EDITORIAL

"At-risk families" as a theme might be considered vague in that it is not exactly defined what threatens the subjects at risk. At the same time, the subject is sustained in a concrete dimension of the individual and collective lives of human beings, represented by economic, social, and cultural conditions. These conditions interfere in the development and well-being of a large contingency of families that face, especially in recent decades, the consequences of the inefficiency of a number of economic plans and the ever-increasing difficulties of the State in its attempts to provide the basic necessities of health and education for the majority of its population.

There are situations of elevated potential risk, among which are the fragmentation of services for family care, which generally do not function in an integrated fashion, thus generating a vacuum in terms of support for the families; crime in general, including political corruption; the social values which permit corruption; the social values which permit violence; the social injustice which supports the parasitism of large corporations which benefit from tax benefits without offering any return of equal value to society as a whole; and the social conception surrounding fatherhood, which accepts that the responsibility for educating children lays primarily with the mother. On a more internal level, families live with the threat of unemployment or unstable employment; insufficient salaries; as well as the limitations towards taking care of their more basic needs, such as an adequate physical environment in which to dwell and construct a family unit.

Although it is contradicting, and in some cases even inhuman, it is within these circumstances that one expects a mass of children and adolescents to build their own identities, contending with their own demands for their development. Such demands may be compared to an obstacle course in which they need to learn from the moment they must take their first steps, to becoming literate in primary school, to achieving their autonomy and independence in their parents' eyes, to becoming responsible adults in the manner that best suits them.[1]

These and other perspectives were outlined in the International Symposium of "At-Risk Families" in November of 2004 in Rio Grande, RS, Brazil. These same themes are furthered in this special edition of the Nursing Journal Texto & Contexto. The International Symposium of At-Risk Families was promoted by the Nursing Department of the Federal University of Rio Grande (UFRG) Foundation, together with the Study and Research Group for the Family, Nursing, and Health (GEPEFES), the Nucleus of Studies and Research in Health (NEPES), the University Hospital of UFRG and the Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Studies in Family and Health (LEIFAMS). The Secretary of Science, Technology, and Strategic Inputs, the Department of Science and Technology, both of the Ministry of Health, as well as UNESCO and other institutions offered fundamental financial support.

The objective of this Symposium was to bring together researchers, students, and other professional from different regions of the country in order to discuss questions related to family health, their development and intervention concerning at-risk families. More specifically, the Symposium looked to discussing, sharing, and offering the experiences related to the family living process of diverse professionals; to promoting the knowledge produced by researchers and other professionals who work with at-risk families; to making the existing services that interact with the family more visible; to reflecting about the relationships among public policies, family, risk, and family health promotion; and to subsidizing the consolidation of research groups and studies concerning the family.

The Symposium was structured in four thematic sub-areas. **Area I**: Family and violence, representing an important social problem, considered one of the greatest failures in the arena for promoting the minimal opportunities for health and development to run its course in a normative manner. **Area II**: The family facing situations of sickness, encompassing related themes with the complex interaction between family and certain diseases whose effect reach beyond the individual dimension of the carrier of the disease, involving the family group as a whole, in a significant manner. This theme dealt with the family in different scenarios when disease becomes part of their daily life; in the hospital, in their basic network, in their community, and in others. **Area III**: Public policies and family health, the inclusion of which was due to and understanding that health care policies make up the backbone of promotional, maintenance, and recovery actions in health. This occurs within organizational aspects, allocation of resources, and in defining and reinforcing health care priorities. **Area IV**: Resilience and promotion of family health, included by means of the fact that resilience represents one of the possible channels in order to work with grave problems experienced by a large contingency of the population. This population is ever living in adverse situations, consequences of the social, economic, and political problems that desolate the entire world and reverberate over the daily life of families, such as the high indexes of crime and violence in urban areas, the conditions of extreme poverty, and others. We hope that the readers appreciate the publication of the themes put forth in the Symposium and embraced by the Nursing Journal Texto & Contexto, helping to socialize an issue that certainly is current and of interest to professionals in diverse areas.

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REFERENCE

1 Dumas J. L'enfant violent: le connaître, l'aider, l'aimer. Paris: Bayard; 2000.