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Resiliency in South African and Belgian single-parent families

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This study focuses on the identification and comparison of resilience qualities in South African and Belgian single-parent families. The results reveal that the inherent strength of the family is one of the most important of these qualities. Other important aspects are a sense of control over the outcomes of life experiences; the family's orientation with regard to challenges that have to be faced, and an active orientation with regard to adaptation in a stressful situation. Children from both countries affirmed the importance of using the support of family and friends to deal with stressors, and also perceived their communities as sources of social support.

Veerkragtigheid in Suid-Afrikaanse en Belgiese enkelouer-gesinne

In hierdie ondersoek word op die identifikasie en vergelyking van veerkragtigheidskwaliteite in Suid-Afrikaanse en Belgiese enkelouer-gesinne gefokus. Resultate dui daarop dat inherente gesinsterkte een van die belangrikste veerkragtigheidskwaliteite is. Ander belangrike aspekte is 'n gevoel van beheer oor lewensgebeure, die gesin se ingesteldheid teenoor uitdagings wat hulle moet oorkom, en 'n aktiewe ingesteldheid ten opsigte van aanpassing by stresvolle omstandighede. Kinders van beide lande stem saam dat die gebruik van ondersteuning van familie en vriende belangrik is om stressors mee te hanteer en dat hulle hul gemeenskap as 'n bron van sosiale ondersteuning beskou.

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There has been a significant increase in the number of single-parent families, brought about by a variety of crises (Greeff & Van der Merwe 2004: 59). In South Africa, one out of every two marriages currently ends in divorce (Statistics South Africa 2001). Vanhove & Matthijs (2003) estimate that, in Belgium, 45% of married couples divorce within 40 years. A divorce requires numerous adjustments on the part of family members because it brings about changes in the family structure, family roles, family relationships and the family's economic circumstances (Thompson & Rudolph 2000: 23). The specific aim of the present study was to compare resilience qualities in two corresponding study populations from South Africa and Belgium. The findings could contribute to the limited literature on family resilience in single-parent families, reduce negative perceptions of divorced families, and confirm the practical value of a salutogenic perspective. Furthermore, they may be utilised in the development and implementation of prevention and intervention programmes for single-parent families. Once resilience qualities have been identified, they may also serve as guidelines for families struggling to adapt and cope after divorce.

The human sciences have recently experienced a noticeable paradigm shift from pathogenesis to salutogenesis; a shift to a perspective of strength, emphasising health rather than illness (Antonovsky 1987: 51). The salutogenic paradigm emphasises positive qualities and strengths which contribute to the growth and promotion of a system, rather than dysfunction (pathogenesis). Typical questions that are asked include: How can the family adapt successfully? What are the strengths and abilities of individuals and of the family? The responses to these questions could shift the focus from intervention to prevention (Walsh 1996: 262).

Resilience refers to the ability of an individual or a family to remain intact in spite of trauma or crisis, and to return to the same pre-morbid level (or even to attain a higher level of functioning than before the crisis). According to Strümpfer (1995: 83), resilience is a comprehensive, positive concept that implies strength, forcefulness and defensibility. It involves dimensions and qualities that help a family resist separation and disintegration in spite of crises (McCubbin & Patterson 1983: 14). Resilience is influenced by risk factors and protection factors. Risk factors refer, *inter alia*, to poverty, weak parent-child relationships, or psychological and physical deficiencies (Rutter 1987). Protection

factors are resources that increase the potential for resilience by serving as a buffer against misfortune (Fergusson & Lynskey 1996: 135). Walsh (1998: 13) describes three resources that can serve as buffers, namely economic resources (such as income and assets), parental resources (such as consistent discipline, parental involvement and demarcated parameters), and community resources (such as friends, family and formal organisations supplying information and support).

In this study, the Resiliency Model served as the theoretical basis for a family's adaptation after a crisis. The model originates from Reuben Hill's ABCX model (McCubbin & McCubbin 1993: 248) and was further extended into the Double ABCX model by McCubbin & Patterson (1983). This was then developed into a process model, namely the *Family Adjustment Adaptation Response Model* (FAAR). The FAAR model was followed by the *Typology Model of Family Adjustment and Adaptation*, which emphasises family typology, problem-solving and the coping mechanisms of the family in the adjustment process (McCubbin *et al* 1996). The Resiliency Model adds four domains of family functioning: interpersonal relationships and development, wellbeing and spirituality, community ties, and structure and functioning. It emphasises important family processes and harmony and balance in the family. It also stresses five important levels of family evaluation, including the culture and ethnicity involved in family change and recovery. Finally, it also focuses on the central role of the family's relationship processes and its adaptation.

Family resilience is thus not a novel concept, although research on the topic is relatively limited. Silliman (1994) identifies the following qualities as contributing to family resilience: dedication, cohesion, adaptability, spirituality, family time and belongingness. According to McCubbin & McCubbin (1993: 250), adaptability (the ability to handle misfortune and change direction successfully) and cohesion (the belongingness of the family) are the most important family resources. The key elements for healthy family adaptation after a crisis, according to Walsh (1998), are: recognition and sharing of the effects of the loss; open communication, with recognition of the family's existing structure in spite of the crisis, and the family's ability to establish itself in other relationships and to achieve life goals. The resilience qualities identified in previous research are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Resilience qualities identified in previous research

Qualities	Researcher/Author
Good self-esteem, family belongingness and the availability of social support.	Garvin *et al* 1993
Emotional support among family members, family participation, household chores and hobbies, clear rules and regular contact with family and friends.	Gordon Rouse *et al* 2002
Spirituality and beliefs.	Walsh 1998
A family's perception of its control over a situation.	Drapeau *et al* 1999
Level of education and socio-economic status, which influence the family's sense of coherence, which in turn determines the degree of adaptation after a crisis.	Sagy & Antonovsky 1998
Good parent-child relationships after a divorce, the maintenance of family rituals, pro-active handling of family problems, minimal conflict between parent and child – including a positive relationship between mother and child.	Barnard 1994
Solidarity, health, routine and traditions as part of family strengths.	McCubbin & McCubbin 1993

Family resilience may vary as a result of the family's cultural context (McCubbin *et al* 1996: 47). Significant racial and cultural differences were found in a study by Demmer (1998) on the fear of death and on coping resources when families were confronted with a death. Other studies, however, have found agreement between families from different countries with regard to adjustment after divorce. For example, Huddleston & Hawkings (1991: 200) found significant similarities between the emotional and physical health of Canadian and American subjects after divorce. The health of the participants improved after their d ivorce, although certain negative emotions were still experienced in both groups. A comparative study by Portes *et al* (1991: 88) on the identification of family qualities to predict the adaptation of children after divorce found, *inter alia*, that there is a lack of research on divorce and on the adaptation of children after divorce. According to Levitin (1979: 22), a child's ethnicity (culture) may be one of the risk factors that

could influence such adjustment. It is therefore useful to determine the extent to which resilience factors coincide or differ across different populations (groups or families that may differ in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, socio-economic status, family phase and family structure).

Variables that show a significant positive correlation with the coherence of a family could be viewed as resilience qualities (Werner & Smith 1993: 43). Families with a strong sense of coherence adapt more easily after a crisis (Antonovsky & Sourani 1988: 89, Hawley 2000: 110). For this reason, a family's sense of coherence is used in this study as the measure of its adaptation after divorce.

1. Aim of the study

It follows from the literature that there may be differences and similarities in resilience qualities in different populations affected by divorce. Therefore, the aim of this study was to compare the results of two surveys (South African and Belgian) and, in so doing, to determine which qualities could be associated with family resilience in single-parent families in each population and how the two groups agree or differ.

2. Method

A single cross-sectional survey research design was used to compare South African and Belgian single-parent families with regard to qualities relating to family resilience. The surveys were done independently and at approximately the same time in the two countries. Self-report questionnaires were completed separately by parents and children.

2.1 Participants

In South Africa, 98 white Afrikaans-speaking (n= 67) and English-speaking (n= 31) single-parent families participated in the survey. The parent and the oldest child (aged between 12 and 19) completed the questionnaires independently. The parent was required not to have remarried or become involved in a permanent intimate relationship. As a result of the requirement that postgraduate Psychology students at a single university had to identify the families, all of them were from the Western Cape province. The average age of the parents was 42 years 3 months and the families had an average of 2.3 children. The average

length of the marriage before the divorce was 15 years 4 months and the average period since the divorce was 3 years 6 months. It is significant that 89 of the 98 participating parents were female, which may have been because more mothers than fathers are given custody of children. All the parents were employed at the time of the survey, with a median income of R40 000 to R60 000 per annum, which is slightly higher than the R45 000 average income per family for South Africans in 2000 (National Economic Development and Labour Council 2003).

In Belgium (in the provinces of Brabant, Antwerp, East Flanders, West Flanders and Limburg), 65 single-parent families participated in the survey. The participating child had to be older than 12 and the parent was required not to have remarried or to be living with a new partner. The average age of the parents was 45 years 8 months. Only 10 of the 65 questionnaires were completed by men. A third of the participating children were male. The ages of the children completing the questionnaires ranged from 12 to 30 years, with an average age of 18 years 5 months. The participating families had between one and four children, with the majority having two or three. The parents had been married between 1 and 30 years prior to the divorce, with the average length of the marriages being 15 years 8 months. The parents had been divorced between 1 and 20 years, while the average period since the divorce was 7 years 5 months. Most participants were in the educational category termed "higher secondary education", with a large group in the category "higher schooling". There were only a few parents in the other categories, namely "lower education", "lower secondary education" and "university". The nett income of the families ranged between €7 500 and €32 000 — lower than the average for families in Belgium (De Mot 2002: 63).

2.2 Measuring instruments

All the questionnaires used in this project had been successfully used in research in South Africa (Greeff & Human 2004, Greeff & Van der Merwe 2004). A biographical questionnaire was compiled to obtain information on family composition, educational level, employment status, income group, length of marriage, time since divorce, number of children in the family, age and gender.

The *Relative and Friend Support Index* (RFS) was designed by McCubbin *et al* (1982) to determine the extent to which family members use the support of their own family and friends as a coping strategy when dealing with stressors. The eight-item instrument requires a response on a five-point Likert rating scale raging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The internal reliability is 0.82 (Cronbach *alpha*) and the validity coefficient (with the original *Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales* (F-COPES)) is 0.99 (McCubbin *et al* 1996: 459).

The *Social Support Index* (SSI) was developed by McCubbin *et al* (1996: 358). It is used to determine to what extent families are integrated into the community and to what extent they perceive the community as a source of emotional support, which is defined as entailing recognition, affirmation, esteem, affection and relationships with relatives (McCubbin & McCubbin 1993: 248). This 17-item instrument is rated on a five-point scale of agreement, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The internal reliability is 0.82 (Cronbach *alpha*). The test-retest reliability is 0.83. The validity coefficient (correlated with criteria of family wellbeing) is 0.40 (McCubbin *et al* 1996: 358).

The *Family Crisis-Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales* (F-COPES) are used to identify the problem-solving and behavioural strategies that families can apply during crisis situations (McCubbin *et al* 1982). The instrument focuses on two levels of interaction: first, the interaction between the individual and the family system (for instance the way in which a family handles crises and problems among family members) and secondly, the interaction between the family and the social environment (for instance the way in which a family handles problems outside the family that affect the family unity). Higher marks indicate effective positive coping behaviour. The instrument consists of 30 five-point Likert scale items. The scale consists of five sub-scales, which are further subdivided into internal and external coping strategies. Internal coping strategies define the manner in which crises are dealt with by using sources of support within the nuclear family. External coping strategies refer to the family's active attempts to find sources of support outside the nuclear family (McCubbin & Patterson 1983). The internal coping strategies are reformulation or redefinition of the problem in terms of its meaning to the family (Cronbach *alpha* = 0.64) and passive appreciation, for instance the family's inclination to do nothing when

faced with a crisis — an avoidance response based on a lack of confidence in one's ability to change the outcome (Cronbach *alpha* = 0.66). The external coping strategies are the acquisition of social support, for example friends (Cronbach *alpha* = 0.74), family members (Cronbach *alpha* = 0.86), and neighbours (Cronbach *alpha* = 0.79); the quest for religious support (Cronbach *alpha* = 0.87), and the mobilisation of the family to seek and accept help, for example professional help and the use of community resources (Cronbach *alpha* = 0.70). A test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.71 was obtained after five weeks, with an internal reliability coefficient of 0.77 (Cronbach *alpha*) for the entire scale (Reis & Heppner 1993). The construct validity of the questionnaire was proved by factor analysis and a varimax rotation of the axes. Five factors with factor loads between 0.36 and 0.74 were isolated. All five factors had eigenvalues greater than one (McCubbin *et al* 1982: 67).

The *Family Hardiness Index* (FHI) was developed by McCubbin *et al* (1996) to measure internal strength and durability in the family unit. Hardiness refers to a sense of control over the outcomes of life experiences and challenges, as well as an active rather than a passive orientation with regard to adjustment and adaptation in stressful situations. The scale consists of 20 items that aim to measure the qualities of hardiness as a stress-resistant and adjustable resource in families. Each item assesses the degree to which each statement describes the current family situation on a four-point Likert rating scale ("False", "Mostly false", "Mostly true", "True" or "Not applicable"). The scale consists of three sub-scales: commitment, challenges and control. The commitment sub-scale measures the family's sense of internal strength, dependence and ability to co-operate. The challenge sub-scale measures the family's attempts to be innovative, to be active and to acquire new skills. The control sub-scale measures the family's internal locus of control (the level of control they feel they have over their lives) compared to an external locus of control over their lives. The internal validity is 0.82 (Cronbach *alpha*). The validity coefficient ranges from 0.20 to 0.23, with criterion indices of family flexibility, satisfaction, and time and routine (McCubbin *et al* 1996: 243).

In this study, family sense of coherence was used as a measure of the level of family adaptation. To determine the level of family sense of coherence in terms of the internal and external environment, the

Family Sense of Coherence Scale (FSOC) (Antonovsky & Sourani 1988) was used. The scale consists of 26 semantically differential items (with a seven-point Likert scale). Family sense of coherence refers to an orientation between family members, namely that external and internal stimuli are structured and predictable, that resistance resources are available to deal with these stimuli and that the demands of life are worthy challenges. The FSOC scale consists of three sub-scales: comprehensibility (eight items), manageability (nine items) and meaningfulness (nine items). Subjacent to each item is the extent to which the respondent interprets the world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (Antonovsky & Sourani 1988). Fourteen of the items are scored inversely, so that a high score always represents a strong sense of family coherence (adaptation or contentment with the adaptation in the family's external and internal environments). An internal reliability coefficient of 0.92 (Cronbach *alpha*) was reported for the entire scale (Antonovsky & Sourani 1988: 86). With regard to validity, a correlation of 0.71 was found between the FSOC and two family coping scales, both of which correlate strongly with the scores of general family coping (Antonovsky & Sourani 1988: 86).

2.3 Procedure

Data collection took place independently in the two countries. In the South African study, fourth-year psychology students (the classes of 2000 and 2001 at Stellenbosch University) each identified a single-parent family that complied with the inclusion criteria. The family was then approached to participate in the research project, whose purpose was explained. Appointments were made to visit the participating families and to collect the data. During such visits, anonymity and the confidentiality of the information were assured. Both the parent and the child were asked the reasons to which they attributed the successful handling of the divorce (crisis). The questionnaires were then administered, with the parent and the child completing them individually in the presence of the student within 30 to 50 minutes. On the whole, the completion of the questionnaires posed no problems.

In the Belgian study, the addresses of self-help groups in Louvain were obtained with the assistance of the "Trefpunt Zelfhulp" (Self-help Rendezvous). Various groups were approached to participate in the re-

search project. It was expected that a parent and one child (older than 12) would complete the questionnaires. Two self-help groups were willing to co-operate. In one case, collaborators gave the instructions and questionnaires to the parents to complete at home; in the other, the questionnaires were completed under the supervision of the collaborators. Students in the Psychology Department of the Catholic University of Louvain were also approached to identify families with divorced parents. About 20 sets of questionnaires were completed in this manner under the supervision of a student. The completed questionnaires were returned to the Belgian collaborator at the Catholic University of Louvain.

Both the South African and the Belgian data were entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, whereafter the statistical analyses were performed at the Centre for Statistical Consultation at the University of Stellenbosch.

3. Results

Pearson correlations were calculated between the measured independent variables and the dependent variable (*family sense of coherence*), to provide an indication of how well the family had adapted after the crisis. Thereafter, multiple regression analyses were performed on all four sets of data and the results were compared. The results showed that similarities and differences existed in terms of the resilience qualities identified.

The calculated correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variable for the parents and children of both countries are reported in Table 2.

From Table 2 it follows that the parents in the two countries identified four coinciding resilience qualities, with differences on two further qualities. The results for the children showed five coinciding resilience qualities and one difference. Three variables that correlated strongly with the total score on *family sense of coherence* (an indication of good family adaptation after the divorce) were identified by all four groups (parents and children, in both countries).

In order to identify the group qualities that are jointly the best forecasters of family adaptation (the total score on *family sense of coherence*), separate regression analyses were undertaken for the four groups. The independent variable to include in the regressions was chosen by means

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlations between the dependent variable (*family sense of coherence*) and the independent variables for the participants in the two countries

	SA parents		Belgian parents		SA children		Belgian children	
Variable	r	p value	r	p value	r	p value	r	p value
FHI	0.602	0.01**	0.518	0.01**	0.649	0.01**	0.692	0.01**
SSI	0.433	0.01**	0.455	0.01**	0.519	0.01**	0.549	0.01**
RFS	-0.025	0.81	-0.048	0.70	0.207	0.04*	0.250	0.04*
FCOPES (Re)	0.383	0.01**	0.376	0.01**	0.650	0.01**	0.504	0.01**
FCOPES (Pass)	0.389	0.01**	-0.019	0.87	0.343	0.01**	0.457	0.01**
FCOPES (Soc)	-0.068	0.51	0.029	0.81	0.165	0.11	0.115	0.35
FCOPES (Rel)	-0.143	0.16	-0.014	0.91	0.080	0.44	0.177	0.15
FCOPES (Mob)	-0.012	0.91	-0.105	0.39	0.179	0.08	-0.089	0.48
Years married	0.009	0.93	-0.049	0.69	-0.248	0.02*	-0.2	0.1
Years divorced	0.201	0.05*	0.308	0.01**	0.182	0.08	0.31	0.01**
Age of parents	-0.018	0.86	0.077	0.50	-0.147	0.15	0.079	0.49
Age of child	-0.013	0.9	0.119	0.34	-0.054	0.61	-0.003	0.98
Income	0.323	0.01**	-0.078	0.52	0.03	0.77	-0.053	0.67

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

of a step-by-step regression method called "all subsets regression". The regression analyses for the four groups are reported separately in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of regression analyses for South African and Belgian parents and children

	SA parents		Belgian parents		SA children		Belgian children	
Variable	Beta	p value	Beta	p value	Beta	p value	Beta	p value
FHI total	0.398	<0.01**	0.409	<0.01**	0.394	<0.01**	0.401	<0.01**
FCOPES (Re)	0.165	0.05*	0.286	<0.01**	0.397	<0.01**	0.270	<0.01**
SSI total	0.25	<0.01**	0.232	0.02*			0.176	0.07
Years divorced	0.118	0.13	0.209	0.03*				
Years married					-0.137	0.07	-0.145	0.07
RFS			-0.16	0.11				
FCOPES (Pass)							0.204	0.02*
FCOPES (Soc)	-0.157	0.04*						
FCOPES (Rel)							0.124	0.12
Income	0.323	0.01	-0.078	0.52	0.03	0.77	-0.053	0.67

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

From Table 3 it is evident that the *Family Hardiness Index* total scores and F-COPES "Reframing" are present in the regression equations for all four groups. These two resilience qualities, taken separately, also showed important positive correlations with the total score on *family sense of coherence* (see Table 2), which indicates good adaptation after divorce. The *Social Support Index* total score also is present in the regression equation for the Belgian parents, the South African parents and the Belgian children, but not for the South African children. In the results for the parents of both countries the period since the divorce forms part of the regression equation, but not for the children of either country, while the period of the marriage is included as part of the regression equation for the children of both countries.

In summary, it follows from the analyses that four coinciding resilience qualities were identified by the parents of the two countries ($p < 0.05$), with differences on two qualities. The children revealed five coinciding resilience qualities (positive correlations, $p < 0.05$), with one difference. Three variables were identified by all groups (parents and children in both countries).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to compare two groups of single-parent families, in South Africa and Belgium, with regard to qualities associated with family resilience. The results indicated various similarities, but also differences between the qualities identified in the two countries.

It transpires from the results that internal family strength (measured by the *Family Hardiness Index*) could be regarded as one of the most important resilience qualities in all four groups (the parents and children of both countries). More specifically, the relevant qualities were (1) a sense of control over the outcomes of life experiences (the perception of how well the family will be able to handle a crisis); the orientation of the family with respect to challenges facing it, and an active orientation to adaptation in a stress situation (the inclination to do something about the situation). This means that if control, positive orientation and an active approach to a crisis are present in a family, the family will probably demonstrate successful adaptation after the crisis. Previous research had also found that a greater measure of family hardiness resulted in better family coherence (Drapeau *et al* 1999: 30, Mederer 1998: 121).

The reformulation of a problem or crisis (F-COPES — "Reformulation") was indicated by both groups of parents and children as a coping strategy strongly associated with the adaptation of their families. This points to the importance of formulating the problem (crisis) in terms of its meaning for the family. For this reason it may be regarded as another key resilience quality (Greeff & Van der Merwe 2004).

Furthermore, it appears from the results that the extent to which families are integrated into the community, and experience that community as a source of emotional support during and after a crisis (measured by the *Social Support Index*) holds good as a key resilience quality

in both countries. This finding has been confirmed in previous studies (Hawley 2000: 113, Rutter 1987: 325).

The three resilience qualities mentioned above were identified in both countries by families that had adapted well after a divorce. What is more, a comparison of the results for both groups of parents indicates that the period since the divorce may have been associated with resilience: the longer the period, the better the adaptation.

However, a noticeable difference was found between the results for the Belgian children and those for the South African children in respect of the impact of both the duration of the marriage and the period since the divorce. For the Belgian children, the longer the period since the divorce, the better the adaptation. For the South African children, the longer the marriage had lasted, the poorer the adaptation after the divorce. This could possibly indicate that the longer a marriage lasts — in other words the longer a family remains intact — the more difficult it is to adapt after divorce and to achieve optimal levels of functioning (Greeff & Van der Merwe 2004: 71). South African children did not identify the period since the divorce as a factor associated with adaptation, while Belgian children did not regard the duration of the marriage as important for adaptation. Both groups of children did, however, emphasise the importance of support from family members and friends in overcoming the crisis. By contrast, the parents did not indicate such support important for successful adaptation after the divorce. Interestingly enough, this finding does not agree with the results of the *Social Support Index*, which measures the extent to which families are integrated into the community and the extent to which they perceive it as a source of emotional support. Since the *Social Support Index* also includes support from family and friends as an aid for adaptation, one might expect the parents in both countries to regard the qualities measured by the *Relative and Friend Support Index* as important. This subtle difference could possibly be explained by the importance of support from the community and integration into the community, which are not measured by the *Relative and Friend Support Index*, but by the *Social Support Index*. It is possible that the parents regarded this specific quality as being more important for successful adaptation than support from family or friends.

A further noticeable difference with regard to financial security was observed between the South African parents and the three other groups.

None of the other groups regarded financial security as important, whereas it was indicated by the South African parents as an important source of support for good adaptation after a divorce.

Biographical variables, such as the ages of the parents and children, religious support, mobilisation of the family and the quest for social support, were not positively associated with successful family adaptation after divorce by any of the groups. On account of the other results of this study (as measured by the *Social Support Index* and the *Relative and Friend Support Index*), it might have been expected that the children in both countries would identify this (measured with F-COPES "Social") as an important resilience quality. However, it occurred only in the regression equation for the South African parents. Also, contrary to Walsh (1998), no important connections were found in this study between the quest for religious support, spirituality and family adaptation. This means that the various groups did not regard the quest for spiritual support as being important for adaptation after a divorce.

The results furthermore indicated that the families did not regard professional help or other community resources as resilience qualities. Since it was one of the objectives of this study to obtain more information about family resilience after a divorce so that better professional help could be offered, the above finding is important for future research and interventions. The inclination of a family not to do anything about a crisis was identified as an important resilience quality by three groups out of the four (the South African parents and children, and the Belgian children). This coping style could be an indication of an inner strength in the family which enables it to absorb a crisis, rather than necessarily indicating defective coping (Greeff & Van der Merwe 2004: 71).

Resilience qualities identified on the basis of the regression analyses largely agree with the Pearson correlations. These qualities include internal family strength, social support and reformulation of the problem. However, there appear to be individual differences between the regression equations for the four groups, which again confirms the results of earlier studies, namely that differences do indeed exist between populations in respect of effective coping strategies for adaptation after a crisis (McCubbin *et al* 1996: 34), as well as between parents and children (Greeff & Van der Merwe 2004: 69).

In summary, the following appear to be the qualities prominently associated with family resilience: the family's hardiness; the redefinition of the crisis situation in terms of meaning; the family's integration into the community and its experience of the community as a source of support; the availability of other support and good relationships (friends and family), and an active rather than a passive orientation towards crises. The differences (and similarities) that were found indicate universal but also unique qualities that help families to adapt and to remain functional during crises. The qualities that were regarded as being important in both countries could be developed in therapeutic interventions in families. For example, the importance of a stable and supportive social network could be discussed within the family and strategies could be formulated as to how and when to strengthen those bonds. By means of these strategies, valuable help could be provided to single-parent families, as well as to individual family members, in adapting and even achieving a higher level of functionality than before the divorce.

The generalisability of the results is limited due to the fact that the participating South African families were all white and from a single province, and therefore not representative of the heterogeneous South African population.

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