



Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law : the effects of proximity on conflict and stress
by Deane Cowan

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Home Economics
Montana State University
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Abstract:

This study was part of a Regional Agricultural Experimental Station project involving nine western states. The data reported in this study are a subset of the Montana data. The data focus specifically on mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships within two-generation farm or ranch families. Sources of conflict and strategies the two generations of women use to cope with this conflict were identified. The study also explored whether living and working in close proximity increased stress of and between these two women. Data were collected from 44 mothers-in-law, and 55 daughters-in-law from two-generation farm or ranch families. The study revealed that for most mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law their relationships did not constitute a problem. However, about 40% of the daughters-in-law were having some problems. The study also revealed that proximity in living and working arrangements actually appears to have little effect on the stress levels of the two generations of women. Even though the majority of women reported that their relationships were not problematic, it is important for professionals to be aware that some families are having difficulties. Knowledge about sources of conflict and successful conflict resolution strategies should be helpful to counselors, the clergy, physicians, mental health personnel, and extension agents as they prescribe treatment and plan programs to alleviate stress in rural families.

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ABSTRACT

This study was part of a Regional Agricultural Experimental Station project involving nine western states. The data reported in this study are a subset of the Montana data. The data focus specifically on mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships within two-generation farm or ranch families. Sources of conflict and strategies the two generations of women use to cope with this conflict were identified. The study also explored whether living and working in close proximity increased stress of and between these two women. Data were collected from 44 mothers-in-law, and 55 daughters-in-law from two-generation farm or ranch families. The study revealed that for most mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law their relationships did not constitute a problem. However, about 40% of the daughters-in-law were having some problems. The study also revealed that proximity in living and working arrangements actually appears to have little effect on the stress levels of the two generations of women. Even though the majority of women reported that their relationships were not problematic, it is important for professionals to be aware that some families are having difficulties. Knowledge about sources of conflict and successful conflict resolution strategies should be helpful to counselors, the clergy, physicians, mental health personnel, and extension agents as they prescribe treatment and plan programs to alleviate stress in rural families.

INTRODUCTION

Over 90% of American businesses are family owned (Rosenblatt, 1985) and most parents want to pass them on to their children (Bratton and Berkowitz, 1976; Hedlund and Berkowitz, 1979). Farm and ranch parents are no exception. The actual number of Montana farm/ranch operations that have been passed from generation to generation is not known, but many parents probably pass land, buildings, and machinery on in some fashion---as gifts, arranging purchases with low interest and/or lenient terms, etc. Reasons for such parental arrangements include keeping the farm in the family, keeping their adult children near them, and helping the adult children enter farming since the high entry cost makes it difficult for most young adult farm/ranch children to purchase their own operation.

Little is known about multi-generational farm/ranch operations, but there is a high probability that these families have close kinship networks. It is likely that in a typical two-generation farm family the father and son work together in some capacity, and the two families live in close proximity. This physical proximity, while contributing to the efficiency of the farm/ranch operation, may result in conflict and/or stress between father and son

and between mother and daughter-in-law. The success of today's multi-generation farm/ranch operation depends upon more than the weather, commodity prices, and its debt/asset ratio. It also depends upon good management practices (Marten, 1985). How well the father and son work together affects their management.

The relationship between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law probably also influences the operation of the unit. The daughter-in-law's feelings of acceptance; her perception of how well she, her husband and her children are treated; and her enjoyment of farm/ranch life may contribute not only to the smooth running of the operation, but also to the eventual success of an intergenerational transfer of the operation. In contrast, her unhappiness may cause her husband to move off the farm.

Although very little is known about conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, it is probable that a number of factors have potential for producing conflict between them. For example, based on a review of the literature, Trachta, Weigel, and Abbott (1984) hypothesize that a major source of conflict arises out of the matter of "who owns what". The what used here refers to possessions, territory, time and children. Possessions are the material objects around the home and farm such as the home itself, machinery, etc. Territory is space and goes beyond the strictly material aspect of possessions. Territory may

include land owned individually by father or son, the land where the separate family homes are located, or the space each family considers necessary for its own well-being. Time is a resource that can be apportioned among work, leisure, and other pursuits (Trachta et al., 1984).

There are three ways these resources can be owned: yours (unavailable to me); mine (exclusively); and ours (shared). Unless families involved in a farm/ranch operation establish rules for who owns what, what can be borrowed, and what people would rather not share, major conflicts may arise (Trachta et al., 1984). In addition, if the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law have different philosophies of child-rearing, serious conflict may result if the mother-in-law forces her ideas upon her daughter-in-law (Fischer, 1983).

Purpose of the Study

There has been little research on conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in general and the stress such conflict may produce. There is virtually no such research on farm/ranch families. This research will study the relationship between the mother-in-law and her daughter(s)-in-law, identifying sources of conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law and strategies used to cope with this conflict. In addition, the paper will explore whether or not living in close proximity increases conflict

and stress between these two individuals and the two generations in general.

Definition of Terms

The following is a definition of the terms that are used specifically in this paper.

- 1) Interference--the act of interposing in a way that hinders or impedes (Websters Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1983). In this study, interference will be used to describe how mothers-in-law may hinder or impede the lives of their daughters-in-law.
- 2) Operations--performance of a practical work or of something involving the practical application of principles or processes (Websters Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1983). In this research, operations means the collective activities of farm/ranch families in the production of agricultural products.
- 3) Perceived stress--the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful (Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein, 1983).
- 4) Proximity--refers to how close the two families live to each other.
- 5) Stress--tension resulting from the behavioral and/or cognitive change required to adapt to stressors, ie. events.

- 6) Two generation stress--stress between two-generation farm/ranch families (mother and father and son and daughter-in-law).

Assumptions

Based on Duvall's (1954) model, it can be assumed that the daughter-in-law is a newcomer into an already intact farm/ranch operation. It is she who will make adjustments in order to get along within the already established family system.

Limitations

- 1) In this study only intact two generation farm/ranch families will be included. Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law in families where the father was deceased or for some reason no longer living with the family will not be considered. This limits the generalizability of the data.
- 2) The proximity measure has unequal intervals which limits the kinds of statistical analysis one can use. The data are nominal and thus only non-parametric statistics can be used, eliminating the more powerful parametric statistics.

Need for the Study

Although in-law relationship problems are as old as human kind, there are very few empirical studies of these relationships. Studies that involve mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflicts are especially rare, and studies

of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law within an intergenerational farm family are not found in the research literature.

Problems which are specific to two generation farm/ranch families that reside and work in close proximity are likely to be exacerbated in families in which the son's role within the operation is not clearly defined and where the mother-in-law interferes. These factors may affect marital satisfaction of the son and daughter-in-law, stress levels between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and conflict between the generations. These problems may also affect marital satisfaction of the son and daughter-in-law, stress levels between mother and daughter-in-law and conflict between the generations. Such stress is likely to interfere with good ranch management which in turn affects farm/ranch income.

The findings will enable farm/ranch families to learn more about themselves and the inherent problems of intergenerational farm/ranch operations. The research may also aid family life educators and therapists to better understand the interactions between farm/ranch mothers and daughters-in-law. Such information may be useful as they plan appropriate educational programs and treatment for farm/ranch families.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Mother-in-law/daughter-in-law conflict is discussed in the popular literature, but very few empirical studies have appeared in research journals. No studies of intergenerational farm families focusing on the problems arising from close living, shared labor, and constant interaction between families were located. Only a few in-law studies were identified. Thus, the following review draws heavily upon these few research articles and one extension publication.

Several topic areas within the literature are relevant to this study. These are in-law relationships in general, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships specifically, and conflicts that may arise within the in-law family structure.

In-Law Relationships

In-law problems include not only problems the couple has with their in-laws, but also the couple's conflicts between themselves over in-laws. According to Kieren, Henton, and Marotz's (1975) review of the literature, in most cases of marital conflict both husbands and wives believe that the husband's kin are more frequently involved in the conflict than are the wife's kin. This is probably even more likely in father/son farm operations where

paternal family members interact with each other on a daily basis.

In North America women seem to feel stronger emotional bonds with kin than men, and thus are usually the ones who assume responsibility for keeping in touch with relatives. Komarovsky (1964) describes women as kinkeepers in charge of keeping and maintaining ties with the relations on both sides. Thus, daughters-in-law probably play a key role in weaving the social network fabric of farm communities since it appears that more sons than daughters are farming with their parents. The daughter-in-law may extend her husband's social support network by incorporating her own, especially if her family lives in the same community. If she is not from a farming background and does not like farm/ranch life, or her relatives live in distant places, or if she is unhappy with her in-law relationships, she may urge her husband to find other employment.

Duvall's (1954) research indicates that every married couple belongs to three different families. The first affiliation is with the new family that the couple begins together, the family of procreation. At the same time, the couple also belongs to both his family of origin and to hers. Duvall suggests that any married couple bases its living arrangements on an elemental triangle and unless a beginning family can form a cohesive family unit that is stronger than the one which ties either of the couple to

their parental family, the new family will feel threatened. In order to establish a strong family unit, a newly married couple must realign their loyalties such that our family comes before either yours or mine. The figures on the following page illustrate Duvall's elemental triangle graphically. (See Figure 1, 2, and 3 taken from Duvall, 1954, p. 279).

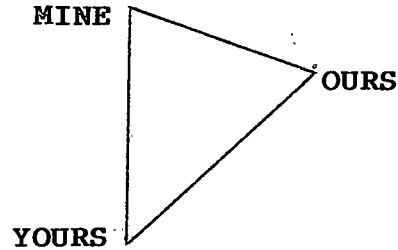
In Figure 1, "YOU" have in-law trouble because "MY" family is too close. Whatever the reasons may be, the forces pulling me toward loyalty to "MY" home are too strong, and the development of "OUR" common sense of identity is delayed or weakened.

In Figure 2, "YOUR" family is too close, and so "I" have in-law trouble. Because "YOU" are bound so tightly to "YOUR" family, I am pulled away from mine and ours, and we make little progress in establishing "OURS".

In Figure 3 we are most loyal to "OUR" family because we are not threatened by the ties that bind us to "YOUR" family nor by the bonds uniting us to "MY" family. The new couple is able to build a common identification that pulls them away together into a unit of their own. When this type of autonomy is established, a married couple can become a member of both the husband's and the wife's family without the stress of in-law problems (Duvall, 1954).

Figure 1. Family Closeness: my family too close.

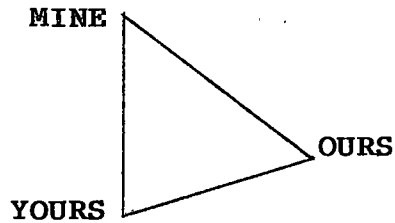
"MY" family too close



"YOU" have in-law trouble

Figure 2. Family Closeness: your family too close.

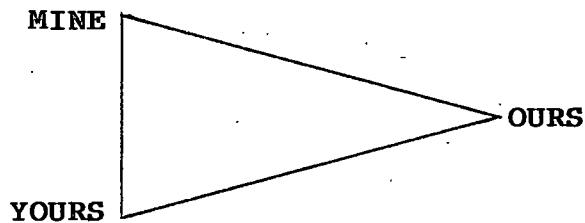
"YOUR" family too close



"I" have in-law trouble

Figure 3. Family Closeness: our family comes first.

"OUR" family comes first



No in-law trouble

Any intrusion or threat from either family may be considered an in-law problem. The autonomy of the married pair is imperative for cohesion to develop and any conflicting force emanating from either parental home that imperils the independence of the new pair may be construed as in-law difficulty. Duvall's model suggests that the greater the autonomy of the married adult children and the fewer the conflicts between the parents and the adult children, the more cohesive the marriage of the adult children.

The establishment of autonomy by a young couple may be threatened if any relative by marriage or by blood interferes (Duvall, 1954). According to Duvall's research only a few men report in-law difficulty. In general, more women than men report difficulty with in-laws and more female than male in-laws are found troublesome both among distant and close relatives (Duvall, 1954; Kirkpatrick, 1963; Komarovsky, 1964; Leslie, 1976).

Adult children criticize member's of the parent's generation more often than the young people are criticized by the older generation (Duvall, 1954). Perhaps this is due to the urgency of the establishment of autonomy among young adults (Duvall, 1954). Establishing autonomy may be especially hard for young adults who live and work near the older generation as is often the case for children of farmers/ranchers.

In Duvall's (1954) study the major criticisms of in-laws were meddlesomeness, interference and domination. Twenty percent of all complaints were of these types. Mother-in-law and sister-in-law were mentioned most often as being the most difficult relative.

Adult children also indicated that becoming accepted as a member of the spouse's family is sometimes a problem (Duvall, 1954). This data may be of importance for farm/ranch families. If families are to live and work in close proximity, they also interact closely. With this kind of closeness, parental acceptance of a son's wife would seem to be a necessity if the family is to get along together.

Children-in-law often criticize their parent's-in-law as being old-fashioned, disagreeing on traditions, resisting change, and being uncongenial (Duvall, 1954). This may be due in part to the struggle for autonomy by the young adults. They are struggling to establish their own way of life and may feel the only way to accomplish this is to repudiate the old ways to which their parents and parents-in-law cling (Duvall, 1954). Parents, on the other hand, do not seem to complain that their children are too modern, but seem to wish their adult children would accept them as they are without negatively labeling them (Duvall, 1954).

In summary, in-law relationships seem to be problematic and a young couple just entering the marital

relationship may have its new relationship threatened if the couple lives near their in-laws. According to Duvall, the establishment of autonomy is essential if the new couple is to build a stable family relationship of its own. Interference from any relative may threaten this autonomy. It is probable that any young couple living and working in close proximity to in-laws, as is often the case in two generation farm/ranch families, will experience some in-law interference which may cause conflict between the generations. If this conflict is not resolved, stress will result.

Mother-in-law/Daughter-in-law Relationships

Duvall (1954) found that mothers-in-law were the most difficult in-law by a wide margin. Forty nine and a half percent of the respondents in Duvall's study mentioned mother-in-law as the most difficult relative. Twenty eight per cent specifically complained of meddlesomeness. Duvall says, "It is quite possible that, given an opportunity to react negatively to their relatives by marriage as the people in this phase of the study were-- most persons will name the mother-in-law as most difficult because it is she in our society who may be criticized without censure, in fact even with a certain expectation" (Duvall, 1954, p. 190).

The intimate bond that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law share with the son/husband is often the only tie

between them. Fischer's (1983) research indicates that when a child is born to the daughter-in-law the relationship strain between mother and daughter-in-law increases. The daughter-in-law tends to turn towards her own mother for help after the birth of a child rather than toward her mother-in-law who may see herself as the maternal figure in her daughter-in-law's life. Because the daughter differentiates between her own mother and her mother-in-law, greater ambiguity in the interpersonal boundaries of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law may result (Fischer, 1983).

Fischer's research examines how three dimensions of role relationships (relational strain, interpersonal boundaries, and interactive involvement) are affected at the birth of a child to the son and daughter-in-law. Fischer refers to relational strain as the extent to which two people in a relationship do not relate smoothly to one another. Interpersonal boundaries describe the intimacy/formality dimension of a relationship. Interactive involvement describes what individuals may do with and for each other.

Fischer concluded from her study that the birth of a child and the orientation of both generations around that child brings more strain to the relationship of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, causes interpersonal boundaries between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law to

become more ambiguous, and makes the in-law relationship more problematic as the daughter's interactive involvement with her mother-in-law increases.

Fischer found that daughters-in-law are irritated more often at the behavior of their mothers-in-law than are mothers-in-law with the behavior of their daughters-in-law. The greatest source of irritation with mothers-in-law is a result of friction over issues involving children. If a mother-in-law complains about the manner in which her daughter-in-law is raising her child (too much spanking, and too much time spent away from children is a common complaint of mothers-in-law about daughters-in-law) the mother-in-law may be seen as interfering with the daughter-in-law's right to manage her own child. These complaints may be seen by the daughters-in-law as attempts to subvert child management practices (Fischer, 1983).

In summary, the literature review supports the conclusion that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law have conflicts and that conflicts may escalate when a child is born to the daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law's interference in her daughter-in-law's life at this time may result in a strain in the relationship between the two. It seems likely that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who live and work in close proximity will experience more conflict than those who live apart and the conflict will increase as children are born to the younger generation.

Family Conflict

Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary (1983) first definition of conflict is as a competitive or opposing action of incompatibles: antagonistic state or action (as of divergent ideas, interests, or persons). The second definition is "mental" struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes or external or internal demands. Trachta, Weigel, and Abbott (1984) define conflict in a two generational farm family as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power or resources. When two people have different values or needs, and it appears that satisfying one person's needs will interfere with the needs of the other, conflict may arise (Trachta et al., 1984).

Beavers (1977) argues that different values or needs of family members are inevitable sources of conflict. Beavers argues that all living systems occupy geographical space, and there are conflicting demands within the system for such space. This is an indicator that intergenerational farm/ranch families who are living near each other may experience more conflict than those who live some distance apart.

Power or control issues may cause conflicts in two generation farm families (Trachta et al., 1984). According to Trachta et al., (1984), the older generation may retain authority or refuse to relinquish authority to the son.

The son may then find himself in a situation of being a hired hand instead of a trusted partner. Based on her review of the literature, Marotz-Baden (1985) suggests that if the son is young, the father may fear that he is too inexperienced to make important decisions alone. A son under such rigid control may decide to leave the farm/ranch operation.

Trachta et al., (1984) suggest that decision making is the major component of power or control. Who makes the decision regarding financial investments and the selling of crops and livestock can create conflict because one generation may be more conservative than the other generation. Marotz-Baden (1985) suggests that another example of control occurs when the person who has the needed information to make decisions doesn't have the power to make the decisions, but is subsequently blamed if the decisions someone else has made turn out to be wrong.

Another source of conflict may be the transfer of property. The understanding each family member has of the transfer arrangements and of the fairness of the transaction may contribute to conflict or feelings of hostility (Marotz-Baden, 1985). The division of farm/ranch income is a primary transfer issue. Unless this issue is resolved so that each family member feels that he/she is getting a fair share, conflict will probably result (Marotz-Baden, 1985).

Conflicts are not always negative. They may have a positive effect on the family. Conflicts may increase motivation to do well; they may lead to positive changes; and disagreement may cause a decision to be thought through more carefully (Trachta et al., 1984). An important thing to remember about conflict is that it can provide new directions and opportunities (Trachta et al., 1984).

It is probable that each person in a family will behave differently when dealing with conflict and may even behave differently with each person with whom they are in conflict (Trachta et al., 1984). Problem solving is an effective way of solving conflict in two generation farm/ranch families (Marotz-Baden, 1985). Using this method, parties in the conflict collaborate in solving conflict (Trachta et al., 1984). Collaboration or working jointly with others helps promote an understanding of everyone's perspective, enhances communication, cooperation, and interdependence, and instills a feeling of integrity, trust, and mutual support (Trachta et al., 1984). In order to become proficient at collaborating, a family needs practice. An underlying feeling of respect, caring, forgiveness, and goodwill is necessary (Trachta et al., 1984).

Thus many factors contribute to conflict experienced by the older and younger generations in intergenerational farm/ranch families. Among these conflicts are different

values and needs, power or control issues, decision making, and transfer of property. These conflicts can have positive or negative effects on family members and a person may behave differently with each person with whom s/he is in conflict. The most effective ways of solving conflict seems to be the use of problem solving and collaboration (Trachta et al., 1984)

Summary and Hypotheses

Today's economy forces farmers/ranchers and their adult children to become educated managers in order to survive on the land (Palmer, ed., 1984). Since intergenerational farm/ranch families often live and work in close proximity, cooperation and sharing are key components of good management.

Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are integral parts of multi-generational farm/ranch families. Based on Duvall's (1954) findings it can be argued that the stability of their relationship with each other affects the farm/ranch operation. If the daughter-in-law's perception of the relationship with her mother-in-law is positive, she will probably encourage her husband to stay on the land. If the relationship is negative, she may encourage her husband to find employment away from the farm/ranch.

This study will provide descriptive and correlational data regarding the sources of conflict and stress between

mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in two generational farm/ranch families and will attempt to identify the strategies they use to resolve conflict and reduce stress. The descriptive portion of this research is important because there has been so little research on multi-generation farm/ranch families.

Duvall's (1954) research suggests that interference by the mother-in-law will negatively affect the marital relations of the daughter-in-law and her husband. It also seems plausible that certain kinds of interference would affect the daughter-in-law's perception of conflict between the two generations and her own stress level. The following hypotheses were formulated to test these assumptions:

1. The closer together the two families live, the greater the stress between the younger and the older generations of women.
2. The closer together the two families live, the higher the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law perceived stress levels.
3. The more disturbing the differences in child rearing practices between the two generations are to the daughter-in-law, the greater the daughter-in-law's stress level.
4. The less the daughter-in-law's perception of interference from the mother-in-law in her and

her husband's life, the greater the daughter-in-law's marital satisfaction.

5. The less the daughter-in-law's perception of interference from the mother-in-law in her and her husband's lives, the less her perception of stress between the older and younger generations.

METHOD

Sample Selection

This study is part of a Regional Agriculture Experimental Station project involving nine western states (California, Arizona, Utah, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, Oregon, Nevada, Washington). The Montana project is investigating how rural kinship systems are mitigating the effect of economic stressors on farm/ranch families specifically as these families transfer assets across generations; the stressors inherent in intergenerational transfer of farm land; and the strategies Montana farmers and ranchers are utilizing to combat these stressors (Marotz-Baden, 1983). The data reported in this study are a subset of the Montana data. They focus specifically on mother-in-law and daughter-in-law interaction in two generation farm/ranch families.

The Montana Agriculture Soil and Conservation Service provided a 10% random sample of Montana farm and ranch operations that their records showed as being multi-family operations that farmed/ranched more than 200 acres. These 400 operations were sent letters in December of 1984 explaining the study and requesting the names and addresses of the mother and father and at least one married son and his wife. After a January 1985 follow-up letter, a total

of 253 families had responded. Of these 253 families, only 2.8% were unwilling to participate. However, 175 of the families (70.8%) were not eligible because they did not meet the criterion of having an intact older generation and an intact younger generation with sons rather than daughters who were involved in the farm/ranch operation. A total of 68 two-generation families remained in the study. Individual questionnaires were sent separately to each adult member of these 68 families. One hundred and seventy five people responded (64.3%) after two follow-up letters. Of the 175 people responding 44 were mothers-in-law and 55 were daughters-in-law.

Instrument

Questionnaires for the Montana project were developed for each member of the family; father, mother, son, daughter-in-law. Some of the measures were selected by the Regional W-167 planning committee for the regional project. Others were selected or designed specifically to measure the independent and dependent variables that were peculiar to the Montana project. The measures for the independent and dependent variables of each of the hypotheses of this thesis will be discussed in detail below.

Ten two-generation farm/ranch families from a neighboring county pretested the questionnaire. After a revision, the questionnaires were retested again with members of another two-generation farm family and were then

slightly revised. Questionnaires designed for mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were used in this research.

Independent Variables

The independent variables in the study were physical proximity of intergenerational farm/ranch families, differences in child rearing practices between the generations and the daughter-in-law's perceptions of her mother-in-law's interference with her, her husband's, and her family's lives.

Proximity. This variable was measured in terms of miles or fractions of miles between the dwellings of the two families and was determined by the following forced choice question with forced choice answers:

How close do you live to the nearest son and daughter-in-law with whom you farm/ranch (See Appendix B page 7, question 27 of the mother-in-law's questionnaire; page four, question 10 of the daughter-in-law's questionnaire).

Differences in Child Rearing Practices. Differences in child rearing practices between the generations was measured by a question about the occurrence of differences in the last two years and how disturbing it was.

Interference. Mother-in-law's interference in the lives of her adult children was measured by nine questions with forced choice answers. Whether or not there were serious arguments, jealousy, resentment, bossiness, husband's/son's loyalty to his mother rather than to his

wife, whether or not the mother-in-law tried to run her daughter-in-law's life, if she respected the daughter-in-law's privacy, and if the mother-in-law often saw things differently than the daughter-in-law were the questions asked. The forced choice answers included never, sometimes, often, all the time (See Appendix B).

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were two-generation stress, perceived stress and marital satisfaction.

Two Generation Stress. The measure for two-generation stress, Farm Family Stress, (Weigel, Blumdell & Weigel, 1984) is based on objective events emanating from situations specifically arising from several families farming together. The measure was incorporated in each individual questionnaire and asks how often each of 22 situations may have occurred in the last two years and how disturbing this situation is. It has a reliability of 92.7. Validity has not been established.

Because a variety of stressors appeared to be represented by the 22 items, a factor analysis was done using all 175 respondents (father, mother, son, and daughter-in-law for the entire Montana farm/ranch data set) to better understand to what degree underlying dimensions were represented. See Marotz-Baden (1986) for an explanation of this procedure and greater detail regarding these factors for the entire data set.

Five factors with eigen values greater than one emerged. The first factor accounted for 34.1% of the total variance among variables and is labeled Lack of Equal Status. It reflects a lack of equality between the two generations and among family members generally. The second factor is Family versus Farm explaining 9.3% of the variance. It reflects the demands of the farm that are in conflict with the time demands of the family. Money worries are reflected in the third factor labeled Financial Concerns (8.0% of the variance). The fourth factor, Independence - Dependence, (6.6% of the variance) taps desire for more independence. The final factor, Extended Family Conflict, explaining 4.9% of the variance, reflects concern over time spent together and the concerns the families may have over differing child rearing practices.

Perceived Stress. The Perceived Stress Scale devised by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) was also a part of each individual questionnaire and measures the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. This scale is a more general measure than the Farm Family Scale and measures experienced level of stress as a function of objective stressful events, coping processes, personality factors, etc. (Cohen et al., 1983, p. 386). Cohen et al. (1983) correlated this 14-item scale with several self-report and behavioral criteria. In three samples of college students coefficient alpha reliability

for the Perceived Stress Scale were .84, .85, and .86 but sharply decline after 4 to 6 weeks suggesting that stress levels may vary as significant events and coping mechanisms change. Thus, the authors suggest that the Perceived Stress Scale is a reliable measure of current stress level.

Marital Satisfaction. The Locke-Wallace Short Marital-Adjustment and Prediction Test (1959) was included in each individual questionnaire and measures marital adjustment (accommodation of a husband and wife to each other at a given time) and marital prediction (forecasting the likelihood of marital adjustment at a future time). In a sample of 236 subjects 48 were known to be maladjusted in marriage and another 48 were exceptionally well-adjusted. In the testing 135.9 was the mean score for the well-adjusted group. The mean score of the maladjusted group was only 71.7. The difference was a very significant one--in that the critical ratio was 17.5. Of the maladjusted group only 17% achieved adjusted scores of one hundred or higher. Of the well-adjusted group 96% achieved scores of one hundred or more.

Thus the short marital-adjustment measure clearly differentiates between persons who are well-adjusted and those who are maladjusted in marriage. It is evident, therefore, that the test has validity since it seems to measure what it purports to measure--specifically marital adjustment (Locke-Wallace, 1959, p. 255).

The split-half technique corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula was used by Locke-Wallace (1959) to compute the reliability coefficient of the adjustment test and was found to be .90. Thus it would seem that the short adjustment test has high reliability. The reliability coefficient for the marital prediction portion of the test as computed by the split-half technique and corrected by the Spearman-Brown formula is .84.

Description of the Sample

The mother-in-law's mean age was 60.1 year and the daughter-in-law's mean age was 31.6. The mothers-in-law had been married for an average of 35.8 years and had an average of 4.1 children. The daughter's-in-law had been married an average of 10.5 years and had an average of 2.5 children. (See Table 1).

Fifty nine percent of the mothers-in-law had a high school education or less compared with 34% of the daughters-in-law. While approximately the same proportions (29%) had some college, more daughters-in-law had a college degree (20.8% vs. 2.6%).

An average of 97.5% of mothers-in-law owned their own homes in comparison to 81.5% of daughters-in-law. Before tax incomes in 1984 for both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law ranged from below \$5,000 to over \$80,000. The mean income for mothers-in-law was \$30,000-\$39,000. For daughters-in-law the average income was \$20,000-29,000.

Table 1. Description of the Sample

Demographic variables	Mothers- in-law (n=44)	Daughters- in-law (n=55)
Mean age	60.13	31.63
Mean years married	35.80	10.48
Mean number of children	4.15	2.49
Education		
High school or less	59.0%	34.0%
Trade school	5.1%	9.5%
Some college	28.2%	30.2%
College degree	2.6%	20.8%
Graduate work	5.2%	5.7%
Income		
Under \$5,000 - 9,999	18.8%	14.6%
\$10,000 - \$19,999	28.2%	27.1%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	12.5%	33.4%
\$30,000 - \$39,999	6.3%	8.3%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	0	2.1%
\$50,000 - \$59,999	12.5%	0
\$60,000 - \$69,999	0	0
\$70,000 - \$79,999	4.9%	2.1%
\$80,000 or more	12.2%	12.2%
Mean income	\$30,000 - \$39,999	\$20,000 - \$29,999

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data describing the kinds of problems and strategies for dealing with them are presented followed by a discussion of the tests of the hypotheses.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution Strategies

Because there has been no research on conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in two generation farm/ranch families, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were asked about sources of conflict, the strategies they used to cope with this conflict and their sources of advice and support. These questions were open-ended and the number of responses varied with each respondent.

Conflict

The largest source of problems for both mothers-in-law (18%) and daughters-in-law (42%) was differences in values and opinions as shown in Table 2. Mothers-in-law (18%) also complained about lack of communication, the daughter-in-law's neglect of the farm (11%), and outside stressors (8%) causing problems. The second most frequently mentioned source of conflict for daughters-in-law was lack of family time (8%). Mother-in-law's critical remarks (7%) and outside stressors (7%) were tied for the third source of conflict. Lack of communication with mother-in-law, mother-in-law's tiredness, impatience,

Table 2. Problems in Getting Along Together for Mothers-In-Law and Daughters-In-Law.*

Types of problems	Mothers-in-law perception (n=44)	Daughters-in-law perception (n=55)
	percentage	percentage
Perceived no problems	34.2	16.7
Lack of communication	18.5	5.0
Differences in values, etc.	18.5	41.7
Neglects farm, etc.	10.5	1.7
Outside stressors	7.9	6.7
Tired and impatient	2.6	5.0
No family time	2.6	8.3
Age difference	2.6	0
Power struggles	2.6	3.3
Religion	0	1.7
Critical remarks	0	6.7
In-laws	0	1.7
Adapting to change	0	1.7

* Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding error.

and lack of time to spend with the family were also sources of conflict for daughters-in-law (5% each).

Of note is the high proportion of daughters-in-law and especially mothers-in-law who said they had no problems. Almost twice as many mothers-in-law (34%) as daughters-in-law (17%) responded that there were no problems between the two generations of women. The lack of complaints by mothers-in-law is consistent with Fisher's (1983) findings. The sources of conflict, however, are somewhat different (see Review of the Literature page 15-16 of this text for more details).

Table 3. Behavioral Strategies Utilized by Mothers-In-Law and Daughters-In-Law to Get Along.*

Strategies to get along	For mothers- in-law (n=44)	For daughters- in-law (n=55)
	percentage	percentage
Communication	30.0	16.4
Perceive no problem	26.7	13.1
Ignore the problem	13.3	29.5
Stand my ground	10.0	0
Time out	10.0	23.0
Compromise	6.7	1.6
Agree with her	3.3	6.6
Be patient	0	4.9
Keep a work log	0	1.6
Don't exaggerate	0	3.3

* Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding error.

Strategies

Both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were asked what strategies they used in getting along with each other (See Table 3). The strategy most frequently used by mothers-in-law (30%) was communication compared with 16% of the daughters-in-law who used this strategy. Ignoring the problem was the most commonly used strategy of daughters-in-law (30%). This was the second most frequently used strategy of mothers-in-law (13%). The second most frequently mentioned strategy by daughter's-in-law (23%) was time out. Only ten percent of the mothers-in-law stated that they used this strategy for conflict reduction.

Table 4. Reasons Mothers-In-Law and Daughters-In-Law Get Along Well Together.*

Reasons for getting along well	Mothers-in-law perception (n=44)	Daughters-in-law perception (n=55)
	percentage	percentage
Treat each other with respect	23.3	26.5
Same values and goals	14.0	17.6
Perceive no problem	14.0	14.7
Work/live apart	14.0	7.3
Noninterference	11.6	10.3
Good communication	4.7	7.4
Same religion	4.7	4.4
Work well together	4.7	4.4
Outside support	4.7	0
Agree on childrearing	2.3	2.9
Task takes priority over relationship	2.3	0
I do as she wants	0	2.9
Rested/relaxed	0	1.5

* Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding error.

There were a number of mothers-in-law (27%) and daughters-in-law (13%) who didn't list any strategies because they said they had no problems.

Getting Along Together

"Respect" and "be fair" were given most frequently by both mothers-in-law (23% and daughters-in-law (26%) when stating the reasons for getting along well together. (See Table 4). The second most frequent reason for both mothers-in-law (14%) and daughters-in-law (18%) was having the same values and goals. Fourteen percent of the mothers-in-law noted that working and living apart contributed to

Table 5. Source of Advice for Mothers-In-Law and Daughters-In-Law.*

Source of advice	For mothers- in-law (n=44)	For daughters- in-law (n=55)
	percentage	percentage
No one	25.0	8.8
Husband	25.0	33.8
No answer	15.6	10.0
Daughter	9.4	0
God	9.4	2.5
Daughter-in-law	6.3	0
Son	3.1	0
Friends	3.1	13.8
Sister	3.1	5.0
Aunt	0	1.3
Neighbors	0	2.5
In-laws	0	3.8
Father	0	2.5
Mother	0	15.0
Brother	0	1.3

* Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding error.

their getting along together. Only seven percent of the daughters-in-law mentioned this strategy. Non-interference was the fourth most frequently stated reason with 12% of mothers-in-law and 10% of daughters-in-law stating this response.

Again, a number of these women (15% of the daughters-in-law and 14% of the mothers-in-law) stated they had no problems.

Advice

In answer to the question, "To whom do you turn for advice when you have problems getting along with your

Table 6. Sources of support for Mothers-In-Law and Daughters-In-Law.*

Sources of support	For mothers-in-law (n=44)	For daughters-in-law (n=55)
	percentages	percentages
Husband	31.3	39.5
No answer	21.9	6.6
Perceive no problems	18.8	10.5
Daughter-in-law	9.4	1.3
Son	3.1	1.3
Self	3.1	0
Friends	3.1	10.5
Other family members	3.1	0
Neighbor	3.1	4.0
Brother	3.1	4.0
Mother	0	13.2
Sister-in-law	0	4.0
Father	0	1.3
Sister	0	2.6
Aunt-in-law	0	1.3

* Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding error.

mother-in-law/daughter-in-law?" husbands were the most frequently listed person by daughters-in-law (34%) and mothers-in-law (25%). Another 25% of mothers, however, said they had no one to whom they turned compared with only 9% of the daughters-in-law. The second most frequently listed person daughters-in-law turned to was their own mothers (15%) with friends a close third (14%).

(See Table 5).

Sixteen percent of the mothers-in-law and ten percent of the daughters-in-law did not answer the question.

Support

About one third of the daughters-in-law (39%) and one third of the mothers-in-law (31%) stated they turned to their husbands for support. Friends were the second most frequent source of support for daughters-in-law (11%). For mothers it was daughters-in-law (9%), perhaps one with whom they were not in conflict.

Interestingly, almost one quarter (22%) of the mothers-in-law compared to seven percent of the daughters-in-law said they did not seek support from anyone. These data and the high percentage (25%) of mothers-in-law who said they had no one to turn to for advice may mean that mothers-in-law are less willing to talk about such conflict and/or their social network is smaller than that of their daughters-in-law (See Table 5).

Nineteen percent of mothers-in-law stated that they had no problems with daughters-in-law. Only 11% of daughters-in-law, however, said they had no problems with their mothers-in-law.

Hypotheses Testing the Effects of Proximity

Research by Duvall (1954) suggests that interference of the mother-in-law will affect the marital satisfaction of the daughter-in-law and her husband negatively. She further states that it is probable that certain kinds of interference will affect the daughters-in-law's perception of conflict between the two generations and her own stress

level. A newly married couple, according to Duvall, must realign its loyalties so that its new family comes before either his family of origin or hers. Thus it appears that any married couple bases its living arrangements on an elemental triangle (ours, yours, mine). A beginning family needs to form a cohesive family unit of its own that is stronger than the ties to the individual's family of origin or the new family will feel threatened.

Two hypotheses were developed to test the effects of proximity on the stress between the two generations of females and on the perceived stress of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Hypothesis one states that the closer the two families live, the greater the stress between the younger and the older generations of women. Hypothesis two states that the closer together the two families live, the higher the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law perceived stress level.

As can be seen in Table 7, 26% of both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law lived in separate dwellings within one eighth mile of each other. Fourteen percent of mothers-in-law and 11% of daughters-in-law lived in separate dwellings one fourth to one mile away. Fourteen percent of mothers-in-law and 17% of daughters-in-law lived in separate dwellings between one and five miles away. Nineteen percent of mothers-in-law and 15% of daughters-in-law lived in separate dwellings from five to ten miles

Table 7. Proximity of Two Generation Households.*

Distance between households	Mothers-in-law report (n=44)		Daughters-in-law report (n=55)	
	f	%	f	%
1/8 mile apart	11	26	14	26
1/4 mile apart	16	14	6	11
1 - 5 miles apart	6	14	9	17
5 - 10 miles apart	8	19	8	15
10 - 50 miles apart	7	16	11	21
Over 50 miles	5	12	5	9

* Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding error.

away and another 16% of mothers-in-law and 21% of daughters-in-law lived 10 to 50 miles from each other. Twelve percent of mothers-in-law and 9% of daughters-in-law reported that their children/parents in-law lived in other states or in nearby towns. Thus residing in close proximity was the norm for many of these women.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

Pearson product-moment correlations were run for daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law between proximity and the five factors and the total score of the Family Farm Stress scale and the Perceived Stress Scale. As can be seen in Table 8, there were no significant correlations for mothers-in-law or daughters-in-law between proximity and the five factors and the total score of the "Family Farm Stress Scale" which measured stress between the two generations. Thus hypothesis one was not supported for either mothers-in-law or daughters-in-law.

Hypothesis two states that the closer together the two families live, the higher the mother-in-law's and daughter-in-law's perceived stress level. Pearson product-moment correlations were run between proximity and the Perceived Stress Scale for mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The correlation for mothers-in-law was low ($r=.15$) and not significant. The correlation for daughters-in-law, while low ($r=.27$), was significant ($p=.05$) and positive. Thus, as distance from her mother-in-law increased, the daughter-in-law's stress level went up. This finding is the opposite of that predicted by the hypothesis. It should be pointed out, however, that proximity accounts for only .07 of the variance of the daughter-in-law's overall

Table 8. Pearson Correlations Between Proximity and Scores on the Family Farm Stress (FFS) and the Perceived Stress (PSS) Scales for Mothers-in-law and Daughters-in-law

	Family farm stress factors					Total scores	
	1	2	3	4	5	FFS	PSS
Mothers-in-law	.17	.13	.03	.05	.17	.15	.15
Daughters-in-law	.20	.17	.18	.06	.03	.06	.27*

* $p = .05$

perceived stress. Thus these data suggest that proximity has little effect on the stress levels of these farm/ranch women.

The third hypothesis states the more disturbing the differences in child rearing practices between the two generations are to the daughter-in-law, the greater the daughter-in-law's stress level. One-way analyses of variance were run on both the occurrence of differences in child rearing practices between the generations and how disturbing these differences were to the daughter-in-law and her Perceived Stress Scale score. Tables 15, 16, and 17 in Appendix A show that there were no significant relationships between differences in child rearing practices and stress levels for daughters-in-law at the .05 level. It appears, then, that differences in child rearing did not contribute to the daughter-in-law's stress level as measured by the Perceived Stress Scale.

Because these results did not coincide with those of Fischer (1983), descriptive statistics were run on the occurrences of perceived differences in child rearing and their levels of disturbance. As shown in Table 8, the majority of the mothers-in-law (67%) and the daughters-in-law (54%) stated that differences in child rearing practices seldom occurred. About a third, 33% of the mothers-in-law and 32% of the daughters-in-law said that differences occurred sometimes. Only 14% of the daughters-in-law, however, said they were frequent.

Only a few mothers-in-law (6%) and a relatively small proportion (16%) of the daughters-in-law rated these differences as quite or extremely disturbing. Almost half (46%) of the mothers-in-law and 41% of the daughters-in-law said they were not disturbing and 48% of the mothers-in-law and 44% of the daughter-in-law said they were either slightly or moderately disturbing. Clearly, daughters-in-law are upset by child-rearing differences. The data suggest, however, that although these differences exist between the generations they are not very prevalent nor very disturbing for most.

(See Table 9).

Duvall's 1954 research seemed to indicate that interference by the mother-in-law would cause marital problems for her son and his wife. Duvall also infers that the less interference the daughter-in-law perceives

from her mother-in-law, then the less likely the daughter-in-law will perceive that there is stress between her and her mother-in-law. Hypotheses four and five were designed to test these assumptions.

Hypothesis four states that the less the daughter-in-law's perception of interference in her and her husband's life, the greater the daughter-in-law's marital satisfaction. When asked how well they got along together, most of the mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law said they got along well. In fact, 34% of mothers-in-law and 17% of daughters-in-law said there were no problems (Refer to Table 2). In addition, approximately 60% of the daughters-in-law said that their mothers-in-law did not try to run their lives (Refer to Table 10).

A one-way analysis of variance was run for each question that measured some aspect of the daughter-in-law's perception of her mother-in-law's interference in the lives of her and her husband and the Locke-Wallace Short Marital Adjustment and Prediction Test. There were no significant differences between perceptions of interference and marital satisfaction at the .05 level. Thus this hypothesis was not supported. These data are depicted in Tables 15-18 in Appendix A.

Hypothesis five states the less the daughter's perception of interference from the mother-in-law in her and her husband's lives, the less her perception of stress

Table 9. Daughter-in-law's Perception of Types of Mother-in-law Interference

Daughter-in-law perception of types of mother-in-law interference	Frequency (n-55)	Percentage
Jealousy of mother-in-law		
Never	32	60
Sometimes	20	38
Often	1	2
All the time	0	0
Resentment of mother-in-law		
Never	15	28
Sometimes	32	60
Often	6	11
All the time	0	0
Mother-in-law runs daughter-in-law's life		
Never	32	60
Sometimes	15	28
Often	5	9
All the time	1	2
Mother-in-law is bossy		
Very	15	25
Seldom	18	34
Never	22	41
Mother-in-law respects privacy		
Very satisfied	38	72
Somewhat satisfied and dissatisfied	14	26
Very dissatisfied	1	2
Husband more loyal to mother than to wife		
Never	35	66
Sometimes	14	26
Often	3	6
All the time	1	2
Mother-in-law sees things differently		
Never	0	0
Sometimes	37	70
Often	15	28
All the time	1	2

between the older and younger generation of women. A one-way analyses of variance was run for each question that measured some aspect of interference and each of the five factors and the total score of the Family Farm Stress measure. (See Appendix A, Tables 17-21.) There were no significant differences.

In view of the fact that hypotheses four and five were not supported, the frequency tables of the seven items measuring the daughter-in-law's perception of her mother-in-law's interference in her and her family's life were examined. As can be seen in Table 9, most daughters-in-law did not report much interference from their mothers-in-law. Sixty percent, for example, said their mothers-in-law never tried to run their lives. About a third, however, reported that their mothers-in-law interfered in their lives at least some of the time. The data suggest that the mother-in-law's interference does not significantly affect the daughters-in-law's marital satisfaction or the stress level between the two generations. It appears, then, that most mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law get along well together in intergenerational farm families even though they may live and work in close proximity.

Interpretation

It appeared from the small amount of research available that there might be major conflicts between mothers-in-

