

FAMILY TRANSITIONS PROJECT



Newsletter

2004

Institute for Social and Behavioral Research

Message from the Project Directors:

Dr. Rand Conger, Project Director;

Drs. Becky Burzette and Tricia Neppl,

Associate Project Directors

Greetings from the Family Transitions Project research team! All of us here at the Institute extend our deepest appreciation to those who have contributed to this remarkable project. It is stunning to realize that this project has completed its fifteenth year! We are sincerely grateful for the enthusiastic and committed participation from Targets, their romantic partners, and their children during the past wave of data collection. It is clear from the data provided by Targets and their romantic partners that the past two years have been extremely busy — finding dream jobs, changing jobs, getting married, and starting or adding to families. Moreover, many participants have encountered difficult situations and events over the past two years. In spite of the stresses and strains of these circumstances, they participated in the project — thank you! We hope that those of you who were not able to participate, for whatever reason, will be able to rejoin the project this year.

Commitment to the Family Transitions Project is well illustrated by those who, while deployed in battle zones overseas, completed and returned questionnaires! In fact, we find that a number of Targets and Romantic Partners have been deployed in the recent past. We thank them and all those in the military for their service. We also appreciate the sacrifices made by the families of these men and women so that they may serve.

What does the future hold for the Family Transitions Project? We are pleased to announce that the Project has received funding for another five years, through 2009. We're going back into the field this fall, focusing on Targets' children — the fourth generation of participants! As you know, this project is unique in many ways and our success in obtaining continued

funding is primarily due to your commitment to the project. Another five years of funding means that we can enhance our understanding of how one generation of families influences the development of the next generation. No other study of this magnitude has ever been conducted, and its success is entirely based on your dedication to accomplish what no other group of individuals and families has ever done before. We hope that Targets, and their families, will continue their enthusiastic participation. As we've done in past years, we will send Parents and Siblings the annual newsletter, so that they may remain informed about study results — after all, without their past participation the study would not have carried on in its current form.

In this issue of the Family Transitions Project newsletter, you will find articles on the physical health of Targets and their families and how their health compares to national data. You will also find a summary of the scientific accomplishments achieved by Project researchers and how your participation over the years has contributed to the wealth of information produced. In addition to an update from Debbie Bahr, the Project Manager, you will find an article from Field Interviewer, Vickie Engelking, photos of a number of Transitions staff members, and a U.S. map indicating where Targets are currently living. We hope you enjoy this newsletter.

Thank you once again for your commitment to the Family Transitions Project! As we look forward to the next five years, it's exciting to speculate about what we'll find and what innovative programs the project will inform in the future. With your ongoing support we will continue to generate important new insights that will help generations of families in the future.

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SCIENTIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE FAMILY TRANSITIONS PROJECT

By Dr. Rand Conger

With increasing frequency, participants in the Family Transitions Project ask about the scientific accomplishments of the study. It seems only reasonable that people who have given so much of their time and energy to this project would want to know how their contributions have been used to advance understanding of families and family members. In earlier newsletters we have discussed how findings from this research have led to educational programs that have already assisted families; for example, by helping parents understand how to promote the competent behaviors of their children and to reduce the chance that they will develop behavioral problems such as substance use or emotional difficulties. In this report we turn the focus from application of the knowledge gained to the scientific information that has been generated by the study.

One way to think about scientific products is simply to count the number of publications or scientific presentations that have been generated by the Family Transitions Project. In this regard, during the past 15 years scientists affiliated with the study have generated literally hundreds of journal articles, book chapters, and presentations at scientific conferences! A complete list of the publications from the study is available by contacting the Project Manager, Debbie Bahr, at 1-800-455-4250 or dcbahr@iastate.edu. Debbie will be happy to send you the reference list.

In addition to scientific articles and book chapters that may be of interest, four books have been published by Family Transitions Project scientists. Two of these volumes are particularly informative for participants in the study. The first book, by Conger and Elder, traces the impact that the 1980s farm crisis had on study families. This book describes the "Family Stress Model" of economic hardship on families, which was developed to help understand how economic problems affect parents and children.

Results from the study were supportive of the model, which proposes that financial difficulties increase risk for parents' emotional and marital problems, which, in turn, can lead to poorer school performance and more antisocial behaviors by children. Especially important, the findings showed that when parents can maintain effective parenting practices even when they are faced with economic difficulties, children develop quite normally. These results have now been replicated in a number of other studies involving very diverse populations in urban as well as rural areas of the U.S., and also in Finland and Korea. **Simply put, the research in Iowa has influenced understanding of how families deal with economic hardship all around the world!** You can read about these findings in: Rand D. Conger and Glen H. Elder, Jr. (1994). "Families in Troubled Times: Adapting to Change in Rural America. Hillsdale, NJ: Aldine de Gruyter Publisher.

A second important book to come from the project was also written by Elder and Conger. While the earlier volume showed how financial difficulties can produce problems for families, this second book emphasized the social and emotional advantages of rural living. The results demonstrated that the strong community ties in rural areas and the importance of each student in smaller schools promote competence and achievement. In addition, the findings showed how linkages across generations, from grandparents to grandchildren, and the contributions of children and adolescents to family life, also promote the competent development of children. **This book provides significant scientific evidence that there are many advantages for children who live on farms or in rural places.** To read more, see: Glen H. Elder, Jr. and Rand D. Conger (2000). "Children of the Land: Adversity and Success in Rural America." Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. *(continued on page 4)*

HEALTH

Over the years study participants have responded to a variety of questions about health. These range from how much sleep people get to eating habits to identifying the illnesses and health conditions they recently experienced. Following is information collected in 2001 from Targets and their Romantic Partners about their own health, as well as the health of their children.

Children

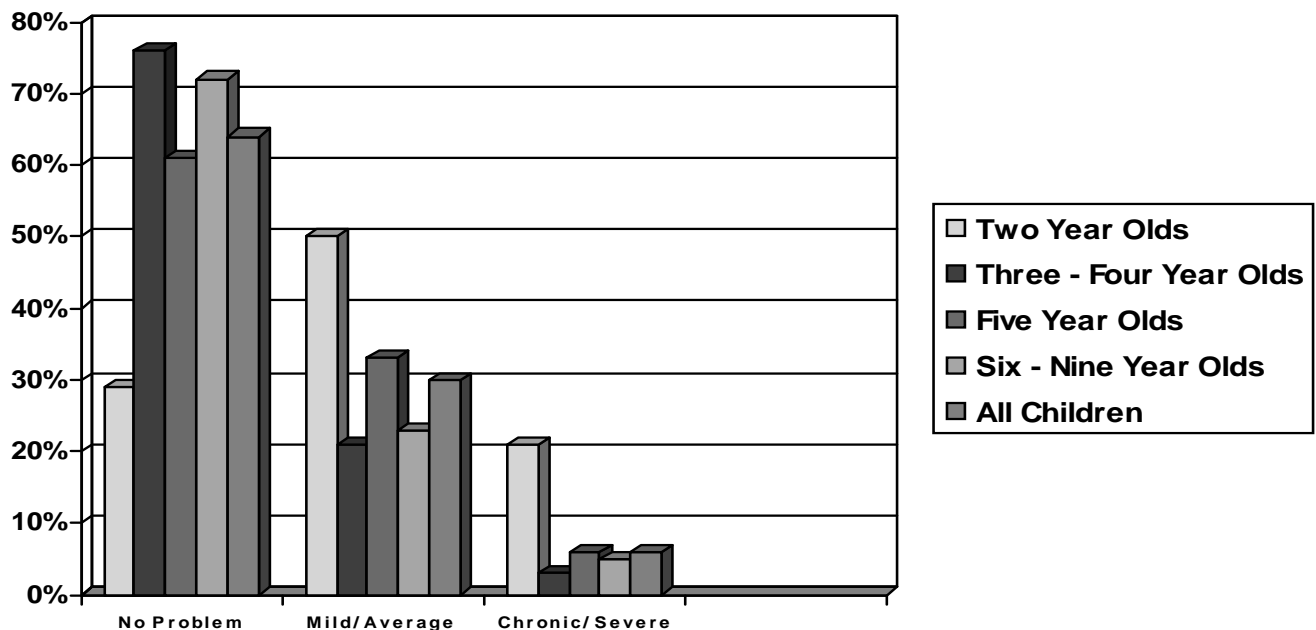
By Dr. Tricia Neppl

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2001, 84% of U.S. children under the age of 18 years enjoyed good health, while 13% of children had been diagnosed with asthma and 17% had two or more visits to an emergency room.

How do children from the Family Transitions Project compare? In 2001, parents of the 122 children who participated (ranging in age from 18 months to 9 years) reported that, overall, their children were in good health.

Of these children, 73% had never paid a visit to the emergency room! Eighteen percent had gone one time to the emergency room and only 9% had gone more than twice, with no one going more than 5 times. The 3 top reasons for visits to the emergency room were ear infections, stitches, and dehydration.

How much of a problem were ear infections in 2001?



Parents reported the following other medical conditions for their children who participated in the study in 2001: Non-food allergies – 7%; Asthma – 3%; Food allergies – 3%; Chronic bronchitis – 2%; and Pneumonia – 2%.

Targets and Romantic Partners

By Dr. Becky Burzette

The table below lists the rates (in percentages) of some of the most common symptoms and diseases that Targets and their Romantic Partners reported experiencing in the twelve months prior to 2001. For comparison, I've also included the rates reported in 1999, as well as national rates for some of the diseases. The national rates were reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from the 2001 National Health Survey for persons age 18 to 44 years. (The CDC does not report statistics for all of the symptoms and diseases in the table.)

Percentage of Targets and their Romantic Partners reporting the following symptoms or diseases, in 2001:

	Family Transitions Project		CDC National Health Survey
	1999	2001	2001
Common cold	82%	76%	n/a
Sore throat	61%	60%	n/a
Sinus infection	33%	30%	16%
Migraine	24%	23%	20%
Bronchitis	8%	9%	n/a
Asthma	5%	6%	12%
High blood pressure	3%	6%	7%
Arthritis	2%	4%	12%
Peptic ulcer	2%	2%	7%

In 2001, the most commonly reported diseases or symptoms were upper respiratory infections – 82% reported having had a cold, the flu, a sore throat, or sinus infection. Note, however, that the rates for these diseases decreased as compared to 1999.

These data also reflect a slight but definite increase, from 1999 to 2001, in physical health problems that are a normal part of aging. High blood pressure, arthritis, ulcers and diabetes – diseases often associated with aging – are becoming more common. In addition, rates for chronic conditions (asthma, high blood pressure, arthritis, etc.) also increased from 1999 to 2001. In 1999, 11% of Targets and their Romantic Partners reported at least one chronic condition; in 2001, that rate was 17%.

Conger, Rand (continued from page 2)

Finally, it's worth noting that the scientists involved in the study are not the only ones who think that the research has made important scientific contributions. The results of the Family Transitions Project have produced awards for scientific achievement from many national societies and organizations, including the National Council on Family Relations, the American Sociological Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association for Rural Mental Health, the Rural Sociological Society, and the International Association for Relationship Research. Moreover, findings from the research are frequently cited in textbooks on human

development, adolescence, and family studies that are used in major universities.

Your contributions to this study are being used to educate the next generation of young people who, hopefully, will learn from your experiences how to create even stronger families and more stable marriages, which, in turn, will promote the competence and success of their children. **This new generation truly owes you a debt of gratitude for your willingness to share the ups and downs of your lives with them through the findings from this landmark study.**

**THESE CANDID PHOTOS WERE TAKEN AT A GATHERING OF
FIELD INTERVIEWERS, AMES STAFF, AND RESEARCHERS
HELD ON APRIL 28TH HERE AT ISBR.**



**Left to right: Lavonna Meyer, Marlys Huff,
Rand Conger, and Brenda Dunn.**

Tricia Neppi



Becky Burzette



**Left to right:
Janice Nicholson,
Billie Israel and
Andrea Gunning.**



Enjoying conversation and lunch!



**Left to right:
Kristina Levonyan-
Radloff and
Debbie Bahr.**



**Front to back:
Betty Davis,
Chris Kinley and
Cathy Owen.**

WHERE are Targets living now? The following map shows the percentage of Targets living in each state throughout the U.S.



Where are Targets living?

Outside of the United States	1%
Western United States	4%
Eastern United States	1%
Southern United States	4%
Central United States, not including Iowa	20%
Iowa	70%

Military Service

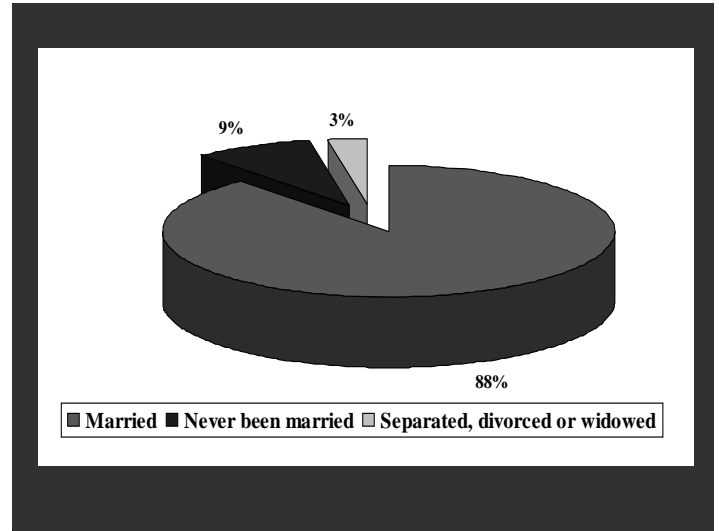
All of us here in Ames want you to know that we are thinking of those of you who are serving in the military or who have loved ones doing so. We continue to pray for the safe return of all military personnel, so that they may reunite with their families and friends.

Following is information learned in 2005 – 2006 about military service:

- o During the two years prior to 2005-2006, 2% of Targets served in the military, including the National Guard. Of these, 1.5% had been deployed overseas.
- o Again during the two years prior to 2005-2006, 20% of Targets had immediate family members (not including Spouses and Partners), other relatives and close friends involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan).
 - Of these, 45% were close friends, 32% were cousins, and 16% were siblings.
 - Other relatives who served were parents, in-laws, nephews, nieces, aunts and uncles.
- o During the two years prior to 2005-2006, 2% of Targets' Spouses and Partners served in the military, including the National Guard. Of these, 1% had been deployed overseas.

Number of Children by Age

The following graph demonstrates by age the number of children who are eligible to participate in the child component of the study.



Note: 4% of Targets have been married more than once.



Relationship Status

The following table illustrates the status of Targets' romantic relationships, as reported in 2005-06.

Married	62%
Living with someone in a steady, marriage-like relationship	14%
In a steady, dating relationship with one person	7%
Dating, but not in a steady dating relationship with one person	7%
Not dating or seeing anyone right now	10%

Message from Debbie Bahr, Project Manager

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As always, I want to thank you for your participation in the Family Transitions Project! Whether you participated recently or whether you last participated in 1999 and earlier, we are grateful for your support of this important project. The high level of support shown over the years has been critical in order to obtain additional funding, and we are excited that we will be able to continue the project by virtue of having received funding for another five years. Again, thank you for the crucial role that you've played in making it possible for this research to contribute essential knowledge about families and individuals and the factors that help them succeed or that result in challenging life and family circumstances. I hope that you are proud of your work on the project, because without you the success of the past 15 years would not have been possible, not to mention the ability to celebrate a twenty-year anniversary in 2009!

For the 2003 – 2004 wave of data collection, 82% of Targets participated in an in-home visit with their romantic partners or completed mail questionnaires. Additionally, 85% of families participated in interviews with children. This fourth generation of study participants ranged in age from 18 months old to 11 years old! **We know that people are very busy and we appreciate all of your efforts to accommodate these interviews and to complete the questionnaires.**

What's coming up?

We will be contacting Targets for a short telephone interview beginning in late August. In addition, we will continue our in-home visits with parents and their eligible children, ages 18 months through seven years old. The reimbursement for these families is \$200 per family for their participation in the in-home visit (\$200 is a \$90 increase from the previous reimbursement amount of \$110).

Confidentiality Protection

Periodically, we have questions from participants about the confidentiality of study data. Here at the Institute we follow rigorous procedures to ensure your confidentiality. An identification number that is unique to the project is utilized on questionnaires and videotapes, and this ID number is what is entered with the data. All data and other materials associated with interviews are kept in locked rooms, or are stored on computers, that are accessible to a limited number of authorized personnel. In addition, the Institute for Social and Behavioral Research maintains strict security on its computers and servers so that information is protected from unauthorized use, both internally and externally. As you may know, study results are reported in summary form, never in such a way that an individual person could be identified. If you have questions or concerns about confidentiality please call me. It's so important for you to feel comfortable with our procedures in this regard.

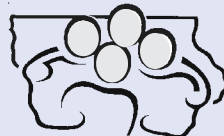
Family Members in the Military

All of us here in Ames want you to know that we are thinking of those of you who are serving in the military or who have loved ones doing so. We continue to pray for the safe return of all military personnel, so that they may reunite with their families and friends.

I am truly grateful for your support of the Family Transitions Project and for your participation, past and future!

THANK YOU.

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