Only 6% of the mothers-in-law and 16% of the daughters-in-law said they were either quite or extremely disturbing. Controlling for proximity and length of time married did not alter these results. Thus, while some daugh-

ters-in-law are upset by child-rearing differences, for most, differences that exist are not very disturbing.

Duvall's (1954) in-law theory suggests that the daughter-in-law's perception of her mother-in-law's interference in her and her husband's lives will negatively influence her marital satisfaction. Seven questions measured different aspects of the daughter-in-law's perception of her mother-in-law's interference. One-way analyses of variance tests were run for each question and the daughter-in-law's score on the Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment and Prediction Test. There were no significant differences.

One-way analysis of variance was also run for questions measuring interference and intergenerational farm-related stress as measured by each of the five factors and the total score of the Family Farm Stress Scale. Because these findings were contrary to expectations, the items measuring interference were examined. In brief, about a third of the daughters-in-law reported that their mothers-in-law interfered in their lives at least some of the time. Most did not report much interference. Sixty percent, for example, said that their mothers-in-law never tried to run their lives and that they were never jealous of their mothers-in-law. While seventy-five percent said that the mother-in-law was seldom or never bossy, 72% reported they were very satisfied with her respect for their privacy, and 70% said the mother-in-law sometimes saw things differently from themselves; only 28% said they were never resentful of their mothers-in-law.

Controlling for proximity and length of time married only altered the findings on the issue of privacy. Daughters-in-law who had been married 10-14 years and who lived 1/4 to 10 miles away from their mothers-in-law, were more satisfied with her respect for their privacy than were those who lived closer or farther away or who had been married a shorter or longer period of time (Chi-square = 7.95; df = 2; $p = .019$). Nevertheless, it does not appear that the mother-in-law's interference significantly affected the daughter-in-law's satisfaction or intergenerational stress levels.

Interpretation

Previous research suggests that relationships of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law could be marked by conflict, especially if they lived in close proximity and the daughter-in-law had children. Further, this conflict could affect the stress levels and marital satisfaction of the daughters-in-law. The data from this study of farm and ranch women did not support this contention.

The majority of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in this study seemed to have good relationships with each other, although more daughters-in-law (83%) reported problems than mothers-in-law (66%). In fact, 34% of the mothers-in-law said they had no problems getting along with their daughters-in-law compared with 17% of the daughters-in-law. That daughters-in-law perceived more problems was expected. Previous research suggests that the mother-in-law is the most troublesome in-law. In addition, it was the daughter-in-law who most recently became a part of the farm/ranch operation and who was probably expected by everyone to do more adjusting.

Less than one third of the daughters-in-law reported that they had serious arguments with their mothers-in-law, that they were jealous or resentful of the older woman, that their mother-in-law tried to run their lives, or that their husband was more loyal to his mother than to his wife. Furthermore, 72% of the daughters-in-law were satisfied with their mothers-in-law's respect for their privacy. Only about 30% of the daughters-in-law stated that their mothers-in-law "often or always" saw things differently than they did.

Responses to another question in the study reaffirmed these findings. Sixty-two percent of the daughters-in-law reported that they got along well most of the time with their mothers-in-law. Thirty percent said they had some problems getting along. Only 8% said they got along poorly.

Values and goals were important to both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Differences in values and goals were the primary sources of conflict for both. Similarity of values and goals was the second most frequently cited reason for getting along together. Thus, practitioners and researchers working with two-generation families should be alert for perceived differences in values and goals which could provide potential conflict.

Communication also played a critical role in the relations between these two groups of women. Thirty-six percent of the mothers-in-law said that communication was their most effective strategy in resolving conflict with their daughters-in-law. Lack of communication was tied with differences in values as the most frequently cited reason mothers-in-law gave for not getting along with their daughters-in-law. Programs designed to aid such families should, therefore, include a communications component.

The focus of this research was on identifying common sources of conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in two-generation farm/ranch families. Large amounts of unresolved conflict were not discovered. Approximately two thirds of the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were effectively working out their problems. The remaining one third were experiencing problems they have yet to resolve. These problems did not seem to be appreciably related to either how close they lived to their mothers-in-law or to the length of time daughters-in-law had been married.

Conclusions and Implications

Mothers-in-law have been viewed as problematic at least since the days of Hansel and Gretel. The purpose of this exploratory research on mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships in two-generation farm and ranch families was to identify sources of conflict between these two generations of women, to determine the impact of such conflict on stress levels and marital satisfaction, and to identify strategies these women used to cope with their conflict.

The relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law living in two-generation farm/ranch families were not as problematic as expected. The majority of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law reported that they got along well together. One third of the women, however, were having problems. This figure is consistent with other data. Tension and strain between family members, for example, was the second largest source of stressors reported in a 1981 study of Montana farm/ranch families (Marotz-Baden, 1985). In that study 29% of the couples surveyed reported increased conflict with in-laws or relatives during the last year.

These data have important implications for counselors, clergy, physicians, mental health personnel, and extension agents. It is important for these professionals to be aware that a significant minority of farm/ranch families are experiencing problems

with their in-laws and other relatives. Such information should be useful as they prescribe treatment and plan programs to alleviate stress in rural families. Important factors to consider are differences in values, goals, and communication patterns.

Because this study was of *intact*, two-generation farm and ranch families, it is not known how many of the younger generation are no longer farming with their parents because they could not get along. Anecdotal data from one of the daughters-in-law in this study (in her second marriage) and from several sons, who did not qualify for the study, suggest that serious problems do exist in some families and that these can lead to a breakup of the two-generation family or divorce. In addition to the suggestions offered to applied professionals in the preceding section of this article, it seems appropriate to suggest that a critical time for preventative intervention may be when the son(s) marry and/or begin to farm with/for their parents.

This research also provides some baseline information for further research. Why do some multigeneration families get along so well and others poorly? If in-law conflict and proximity are not strongly related to stress and marital satisfaction, what factors in two-generation families are? These are but a few of the questions to be answered by further research.

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