

## Foreword

There is growing evidence that young people are experiencing stress as never before. Australian youth have called for prevention rather than intervention as they tell us to forget the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff ... - teach us how to keep from falling off it .

It is recognised that children and adolescents face many stresses in their lives including family and relationship conflict and academic and social pressures at school. Research suggests inadequate responses to coping with stress in children of school age contributes to a range of psychosocial problems including poor academic performance, health problems, anxiety, depression, suicide, eating disorders and violence. Yet many children who face stresses do not develop negative symptoms or ill-health. It is this ability to cope, which allows these children to continue and perform, despite adversity. They can be described as resilient and have the ability to recover and move on, or to avoid self destruction in the face of difficult or devastating events. Increasingly schools are playing a role in the development of psychosocial competence in children and adolescents. The emphasis on health and well-being is timely.

This volume brings together theory, measurement and intervention research which focuses on the health and well-being of young people, particularly in the school setting. Some studies are empirical, others provide a review of the current literature - all have implications for practice. Collectively the papers highlight that resilience can be developed and key factors are family connectedness and school connectedness.

The collection of papers has been organised into two sections to aid the reader. Section 1 is made up of theoretical and research papers which have clear implications for practitioners. Section 2 focuses more specifically on practice. Some papers, such as Fuller, McGraw and Goodyear's (*Bungy-jumping through life: What young people say promotes well-being and resilience*) straddle both sections, but a decision has been made according to where the major emphasis lies. Overall this Special Issue provides readers with the opportunity to become informed on cutting edge research and practice in the area of well-being and adaptation within Australia and the international community.

The first chapter by Frydenberg (*Health, well-being and coping*) provides an overview of current theory and research in the area of coping. It highlights some recent research findings. The theme of coping is taken up again in the following paper by Frydenberg and Lewis (*Academic and general well-being*) and reports eleven studies to illustrate the relationship between general and academic well-being and coping.

Cunningham and Walker (*Screening for at-risk youth*) affirm the utility and relative ease with which we can identify young people at risk of depression through assessing their coping skills. That is, by identifying, in a non intrusive way, young people who use few productive coping strategies and many non-productive coping strategies it is possible to identify those who are depressed. Most importantly the research provides support for teaching young people what not to do as much as what to do in the coping domain.

Moore (*Social Anxiety: Predictors and outcomes*) demonstrates that when adolescents are asked about their experiences when parented their responses provide clear indications that parental style such as, for example, an over protective and under-caring father, is associated with social anxiety outcomes in early adulthood. When working with young people, especially those who are socially anxious, it is helpful to draw on information about family life and take into account the important part that siblings, peers and teachers play.

Moore (*Stress and coping approach to adolescent development*) construes sexual development as a stressor that needs to be coped with. This approach enables her to explore the various strategies that assist young people to make this transition to adulthood with relative ease. The importance of family connectedness and school connectedness in contributing to healthier outcomes is highlighted both in Moore's paper and later in Fuller, McGraw and Goodyear's paper, *Bungy-jumping through life: What young people say promotes well-being and resilience*.

With the concern about young people's emotional health the cognitive experiential self theory (CEST) of Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj and Heier (1996) holds promise. These authors identify two modes of information processing used by young people, namely intuitive-experiential and analytic-rational. Cerni's study (*The relationship of analytical-rational and intuitive-experiential information processing styles with adolescent scholastic and coping ability*) which tests these two modes of information processing in adolescent boys, he found that it is the analytic-rational which is related to effective learning and coping. There are

indications that schools should focus on developing the analytic-rational skills of students in order to enhance students' scholastic and coping skills. However, caution in generalising beyond the population tested needs to be exercised since the students in this study were drawn from a high SES private boys' school.

Fanshaw and Burnett in their paper (*Students' and teachers' perceptions of adolescents' problems and coping strategies*) demonstrate the discrepancy that exists between teachers' perceptions of students' concerns and their coping. This point is highlighted by the fact that students rated teaching methods one of four concerns whilst their teachers thought that students used emotional discharge and seeking diversions along with drugs to cope. Students saw themselves as focusing on the positive and improving relationships more than did their teachers.

Shute (*Childhood chronic illness and the school*) addresses the needs of a particular group of young people, those living with a chronic disease and requiring special attention in the school setting. Often teachers are unaware of students' health-related problems. Medical staff do not as a matter of practice inform teachers, and while parents may inform somebody sometimes, the information does not always reach teachers. The paper stresses the need for the provision of helpful information regarding a pupil's condition to be conveyed to teachers and the importance of teachers being sensitivity to individual differences. A systemic analysis, both for understanding the situation and for assisting with intervention, is suggested. Too often the child with chronic illness is the

unit of analysis and intervention. The theme of a multi-systemic problem solving approach for intervention is picked up again by Rollin and Prevatt (*Interventions for adolescents*) when they describe two interventions, one for chronically ill adolescents, and one for young people at risk of becoming violent.

Given the relationship of peer attributional style to pre-adolescent attributions, the interventions that involve peers, for example, by focusing on class groups (see also Brandon, Cunningham and Frydenberg's *Bright Ideas* program and Hunter and Roberts, *Peer effects in the development of attributional style in children*) provide additional benefit by setting up contexts in which peers can provide support for each other. This is also noted by Rollin and Prevatt. In their multi-systemic intervention with the group of chronically ill adolescents and those at risk of becoming violent. The programs provide benefits additional to that received by individuals by developing the potential for cohorts or peers to impact each other's attributional style. Hunter and Roberts' research supports the relationship between depression and attributional style and leads them to call for a program of attributional style training in children who are at risk for depression. Brandon, Cunningham and Frydenberg (*Bright Ideas: A school-based program teaching optimistic thinking skills in pre-adolescents*) report some promising findings following the introduction of one such program into primary schools.

People like to have a voice and this point is made by two papers highlighting the perceptions of young people and their teachers regarding their concerns and coping, and also by the negotiation

model suggested for keeping young people from skipping class (see Khaminwa, Fallis & Opatow's *Cutting Class in High School Counsellor and Student Interactions and Negotiations*).

Fuller, McGraw and Goodyear (*Bungy-jumping through life: What young people say promotes well-being and resilience*) use bungy-jumping as a metaphor for discussion on resilience and how resilience is linked to the prevention of suicide, drug abuse and violence. By asking young people what they perceive as resilience the study provides helpful information to facilitate the development of these qualities in young people. Collectively these studies highlight the need to seek data and input from participants and those with whom young people interact so that interventions can be collaboratively developed.

Three papers from the United States of America report programs that should be of value to Australian practitioners. Collectively they demonstrate the fact that the role of the guidance counsellor in the United States is not too different from that in Australia. The first by Rollin and Prevatt reported on a re-entry program for chronically ill adolescents and also on a program designed to prevent violence among young people at risk. The second, Christenson, Thurlow and Evelo (*Promoting student engagement in the school using the Check and Connect model*) describes a program designed for young people at risk of dropping out of school, who are often the casualties of our education system. The programs are multi-systemic interventions utilise a problem-solving approach. While the Rollin and Prevatt program focuses on individuals solving their own problems Christenson, Thurlow and Evelo's stu-

dents benefit from the relationship with a monitor.

The third paper from the USA, Khaminwa, Fallis and Opotow (*Cutting class in high school: Counsellor and student interactions and negotiations*) points out the high cost of student absenteeism both for the student and the community. They emphasise that constructive outcomes are achieved by engaging in constructive processes. Their approach is proactive rather than reactive, using a negotiation and problem skills framework to diminish the incidence of skipping class. This paper along with programs like *Bright Ideas* provides us with incentives to use both well known strategies and to try new approaches to minimise young people's risk of failure and dropping out of school.

There are many ways to maximise health and well-being in young people and the papers in this volume should go a long way to assist. The reader is encouraged to read further as relevant books are published. Three such publications are reviewed in this issue.

It has been both a pleasure and a privilege for me to be given this opportunity to put together this Special Issue of the Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling on the health and well-being of young people. The 14 papers on contemporary issues and practice from the United States and Australia should be of great interest and value to Australian practitioners.

I was assisted in the task of reviewing of manuscripts by Professor Susan Moore, Drs Daryl Greaves, Ramon Lewis, Charles Poole and Ivan Watson. The outstanding editorial assistance

provided by Carole Hooper made the task possible. The fact that AGCA has supported the publication of such a "bumper" issue is a credit to the Association and its journal editor, Ivan Watson. He made the task easy and enjoyable in every way.

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**Reference:**

Epstein, S., Pacini, R., Denes-Raj, V. & Heier, H. (1996). Individual differences in intuitive-experiential and analytic-rational thinking styles. *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology*, 71, 390-405.