

The Well-Being of Children and Families

The Well-Being of Children and Families

Research and Data Needs

Arland Thornton, *Editor*

Ann Arbor

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Preface

This book has grown out of the activities of the Family and Child Well-Being Research Network that was established in 1993 by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Under the auspices of the network, NICHD assembled a diverse and multidisciplinary team of researchers from demography, economics, family science, medicine, policy analysis, psychology, and sociology to pursue both individual research and collaborative projects to investigate the well-being of children and families. The network has investigated levels and trends in family and child well-being and has evaluated important factors that influence and mold the ways that children grow and interact with the people and institutions around them. Included within the research initiatives of the network—often undertaken in collaboration with other individuals and groups—have been studies focusing on the influence of poverty and welfare on children, the place of fatherhood in America today, indicators of the well-being of children and families, and the conceptualization and measurement of family and child well-being. Other examples of network initiatives are studies of parental discipline practices, parent-child relationships, cognitive development, community influences, and child neglect and abuse.

One of the central activities of the network has concentrated on new data collections—not the actual collection of data, but advice and consultation concerning a wide range of data collections. Over its lifetime the network has provided advice and consultation concerning different data collection projects in both the public and private sectors. As the network considered the content and design of different data collections, questions frequently arose about the larger theoretical and substantive concerns driving the various data collection projects brought to the network for consultation. From these questions and discussions evolved a Workshop on Research Ideas and Data Needs for Studying the Well-Being of Children and Families, and this volume has grown out of that workshop.

The workshop and this volume were designed to focus on children, mothers and fathers, and interrelationships across generations. A central concern motivating this work was how children and their families are influenced by a wide array of biological, genetic, cultural, psychological,

economic, social, governmental, and community factors. The workshop and volume were designed self-consciously to draw from a broad range of disciplines, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches. The objective was to facilitate the sharing and mixing of perspectives and approaches concerning potentially fruitful collaborative research ideas, questions, and designs.

The network organized a three-day workshop to address these issues. A series of papers from a wide range of scholars was commissioned and distributed in advance. The commissioned papers have subsequently been revised, polished, and integrated into the present volume. At the workshop, invited discussants highlighted material from individual papers, pulled together ideas across papers, and provided their own ideas and suggestions on the topics of the session. The comments of discussants were followed by general interchange of ideas and suggestions. The last part of the workshop was devoted to the distillation of the workshop discussion toward a synthesis of possible recommendations for future research and data collection. The final chapter provides the network's synthesis of recommendations concerning future research and data collection concerning the well-being of children and families. While the recommendations presented in the final chapter benefited from the papers and the discussions at the workshop, the recommendations summarized in that chapter are the responsibility of the network itself rather than with individual workshop participants. We thank our workshop colleagues for their valuable input to these recommendations, but the network alone is responsible for the specific recommendations of the final chapter.

Many people have facilitated the work of the network, the planning and organization of the workshop, and the preparation and implementation of the present volume. We especially appreciate the excellent way in which Judy Baughn administered and guided workshop organization and implementation. Judy Baughn and Monica Dixon provided valuable assistance in coordinating the work of chapter authors in preparing the initial draft of the manuscript. Mari Ellis and Nancy Barr have provided excellent assistance in the final stages of the preparation of the manuscript—coordinating between authors and the Press and providing valuable editorial input. Ellen McCarthy has given the project excellent service in bringing the book to successful fruition at the Press.