

SENSE OF COHERENCE, WAYS OF COPING, AND WELL BEING OF MARRIED AND DIVORCED MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT: The study examines sense of coherence and ways of coping as personality resources capable of helping divorced mothers deal with the divorce crisis. The findings show that although mothers from two parent families enjoy a higher sense of well being than divorced mothers, the well being of both groups was predicted by sense of coherence. They also show that mothers with higher sense of coherence used more effective coping strategies and derived more benefit from the strategies they used. The married and divorced mothers have a similar sense of coherence level. More study is needed to ascertain precisely how sense of coherence contributes to well being, as well as to the choice and effectiveness of coping strategies.

KEY WORDS: sense of coherence; divorced mothers; married mothers; well-being.

Most studies of the recently divorced, and many studies on long-term divorcees, support the view that the well-being of divorced persons is lower than that of married persons (Acock & Kiecolt, 1989; Andrews & Withey, 1976; Drori, Florian, & Kravitz, 1991; Waite, 1995; White, 1991). In particular, divorce is believed to impair the well-being of women with children, whom it turns into single parents. Divorced mothers have been found to suffer from more depression, anxiety, and stress, poorer social adjustment, and less global well being than their married counterparts (Demo & Acock, 1996; Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993). They face more daily hassles and negative life events and are

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badly overloaded. Loneliness, material hardship, and the difficulties of single parenting add to their burden (Compas & Williams, 1990; Demo & Acock, 1996; Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993).

At the same time, the picture is not a uniform gray. Several studies have found that divorced women are not significantly worse off emotionally than their married sisters, and sometimes even fare better (Anson, 1988; Cohen, 1996; Kiecolt & Acock, 1990; Nelson, 1989, 1994; Sauer & Warland, 1982, Toseland & Rasch, 1979–1980). These findings make sense where the divorce is a release from a stressful and unhappy marriage.

The differences in the findings may be attributed not only to methodological differences in the studies (i.e., different outcome measures, instruments, and sample characteristics), but also to a large range of external, internal, and relational factors that have been implicated in women's post-divorce well being. The major external factors are economic resources (Andrews & Robinson, 1991; Booth & Amato, 1992; Cohen, 1992; Demo & Acock, 1996; Menaghan & Lieberman, 1986; and education (Hill & King, 1995; Reynolds & Ross, 1996), both of which have been consistently found to contribute to post-divorce well being. The internal and relational factors include comparative perceptions of current and past life circumstances (Birnbaum, Orr, Mikulincer, & Florian, 1997; Cohen, 1992), parenting skills (Curtner-Smith, 1995; Gringlas & Weinraub, 1995; Horowitz & Andrews, 1995; Simons, Lorenz, Chy, & Conger, 1993), attitudes toward the marriage and divorce (Black & Sprenkle, 1991; Golburn, Lin, & Moore, 1992), the relationship with the former husband (Bray & Hetherington, 1993; Cohen, Dattner, & Luxenburg, 1996; Gray, Kooperman, & Hunt, 1991), social support (Clark-Stewart & Bailey, 1989; Cohen & Loewenberg, 1994; Emery, 1994; Huddleston & Hawkings, 1993; Ricard, Lee, & Hunsley, 1997), and ways of coping (Berman & Turk, 1981; Cohen, 1992; Kitson, Babru, Roach, & Placidi, 1989; Holloway & Machida, 1991; Menaghan & Liberman, 1986; Propst, Pardington, Ostrom, & Watkins, 1986).

These various factors may be seen as resources that affect the appraisal and impact of external stressors. According to stress theory, the resources that people bring to potentially stressful situations affect how much emotional distress such situations will actually evoke. In addition to material resources, the literature emphasizes the importance of two types of inner resources: psychological resources and coping strategies. As Pearlin and Schooler (1978) define them, psychological resources are the personality characteristics that people draw upon

to help them withstand threats posed by events and objects in their environments. Coping strategies are the behaviors, cognitions and perceptions in which people engage when actually contending with their life problems.

This study examines the contribution of two internal resources, sense of coherence and ways of coping, to the custodial mother's well being in the aftermath of the divorce crisis.

SENSE OF COHERENCE

Sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987, 1995) is one of several constructs that have been offered to explain variations in individual responses to stress. Along with learned resourcefulness (Rosenbaum, 1983), hardiness (Kobasa, 1979), and sense of control (Fleishman, 1984), sense of coherence is has been posited as an inner resource that helps people deal more effectively with stress.

As Antonovsky defines it, sense of coherence is a global orientation consisting of three pervasive and enduring, though dynamic, convictions. The first is the feeling that those aspects of the world, both internal and external, that are relevant and important to oneself are structured, predictable, and explicable. The second is that one has the resources to meet the demands they pose. The third is that the demands are challenges, worthy of one's investment and engagement. As Antonovsky encapsulates it, sense of coherence consists in the conviction/feeling that one's world is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful (1987, p. 19).

Regarding adverse life events as part of living, Antonovsky argues that the person's sense of coherence helps to determine whether the outcome of the adversity will be neutral, salutary, or noxious. Implicit in his definition of the concept is the idea that people with high sense of coherence feel able and willing to cope with the stresses they face. Antonovsky claims that they appraise stress differently (more as a challenge than a threat) and cope better with it than their low sense of control peers:

A strong SOC person appraises and handles stress differently from a weak SOC person. Approaching experience with the generalized expectation that stressors are meaningful and comprehensible lays the motivational and cognitive basis for managing and preventing the transformation of tension into

stress. A strong SOC person always has a head start. Before taking action, he or she has mobilized resources to confront the stressor. By contrast, the weak SOC person, confused and devoid of the desire to cope, tends to give up at the outset. (1987, p. 137)

This claim is consistent with the findings in stress research that the appraisal of the situation and one's ability to handle it affect how much distress a difficult situation actually evokes (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, 1988; McCubbin, Thompson, & McCubbin, 1996).

A number of studies have shown a connection between sense of coherence and the ability to cope with normative stressful situations, such as pressure at work (Kalimo & Vuori, 1990; Reynold & Greenfield, 1991), retirement (Antonovsky, Sagy, Adler, & Visel, 1990), and the disability of a spouse (Feigin, 1992). In more extreme situations, sense of coherence was found to contribute to personal optimism among AIDS patients (Linn, Lewis, Cain, & Kimbrough, 1993), to mitigate the psychological distress of homeless women (Ingram, Corning, & Shmidt, 1996) and handicapped women (Dangoor, 1993), and to predict greater ego strength and self-care among cystic fibrosis patients (Baker, 1994). In a rare prospective study, Flannery and Flannery (1990) found that sense of coherence correlated negatively with life stress, anxiety and depression.

Sense of coherence has also been found to play a role in family well-being in stressful situations. Findings of Lavee, McCubbin, and Olson's (1987) study of the impact of stressful life events and transitions on family functioning and well-being confirm that families who show a high sense of coherence feel and function better than those who do not have this resource. In a study of the role of sense of coherence in helping families to deal with the reality of illness in one of their adult members, Anderson (1994) found that families with higher sense of coherence reported better quality of life. Two studies of mothers raising their children under extremely difficult conditions point in a similar direction. Flick and Homan (1994) found that homeless mothers with higher sense of coherence report more positive family attributes, display more positive interaction with their children, and have children with fewer significant problems. Gottlieb (1994) found that high sense of coherence single mothers of disabled children were less depressed, had fewer health problems, and experienced more parenting satisfaction and greater well being than their lower sense of coherence counter-

parts. They also had more coping strategies and felt better able to meet their disabled children's needs.

COPING

Antonovsky's argument that sense of coherence affects the appraisal and handling of stress is consistent with the views of the stress and coping literature. According to this literature, the distress caused by potentially stressful situations derives not simply from their objective difficulty or threat but from the person's perceptions both of the situation and of his or her ability to deal with it. Most relevantly, Folkman and Lazarus (1985) have found that the appraisal of a situation as a challenge (rather than as a threat) and of oneself in control mitigate the distress that a stressor arouses. If the sense that the stressor is manageable is understood as roughly parallel to feeling in control of it, these are the same perceptions that mark high sense of coherence.

Antonovsky's contention that sense of coherence affects coping is consistent with the view of the stress and coping literature, which argues that while coping is both conceptually and experimentally independent of personality resources, it may be affected by those resources (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Antonovsky, however, says little if anything about the nature of the coping that can be expected from high and low sense of coherence persons. In fact, the implications of his theory for the choice of coping strategies are not unequivocal.

The theory seems to imply that high sense of coherence individuals will prefer active, problem focused coping, directed to changing or modifying the external stressor, over passive, emotion focused coping, aimed at modifying their emotional responses. An active approach would seem the more likely outcome of high sense of coherence persons; conviction that they can manage their problems. It has also been generally considered the more effective way of coping, in both divorce (Cohen, 1992; Holloway & Machida, 1991) and other situations (i.e., Argyle, 1987; Bryant & Veroff, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, 1985; Lewinson, Redner, & Seeley, 1991; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990). But Antonovsky himself does not make this connection, and the implications of his theory on coping may not be so straightforward.

For one thing, the more recent literature is not so certain that active coping is always more effective than passive. Findings in many

areas (e.g., Strenz & Auerbach, 1988), including divorce (Cohen, 1995; Nelson, 1989), show that in situations where the external stressor cannot be altered, passive coping may have the better emotional outcome. Given the increasing recognition that different modes of coping suit different situations and that what matters is the appropriateness of the mode of coping to the situation at hand, Antonovsky's theory may also imply that high sense of coherence individuals will use the more appropriate means of coping, whether active or passive.

Moreover, the active-passive dichotomy itself is something of an oversimplification, and the more recent literature recognizes other coping categories, such as help seeking, cognitive reframing, and avoidance and denial, to name the most salient. Some, like seeking help, may be classified as active or passive, depending on whether the help sought is instrumental or emotional, and may have positive or negative psychological effects, depending, among other things, on whether its receipt is perceived as welcome social support or a threat to one's competence and self-esteem (Fisher, Nadler, & Witcher-Alagan, 1982; Nadler, 1986, 1991).

Applied to Antonovsky's theory, these complexities may lead to the prediction that whatever coping strategies they choose, high sense of coherence individuals will use them more effectively.

The question that this study addresses is whether the well-being of newly divorced custodial mothers depends primarily on the fact of their divorce or on their internal resources of sense of coherence and ways of coping. A secondary question is whether and how sense of coherence is associated with the ways of coping that persons choose. To answer these questions, we compare the sense of well being, sense of coherence, and ways of coping of married and recently divorced custodial mothers and examine whether and how their well being is affected by these internal resources, both separately and in interaction. While, as indicated above, the relation between coping and post-divorce well being has been explored, that between sense of coherence and post-divorce well being has not. Nor has the impact of the interaction of these resources been studied. The analysis also includes the women's education and economic status, the two background variables that have been most closely linked with post-divorce adjustment and well being.

Newly divorced women were chosen as our focus because the immediate aftermath of divorce is recognized as being an especially stressful period, in which the divorced custodial mother faces a range of pressing problems, including the reality of living on a radically reduced income; the difficulties of disciplining and nurturing her children on her own

when both she and they are suffering from an emotional loss; sudden social isolation with the loss of mutual friends, relations with her in-laws, and, in some cases, complications with her own parents, to name only the most salient problems (Dreman, Orr, & Aldor, 1990; Herz-Brown, 1987).

METHOD

Participants

Seventy-four mothers participated in the study, 47 women who had been divorced two years or less. All were mothers with custody of one or more children up to six years of age. They were selected at random from a list of couples that the court in Tel-Aviv, Israel, had given to court social workers for the purpose of the evaluation which is routinely arrived out in all cases of disputed custody. The control group consisted of 27 married women with at least one child of six years or younger. These women were obtained from the women in the study group, who had been asked to recommended to the researchers a suitable women from her neighborhood.

The groups were thus roughly matched in socio-economic status. The relatively small size of the control group is due to the fact that not all the women in the study sample responded to the researchers' request.

The groups did not differ significantly in age, country of birth, education, self-declared economic status, or number of children. Their average age was 35; and they had an average of 1.74 children. The great majority, 82%, were native-born Israelis; 10% were born in Europe or the United States; 8% were born in Asia or Africa. Twenty-nine percent had elementary school education, 16% secondary school, and 55% post-secondary education; Fifty-six percent rated their economic situation as good or very good, 37% as moderate, and 7% as poor.

Instruments

Sense of Well Being was measured using a 10-item sense of well being questionnaire adapted from Bradburn (1969), who defines well being as the balance of positive and negative emotional experiences and views it as an emotional expression of good adaptation. Half the items are formulated positively (e.g., "gained satisfaction from some-

thing I achieved”), the other half negatively (e.g., “bored”). The subjects were asked to rate how often they experienced each feeling on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 4 (frequently). Well-being was calculated as the sum of the items, with the negative items reversed. The higher the score, the greater the sense of well being.

The original instrument has high test-retest reliability and internal consistency, as does its Hebrew version ($r = .86-.97$). Internal consistency was also high, both in the US $\alpha = .84$ and Israel $\alpha = .88$ to $\alpha = .80$ (i.e., Cohen, 1992).

Sense of coherence was measured using Antonovsky’s (1987) 29-item Sense of Coherence questionnaire. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 7 the extent to which they agreed with each statement. Although the statements tapped the three components of sense of coherence (comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness), following Antonovsky’s recommendation, we measured only the global concept. Strumpfer (1990) points out that the construct sense of coherence is relevant to coping with stress because of its strong theoretical basis and empirical evidence of its validity.

Internal consistency in studies conducted on an Israeli population ranges from 0.84 to 0.91 (e.g., Dangoor, 1993; Drori, Florian, & Kravitz, 1991; Feigin, 1992). In the present study the Cronbach alpha was 0.89.

Coping with stressful family situations was assessed using the Hebrew adaptation of the Family Crises Oriented Personal Scale (McCubbin, Thompson, & McCubbin, 1996). The English version of this scale was found to have good reliability and validity in a number of samples (McCubbin, Thompson, & McCubbin, 1996). The Hebrew version consists of 27 of the original 29 statements. The subjects were asked to rate how well each of the statements described their attitude or behavior in a stressful family situation on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The factor analysis we conducted on the Hebrew version yielded five factors, which explained 63% of the variance. The first factor describes active coping and contains 4 items. Cronbach $\alpha = 0.64$. The second factor describes avoidant coping and includes 4 items: Cronbach $\alpha = 0.59$. The third factor describes coping by requesting advice and emotional support from informal sources: friends, relatives and includes 4 items, Cronbach $\alpha = 0.76$. The fourth factor describes coping by seeking help from formal sources: professionals and includes 4 items, Cronbach $\alpha = 0.75$. The fifth factor describes coping by social activity and includes 5 items indicating the organization of family activities and participation in social activity outside the home, Cronbach $\alpha =$

0.63. Five scores indicating the extent of the use of each of these coping strategies were calculated for each subject.

Procedure

The participants filled out the questionnaires by themselves and then gave them to the students who had solicited their participation. The data were collected from January–April 1995.

RESULTS

In the first part of the analysis, we performed a series of ANOVAS analysis to compare the two study groups in all the study variables: sense of well being, sense of coherence, and coping style. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and F values for each of the measures.

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations and F Values of Sense of Coherence,
Well Being and Coping Style

	<i>Divorce</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>F</i>
Sense of Coherence	4.73 (0.82)	5.04 (0.56)	3.42
Well-Being	2.80 (0.62)	3.10 (0.45)	4.75*
<i>Ways of Coping</i>			
Active Coping	3.49 (0.67)	3.82 (0.72)	3.60*
Avoidance coping	2.30 (0.64)	2.05 (0.75)	2.07
Help-seeking from informal sources	3.10 (0.88)	3.68 (0.79)	6.11*
Help-seeking from formal services	2.02 (0.84)	2.05 (0.84)	0.01
Social activity	3.37 (0.81)	3.30 (0.67)	0.11

* $p < 0.05$.

As can be seen from Table 1, the women from two-parent families had a significantly greater sense of well being than the divorced women and were more inclined to use active coping and to request advice and emotional support from friends and relatives than the married women. The difference between the two groups' sense of coherence did not reach statistical significance, although that of the married women tended to be higher.

Pearsons correlations that were calculated to determine the association between sense of coherence and ways of coping yielded negative relationships between sense of coherence and avoidant coping ($r = -0.54$; $p < 0.001$) and the seeking of help or advice from formal sources ($r = -0.33$; $p < 0.01$), and a positive relationship between sense of coherence and social activity ($r = 0.42$; $p < 0.001$). The higher the sense of coherence the less the use of avoidant coping and seeking help or advice from formal sources, and the greater the tendency to social activity.

In the second part of the analysis, we performed a stepwise hierarchical regression to examine the relative contribution of each of the variables to the subjects' sense of well being. Family structure (married, divorced) was entered in the first step, background variables (economic status, education, age) in the second step, sense of coherence in the third step, and coping styles in the fourth step. Three interactions were entered in the fifth, and last. The first two, which were carried out in order to examine whether coping styles and sense of coherence worked similarly in both family structures, were between family structure and each of the coping styles, and between family structure and sense of coherence. The third was between coping styles and sense of coherence.

The analysis showed that 64% of the variance was explained by the predictor variables ($F(5,54) = 19.48$; $p < 0.001$). Table 2 presents only the variables that contributed significantly to the prediction of the well being.

As can be seen from the table, family structure explained 7% of the variance. Women in two parent families enjoyed a higher sense of well being than those in one parent families. Economic status explained an additional nearly 7% of the variance. The better the self-reported economic status, the higher the sense of well being. Sense of coherence contributed another 43% to the variance. The higher the sense of coherence, the greater the sense of well being. Of the five coping styles, only the avoidant style made a significant contribution: 3.5%. The greater the use of avoidant coping, the lower the sense of well being. The interaction between help-seeking from informal sources and sense of coherence contributed another 4% to the variance. However, a closer

TABLE 2
Stepwise Hierarchical Multiple Regression to Predicts Well-Being

		β	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	R^2 <i>Change</i>
<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Family Structure</i>				
	Family structure	0.26*	3.01	1.43	7.00
<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Background variables</i>				
	Family structure	0.22	2.49	1.41	
	Economic situation	0.27*	2.00	0.93	6.90
<i>Step 3</i>	<i>Personal Resources</i>				
	Family structure	0.11	1.26	1.02	
	Economic situation	-0.06	-0.42	0.74	
	Sense of Coherence	0.74***	0.19	0.03	42.60
<i>Step 4</i>	<i>Coping style</i>				
	Family structure	0.09	1.02	1.00	
	Economic situation	-0.03	-0.20	0.72	
	Sense of Coherence	0.61***	0.16	0.03	
	Avoidance coping	-0.22	-1.75	0.81	3.50
<i>Step 5</i>	<i>Interaction</i>				
	Family structure	0.12	1.36	0.97	
	Economic situation	-0.03	-0.23	0.69	
	Sense of Coherence	0.69***	0.18	0.03	
	Avoidance coping	-0.12	-0.96	0.84	
	Help-seeking informal sources \times Sense of Coherence	0.22*	0.98	0.39	4.00
Percent of explained variables					64%

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

look at the final step of the equation indicates that when all of the variables were added, the only ones that made a significant contribution were sense of coherence and the interaction between sense of coherence and help-seeking from informal sources.

To understand the interaction, the relationship between well being and requesting advice or emotional support from friends and relatives was computed separately for low and high sense of coherence subjects. The analysis showed that requesting advice or emotional support from

friends and relatives was not related to sense of well being among low sense of coherence women ($r = 0.04$), but positively associated with it among those with high sense of coherence ($r = 0.27$). More specifically, a positive association was found between the use of informal sources of help and well being among high sense of coherence mothers.

All in all, in both groups of woman, the only variable that continued to contribute to sense of coherence when all the variables were entered into the equation was sense of coherence. It contributed on its own to the well being of both groups of women. In addition, among the high sense of coherence women in both groups, help-seeking from informal sources also contributed to well being.

DISCUSSION

This two main findings of this study are (1) that while divorced and married mothers do not differ in sense of coherence, married mothers have a greater sense of well being and employ different coping strategies than divorced mothers; and (2) that, these differences notwithstanding, well being was predicted more by sense of coherence and the interaction of sense of coherence with coping strategies than by family structure.

Married Mothers versus Newly Divorced Mothers

The difference in the two groups' sense of well being is not surprising in light of the "intense situational crisis" which newly divorced women face (Herz-Brown, 1987). In Israel, the situational crisis may be intensified by the fact that family life still plays a major role in Israeli society (Albeck, 1990; Katz & Peres, 1995; Sharlin, 1992). It should, however, be kept in mind that even if newly divorced mothers enjoy less well being than their married counterparts, they may well be better off emotionally than they were in an unhappy marriage.

The differences in the two groups' coping strategies also seem to reflect the difference in their situations. The divorced women used less active coping and were less inclined to request advice and emotional support from friends and relatives than their married counterparts. The active coping factor in this study included not only the means used to solve problems but also the appraisal that the problems were solvable and that the respondent had the ability to solve them. The reduced use of active coping in the short term aftermath of the divorce may thus

reflect the well-known phenomena of loss of self confidence following the breakup of marriage (Booth & Amato, 1992; Hetherington, 1993) and feelings of being overwhelmed by the many new tasks at hand (Cohen, 1995). It may also be that the crisis depleted the divorcees' strength and left them women less able to cope actively.

The divorced mothers' lesser reliance on family and friends for advice and emotional support probably reflects their not having a husband as companion and confidant (Gray, Kooperman, & Hunt, 1991), the falling away of mutual friends (Cohen, 1992; Cohen & Loewenberg, 1994; Malo, 1994), and the estrangement from both in-laws and own family that often follows upon divorce (Cohen & Loewenberg, 1994). Although one's own family is often a major source of social support in divorce (Emery, 1994; Huddleston & Hawkings, 1993; Ricard, Lee, & Hunsley, 1997), there are also cases where personal confusion, apprehension of criticism from one's family of origin, and wariness of losing autonomy by relying on parents and siblings may lead newly divorced mothers to distance themselves (Kuntz & Kuntz, 1995).

Sense of Coherence and Ways of Coping

Findings showed that the women's sense of coherence was related to their ways of coping. Whether married or newly divorced, mothers with higher sense of coherence made less use of avoidant coping, sought less help or advice from professional, religious, and community sources, and had a greater tendency to engage in social activity. These differences support both Antonovsky's (1987) and Folkman and Lazarus' (1985) claims that people's appraisal of their inner resources influences their choice of coping strategies, and, more specifically, Antonovsky's view of sense of coherence is an inner resource in this decision. Since avoidant coping was negatively associated with well being, the findings also suggest that high sense of coherence persons may choose more effective means of coping, or at least eschew ineffective means.

Contributions to Well-Being

The findings show that the only variable to make a stable contribution to the well being of the women when all the variables were taken into account was sense of coherence. Among both married and divorced women, the greater the sense of coherence, the greater the woman's well being. Moreover, high sense of coherence women derived greater well being from requesting advice and emotional support from informal

sources (friends and relatives) than the low sense of coherence women who used this way of coping.

Conversely, the contribution of family structure became non-significant when the women's economic status was added to the analysis, and the contribution of their economic status lost its significance when sense of coherence was added to the analysis. That is, although the married mothers enjoyed greater well-being than the divorced mothers, the difference probably stemmed from their better economic status. And although those who were better off economically experienced greater well-being than their less well-off sisters, the difference may be attributed to the documented association between good economic status and a high sense of coherence (Drori, Florian, & Kravitz, 1991). Along similar lines, avoidance coping contributed to less well-being among both the married and divorced women, but only until it was subsumed by the interactions between sense of coherence and help seeking from informal sources.

These findings can be understood in either of two ways. One is to view the findings as consistent with previous studies of sense of coherence. This interpretation supports Antonovsky's contention that high sense of coherence persons fare better emotionally and are less prone to turning tension into stress, as well as his claim that sense of coherence is a personality orientation that is well established by adulthood and rarely changes substantially thereafter. From this perspective, the independent contribution of sense of coherence to the women's well-being suggests that the inner resource of a strong sense of coherence mitigates the stress of the divorce crisis.

Similarly, the finding that high sense of coherence women derived greater well-being from seeking support from informal sources than their low sense of coherence peers may be seen as consistent with the contention that sense of coherence plays a stress buffering role (Lavee, McCubbin, & Olson, 1987). In this interpretation, the finding suggests that sense of coherence enables persons to better deal with the potentially negative emotional effects of seeking and receiving informal help (Dangoor, 1993; Fisher et al., 1982; Nadler, 1986, 1991), while reaping its benefits. Among other things, it raises the possibility that high sense of coherence women may be able to avoid the stress that can be induced by involvement with the extended family.

All in all, in this interpretation the findings show that while the well-being of newly divorced mothers is lower than that of their married counterparts, their well-being is predicted more by their inner resources than their family structure.

The other interpretation is that the findings stem from the overlap which may exist between sense of coherence and well being (Drori, Florian, & Kravitz, 1991; Smith & Wallson, 1992). Such an overlap would be consistent with the very large contribution (43%) that sense of coherence made to the mothers' well being, as well as with the fact that it virtually swallowed up the contributions the other variables made on their own.

Which of these interpretations is more correct, and to what degree, cannot be determined given the present state of our knowledge.

LIMITATIONS, CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The major limitation of this study is that it was conducted on a small, convenience sample, which raises questions about the generalizability of the findings and the conclusions drawn from them. Although caution is thus required in interpreting the findings, the fact that they are highly consistent with the literature both on divorce and on sense of coherence gives us reason to believe that they reflect patterns that exist beyond the sample.

From a clinical perspective, the finding that divorcees enjoy less well being than married women suggests that even though divorce has become highly normative in western society, divorcees should be treated as a population at risk. The centrality of sense of coherence to the well being of both the married and divorced women suggests that attention should be paid to this factor in education and clinical work, and that, where possible, efforts should be made to bolster not only divorcees' sense of coherence, but that of all individuals.

Further study is recommended. To begin with, to determine the generalizability of the findings, we recommend examining the relationship between sense of coherence, coping, and well-being on larger, more representative samples of both men and women from different social classes and economic situations and in different family structures. We also recommend further study to ascertain precisely how sense of coherence contributes to well being, as well as to the choice and effectiveness of coping strategies.

Further study is also needed on sense of coherence. Above all, the possible overlap between sense of coherence, which is conceived of as a stable personality trait, and well being, which is conceived of as more of a fluctuating, situation dependent construct, requires exploration.

In part, such exploration could proceed using longitudinal studies to address the still unanswered question of whether sense of coherence changes over time and situation.

Finally, efforts should also be made to avoid the possible distortions, common in cross-sectional divorce studies, derived from comparing women who are happy enough to stay married with women who were probably unhappy in their marriages to begin with. To properly address the question of the impact of divorce on well being and coping strategies, before/after studies of the same women are necessary.

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