The Family as a Life-Saver in Disaster

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ABSTRACT

In discussing the subject of "Family and Disaster" the implicit assumption is that the family is the 'instrument' which supports the existing, societal organization and therefore the most common approach is to consider how families cope with disaster. There is confusion as to whether one is speaking about the family on an institutional level or about family units. In this paper we have tried to answer two questions: are individuals better able to cope with disaster on a large scale when living in families(units); does the individualized conjugal family unit with clear-cut divisions of labour and roles offer better chances than other family types?

To explore these questions we used the situation in Japanese camps for civilians during World War II. We reach the conclusion that it is not living in family units which gives a better chance of survival, but the ability to engage in a caring relation with other(s). The ability to adapt to changing situations, without losing one's self control and a 'fighting' spirit seem to be very important in order to survive. The conjugal family type prepares women much better in all respects than men.

General Approaches to the Subject of Family and Disaster

When considering the subject of 'family and disaster', the most common and, therefore the most obvious approach is to consider how families cope with disaster. This approach implicitly assumes that it is the family which is best equipped to ensure the well-being of individuals. Another approach, one that has gained currency in recent decades in Western Europe and North America, is to consider the family as a disaster itself. The family in both approaches is considered as the instrument to support the existing, societal organization, but in the first
instance, one considers that organization as beneficial, and in the second as harmful. The family in that case is accused of reproducing the unjustified and unjust inequalities between individuals, groups and classes. In other words it is accused of being a stumbling block on the way to progress and as such disastrous for society as a whole and for individuals.

Both approaches have in common that there exists a certain amount of confusion about the concept of the family. Do we have to accept that in the first approach any specific type of family offers the best chances for survival in disaster and in the second approach that there should and could be a society without family? In neither instance is it clear whether one is referring to (a) certain family type(s) or to family in a more abstract sense.

Our opinion is that the confusion can be largely explained by the ethnocentric view of the world which has led, at least in Europe and North America, to the belief that the conjugal family is the most effective family type that is feasible in the world. The consequence is that the distinction between family (as a general concept) and families as units of (a) certain type(s) has become blurred. Considerable doubt seems to exist as to whether it is at all possible in the case of the family to speak in institutional terms, as we do in the case of education, economy, politics, etc. Is this justified? Before answering this question, we shall first have to clarify what we mean by institution. We shall take the definition(s) given by Van Doorn (1959:1475). He states that institution is used in two ways:

'.the complex of attitudes, behaviour, social relationships and processes, as well as elements of culture which exist around essential human values according to a relative stable pattern; as such the family, the church, the state are institutions, not to be confused with a family or a state which are collectivities. The institutions in this sense form the principal component of a culture'.

'.the relatively starkly consolidated pattern of forms of behaviour and the related role-expectations, by which durability and stability of a social unit are guaranteed; in this sense the institutions together form the system of social control in a society'.

When defining institution in these terms it seems impossible to support the premise that the family is just a number of families which are the results of the influence of other institutions. The family is centered around an essential human value which can be most adequately described as the belief that the human need for a minimum of physical and mental care can only be met in groups of a relatively long durability and stability. The complex of attitudes, behaviour, social relations and processes, as well as elements of culture, to use the words of Van Doorn, around this 'human value' certainly form relatively stable patterns.

In the second meaning of the concept, too, it is clear that the family is to be considered an institution. Families as collectivities are not the resultants of other social institutions but part of the family and influenced by a complex process of interaction between institutions, among them the family. The family is characterized by norms and values, laws, regulations and rules, organizations to support families, different family types, etc.

Our opinion is that we should always make a clear distinction between family as an institution and families as units as they appear in a certain period, under certain conditions. The question that arises then is how it is possible that in both approaches to the subject 'family and disaster' this distinction is not clear. Our idea is that for a long time, theorizing about the family, as it has been done in sociology, has been mainly a product of Europe and North America. It is only recently that social scientists from other parts of the world, such as, for example, India, Japan and Mexico, have been adding their views and experiences to the theory on the family. In Europe and North America we can distinguish three trains of thought which all lead to the conclusion that the conjugal family is the best conceivable type. These three trains of thought are:

1. In human history several family types have succeeded each other whereby the most recently developed family type was always the most superior. The conjugal family consisting of husband, wife and biological and adopted, non-adult children, is the last and therefore the most superior family type. In this evolutionary concept the conjugal family will
eventually be the family type for all human societies (Parsons & Bales, 1955).

2. The conjugal family is the family type best adapted to industrialized society. As the world is going through a process of industrialization, the conjugal family will therefore become universal (Goode, 1963).

3. The family is developing in an evolutionary process, in which the family type will always be adapted to successive, ever more superior, forms of economic production. The conjugal family is the family type best adapted to a capitalistic, industrialized form of production.

All three lead to a definite view of how this family type functions, what the division of labour between family members should be, etc. This way of ethnocentric thinking is so persuasive and dominant that the family and families have fused into one concept.

We must always bear in mind that family exists on the institutional level and that there are changes at this institutional level, which result in different family types and different expectations about the functioning of existing family units. We have to assume that there will be no society without family and that no family type can be taken for granted, i.e. assumed to exist for ever and be basically unchanged in its functioning. This is supported by the outcome of research.

In recent years the study of family has received new impulses. The result has been a growing insight that any society of any size and complexity has never had only one family type at the same time; that family types are not necessarily developing in an evolutionary way; that individuals in a relatively large number of societies live in families of different types during their lives; that the group which may be defined as a family is certainly more flexible than has been thought for some time. The result is that the subject 'family and disaster' can be approached from another angle by raising two questions.

1. Are individuals better able to cope with disaster on a large scale when they live in families?

2. Does the conjugal family unit with the very clear and distinct division of labour and roles between family members offer better chances in this respect than other family types?
We shall explore these questions for a special case: the Japanese camps for allied civilians, i.e. Westerners, mainly in Indonesia, but also in some other occupied areas in South East Asia during World War II.

**Coping With Disaster**

In the Japanese camps survival became the first aim in life for the inmates. If families offer a better chance to cope with disaster, one would expect that individuals living in families have a higher survival rate than individuals living outside a family. We may also assume that if the conjugal family type of a man, a woman and some children, as we know it, were the best type of family possible, this would result in higher survival rates the more people were enabled to live according to the standards of the individualized role-segregated family.

We shall explore these hypotheses for the camps the Japanese created for allied civilians during World War II: camps for men only; for women and children; for men and (young) boys; and family camps. We limit ourselves mainly to camps in Indonesia, and more in particular on Java, but also take into consideration the family camps in Shanghai and on the Philippines.

The material for this article was collected from the detailed and excellent study undertaken by Dr. D. van Velden, 'De Japanese interneringskampen van burgers gedurende de tweede wereldoorlog' (The Japanese internment-camps during the second world war) (1977), from a number of publications on this period by others (diaries, descriptions and novels), based on the experiences of former inmates and from the author's own childhood recollections of some of these camps.

**General Information**

Japanese camps for civilians should not and cannot be simply compared with the Nazi camps of World War II. They were not directly aimed at exterminating the inmates. The original goal was to isolate white individuals from the native population in order to destroy Western influence and to demonstrate that whites could be conquered. The idea was to repatriate these aliens to their own home-lands once the Japanese had won the war
and had reached their goal - or, in their terms, their destiny - of becoming the leaders of the 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere'.

When these plans could not be carried out because the war took an unexpected and unfavourable turn for the Japanese, the character of the camps changed drastically. Not all civilians were interned directly after the occupation and according to one uniform model. The central organization took shape in 1942, when the Military Government had been firmly established and enough civil servants had been brought over from Japan to take charge. In reality there was a distinction between army and navy, but when we use the term army we also mean navy. The invasion in Indonesia started in December 1941, and the occupied territory reached its maximum expansion in 1942.

The actual occupation assumed several, quite different forms. In many instances it was an orderly event. In other instances, however, many people were killed, especially men. Although all prison-camps came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of War right from the beginning, initially they had a different administration from that of the prisoner-of-war camps. During the early months of 1944 this changed: the camps for civilians and the actual prisoner-of-war camps got the same administration, viz. direct army or navy control.

The civilian prisoners were declared prisoners-of-war, and regarded as non-commissioned officers. After this change, living conditions in the camps deteriorated rapidly. This would, of course, not have been the case, if the Japanese had adhered to the international rules concerning prisoners-of-war, or even to the formal prisoner-of-war regulations they had complied with during the Russian-Japanese war of 1904. However, they did not. At least not in many areas. In Japan, French Indo-China and Thailand, 'white' civilian prisoners were cared for properly and housed adequately. Scarcity of food and other supplies towards the end of the war were the result of general shortages in the country, not of special treatment for these prisoners. However, the prisoners brought from Indonesia to work in what is now Thailand and Japan were never treated well. On the contrary, they did slave labour on almost no food, with no supplies whatsoever and under severe maltreatment.
Internment and imprisonment were not completely uniform. There were central directives for the imprisonment of the whites. How these were executed was dependent, to a large extent, on local circumstances, the character of the military commander and the people themselves. The Japanese were in general happy when prisoners or prisoners-to-be, organized their own imprisonment and their affairs within the camps. Of course all this within the framework set by the Japanese. The Japanese preferred to give their orders, their punishment and so on through a capable internee government. They appreciated a certain amount of discussion on the basis of, for them 'logical', and for their prisoners, very often 'illogical' assumptions.

The cultural gap between the Japanese and their prisoners was a serious problem. There were continual, fundamental and far-reaching misunderstandings. This applied even more to women internees than to men. As the Japanese were all men, and, moreover, men who were used to completely subservient women, this was bad. The Japanese were not only confronted with women who were far more independent than the women they were used to, but also with women who were used to show their subservience to their own men in ways incomprehensible to the Japanese. In some instances the results of this confrontation were disastrous. Not all civilians were imprisoned at once: in general, men were imprisoned first, men needed to keep certain vital enterprises and services going later than other men, different nationalities at different times, etc.

For Indonesia the situation was different from other areas because of the number of persons of Dutch nationality present there. This number was much larger than the Japanese had expected. In contrast to other governments, the Dutch government had discouraged and actually prevented evacuation to Australia. Nor had the Japanese expected that the Eurasians did not form a clearly identifiable group as was the case elsewhere, and that so many of them had Dutch nationality and considered themselves as Dutch.

Besides that, a concentration of women and children had taken place on Java. Java, the 'central' island of the Indonesian archipelago, became the place with the greatest number of 'western' prisoners (80,000 Dutch).
Moreover, Java's occupational history was somewhat different from other regions. This was partly the result of the large number of individuals imprisoned, but it was also a consequence of the personality of the Japanese commander in charge that first year. From opportunistic as well as humane considerations this commander wanted to proceed very carefully in interning the whites. First the men were interned, later women and children.

The period during which all prospective prisoners were being imprisoned was quite long. Early and later internment had both advantages and disadvantages. People imprisoned early could take more with them in terms of furniture, clothing, valuables, etc.

Most of the early prisoners were accomodated in ordinary houses, the change from these city quarters to barrack camps took place much later. Although prolonging freedom delayed internment brought many problems: insecurity, lack of money, confiscation of property. Later imprisonment often meant imprisonment in barracks. This real imprisonment, however, meant relief in one way as the fear of intervention by the Kempeitai, the military police, was less (Van Velden, 1977; Luycks, 1945; Hooykaas-van Leeuwen Boomkamp, 1946).

Camp-sites too, varied to a large degree: a number of houses, prisons, military barracks, coolie barracks, hospitals, monasteries, schools. In addition the state of the sites when they were turned into camps varied: from quite good to completely dilapidated and for that reason long since disused. Transportations were common, especially when prisoners were more and more concentrated in certain locations. These concentrations resulted in less and less space for the prisoners. When the war prospects became worse for the Japanese and they feared allied invasion it became their general policy to take prisoners to places were contact with invading troops could be prevented (men) or places where they would hinder the invading troops (women, children, old and sick men).

In Sumatra, Borneo and Celebes, the prisoners were transported from the coast to the interior. In Java, women, children and sick, old men were concentrated in a few towns near the coast; 'able-bodied' men were taken inland to a plateau where the Japanese were planning to make their final stand after an enemy landing (Van

In the camps situated in Indonesia, it was rule to imprison women and children separately from men. These camps were often located in the same areas, especially during the first years. In areas outside Indonesia, men and women were also imprisoned together, mostly in the same camps but with separate quarters. There was also some real family camps in Shanghai and on the Philippines. In Indonesia this was the case only for some very small groups of 'Nippon'-workers and their families. These were people the Japanese kept outside the camps to run certain services. Towards the end of the war they were taken to the 'normal' camps or killed.

Boys under 16 years of age were first imprisoned in women's camps, as was also the case with old men. In 1944 and 1945, boys over 10 years of age and old men were transported to camps for men. In Java, during that period, two special camps were created for these boys, old men and seriously ill men.

During the years of imprisonment, no maintenance whatsoever was done on the accommodation for prisoners. The same buildings were occupied by more and more people. Frequently doors, or even parts of or complete walls were taken away in order to find space for more people, and the material was used for other purposes. Sanitary facilities deteriorated rapidly and were never capable of coping with the number of people inhabiting the camps. The space around the buildings was never enlarged when more people moved in. On the contrary, this space often became even more restricted (Van Velden, 1977; Luycks, 1945). At first the food rations (Van Velden, 1977; Manders, 1977) were still adequate, but they also deteriorated quickly. Especially after the military authorities had taken over the administration, the food situation became unbearable in most camps. Clothing was not provided.

As the war continued, there was a severe water shortage in most camps. The same held true for fuel, especially wood for cooking. No medicines or other medical material were supplied. Nor were soap, toilet-paper, disinfectants or cleaning materials. No supply was the rule for everything. This cannot be explained by scarcity or trouble with transport because after the
Japanese capitulation sufficient supplies could be provided immediately. There was a constant threat of 'punishment' both physical and through withholding of food, etc. Internes had to work hard at all kinds of manual labour besides the necessary cooking, cleaning, care of the sick, etc.

From the beginning teaching was forbidden in women's camps in Java where most of the children were imprisoned, later it was forbidden everywhere. Religious services, recreation and sports permitted at the beginning were forbidden in most camps. In general, assembling in groups was obstructed more and more during the period of imprisonment and in many instances completely forbidden.

As stated above the Japanese were not, in principle, intending to exterminate their prisoners. It is not clear to what extent this changed during the war. Some instructions have been found giving orders to kill prisoners if an invasion were to occur. There were some instances of prisoners actually being killed on this account in 1944. Later the official instructions were that prisoners should be set free when the Japanese had to retreat and could not take them. A general policy of actually killing all prisoners seems unlikely.

But although the death of all prisoners was not explicitly sought, the measures taken led to exactly that. During the last year the death-rate rose sharply. The many diseases were caused by polydeficiencies resulting from insufficient and poor food rations. At the same time, the prisoners became increasingly susceptible to infectious diseases with increasing chances of a fatal conclusion. The situation was deteriorating so fast that if the Japanese capitulation had been postponed a few months longer, the majority of the internees would have died (Bergman, 1948; Van Velden, 1977; Hooykaas-van Leeuwen Boomkamp, 1946; Luycks, 1945).

A frequent reply from Japanese officers to complaints from the prison camp-leader or camp-doctor about the food and other conditions was: "You may all die here. There is enough space in the cemetery" (Van Velden, 1977:210,422). The increase in the work-load, especially of those chores that had no actual use, towards the end of the war also served no other purpose than the exhaustion of the prisoners (Keith, 1950).
Death in the Camps

Dr. van Velden has made a careful study of the statistics on death in the camps. Data from private records of former inmates, camp-archives which were not (as were most others) destroyed by the Japanese at the end of the war and the sparse data the Red Cross and delegates of neutral governments had been able to collect (in spite of the fact that they had almost no admittance or no admittance at all to the majority of the camps), formed the basis for Van Velden's study. A complicating factor is that people were continuously moved from camp to camp, camps were closed and others enlarged in population, etc.

Van Velden computed the death rates as a percentage of the (estimated) maximum number of inmates a camp ever had during the whole period of its existence. She made estimates of overall death rates on the basis of the data for the individual camps. Van Velden excluded from her calculations all prisoners (men, women and children) taken by the Kempetai (military police) to their prisons or the individuals actually executed (Van Velden, 1977:519-544). As a consequence, the computed death rates are certainly lower than the actual death rates. The death rates thus computed for camps and regions were compared with the 'normal' death rates, computed on the basis of death statistics in the USA and The Netherlands in the years just prior to the war and of the special age distribution of the white population in colonies.

In general, the death rate remained normal for the first two years of the occupation or was even somewhat lower than would have been expected normally. If we look at the overall death rates for all the years of imprisonment, we find that in Shanghai, the death rate was somewhat higher than would be expected normally; on the Philippines it was twice as high, in Sumatra 2,4 times higher and on Java at least 3 times higher than would normally have been expected (Van Velden, 1977:369, 371).

We know the approximate number of men and the number of women who died and we know to what age-categories they belonged, but we do not know if they had children to care for, etc. Therefore it is not possible to use statistical tests and to reach conclusions on the basis of such tests. We therefore have to use other methods.
Firstly, we have data about the family camps in the Philippines and Shanghai, about the women's camps and the men's camps in Indonesia. If our assumption is correct, the death rate in the family camps should be lower than in the other camps. As the women were imprisoned with their children in the women's camps, many individuals were living in family-like units. Therefore we expected that the death rate in the women's camps would be lower than in the men's camps.

At first sight these assumptions seem to be correct. In the family camps, the death rate was lower than the death rate for women's camps, and that for men's camps was higher than for women's camps. On closer inspection the picture changed. Firstly, the conditions in the family camps were better than in the others. More food was delivered, the housing was better, the period of imprisonment shorter and, most important, the period of malnutrition was much shorter. As far as the men's and women's camps are concerned, one cannot speak of significantly different circumstances in these respects. There were men's camps as well as women's camps that were considered as 'good' camps or as decidedly "bad" camps. It is true that the death rates in the family camps were somewhat lower (but certainly not the lowest if death rates for individual men's and women's camps are considered), and that the overall circumstances were better in the family camps, but that does not prove that living in families gave a better chance of survival.

When the death rates for all the different camps are studied, one very remarkable feature which emerges is that the rate of mortality for men is much higher than for women and that this is also the case in the family camps. If living in families resulted in a lower death rate, one would expect that women and men would have about the same death rates in family camps. Even though the mortality rates for men will still be somewhat higher than for women under normal conditions, this cannot explain the differences found. In this respect, one should bear in mind that the number of older people was (relatively) small. In general, the death rate for men is about twice as high as for women. In the family camp Santo Tomas (Philippines), the death rate for men is about $5\frac{1}{2}$ times as high as for women (Van Velden, 1977).
When we consider these facts, it becomes doubtful if living in a family is in itself and important factor in survival. On the other hand, from all the material studied it becomes clear that as a prisoner one had to have someone, or a small group of people, to whom one belonged. When living conditions became worse and the prisoners' energy was decreasing rapidly, the small group of close friends or 'neighbours' became more important. It emerges that any individual needs someone, or some people, to care for, and who care for that individual. Caring, that is, in practical matters as well as in terms of emotional support. This leads to a provisional conclusion: it is not living in a family as such that gives an individual a better chance of survival in disaster, but participating in a caring relationship with (an)other person(s).

We are, however, left with the question of why the mortality rate for men is so much higher than that for women.

As was stated above, there were no clear differences in the physical conditions between camps for men and women. They were located in the same areas. Quite a number of camps were used for women and men successively. One could imagine other factors which could explain the differences found. We shall explore a number of possible explanations.

One cause could have been that men need more food than women, and as a result were subjected to a more severe and longer period of malnutrition. In fact, however, the men actually got more food than the women. The men generally had more work for which they got extra food supplies or some money which they could exchange for food. The work men had to do involved them in being more often outside the camp compound and therefore offered more opportunities for smuggling food. In addition, they had more and better chances to have the necessary contact with their guards in order to be able to negotiate for and buy food.

Moreover, they actually got more food because children under 11 years of age got only half the adults' rations. As there were many children in almost all the women's camps and none of this age in the men's camps, the result was that far less food came to the women's camps. In almost all the women's camps children as a rule got the same
amount of food as adults. From the money prisoners had brought with them into the camps if that was not confiscated and from money earned from 'extra' work, prisoners were allowed to buy some additional food supplies. The women spent an important part of their money on extra food for the children, especially milk for the youngest ones. Food, therefore, can provide no explanation for the higher death rate for men compared with women.

Another explanatory factor could have been that the men had to work more and harder. If we are speaking about the civilian camps in Indonesia itself, as we are, this was not generally the case. Prisoners, men and women, were responsible for the work necessary to 'maintain' the camp and its inmates. In the women's camps more than 50 percent of the inhabitants were often children. These children had to be looked after, and they needed education. Even though small children had a share in the work to be done, the result was that maintenance work required far more labour from far fewer individuals in women's camps. In addition, women as well as men had to execute 'Nippon work', i.e. work for the Japanese which had to be done "voluntarily" but which brought some financial reward, and had their share of useless work. Some examples of this in women's camps are: carrying bricks from one side of the camp to the other and back, digging, with scarcely any tools a pond one day which had to be filled in again the next day.

The women's camps also had a much higher proportion of old people than the men's camps. In the early years because old couples were imprisoned together in women's camps, in the last period because old women survived and old men died.

Another explanation suggested for the higher mortality rate for men was that in the women's camps a number of the inmates were profesional nurses, which could have resulted in better care for sick and aged people. It is doubtful if this could be an explanation at all, as it is an established fact that there were many more medical doctors available in the men's camps. If the lack of nurses had been so important, the death rates for men and women would have been about the same in the family camps. As we have already mentioned, this was not so.

Nor did the Japanese treat the women better than the men. In general, there was a severe lack of mutual
understanding between the Japanese and their prisoners, but in the case of women this was even worse. According to the Japanese culture, the women in the camps were nobodies, creatures of no importance whatsoever. A woman's function was to give birth to children (preferably sons) and to devote her energy to attending to the wishes of the man to whom she belonged. As a girl she had to be completely obedient and subservient to her father and brother, as a married woman to her husband and son, as a widow to her son. She was taught to accept everything, to be gentle, to have no will of her own, not to show any emotion, not to have any opinion and to suffer everything for and from men.

The women who were their prisoners were already nonentities, being women, but as women belonging to men who had been taken prisoner with not even a free country of their own, they scarcely existed at all. The behaviour of these women, however, was in every respect contradictory to what in Japanese eyes was thought normal, proper and acceptable behaviour. They felt that the women looked down upon them instead of acknowledging their own inferiority, that they swindled them whenever possible, etc. Even during the war a number of Japanese guards declared to their male prisoners that they did not know how to handle the women. The treatment in the women's camps was not better, at least as far as the civilian camps are concerned. As was stated above, this did not apply to the civilian men brought to Japan and Thailand for slave labour.

If we think of the general atmosphere, we would expect it to have been better in the men's camps. In general the men had more education, more professional training, etc. As a consequence, they had more possibilities of keeping themselves occupied on an intellectual level. In addition, there were more artists who could entertain their fellow-prisoners. Entertainment and study, too, were forbidden at an earlier date and more completely in the women's camps than in the men's camps. Furthermore, the men's camps contained more individuals used to management and the organization of and for large numbers of people. Another important point was that more men had knowledge of the Japanese language and culture. As the Japanese very largely expected their prisoners to run their own camps, within the conditions set by them and/or
expected by them, these capacities were all very important. It made contact between the Japanese and their prisoners much easier.

The question still remains why the mortality rate for men is so much higher than for women. Firstly, there is still the possibility that it was the responsibility for the children that gave the women the necessary incentive to stay alive. There were discussions in the women’s camps about which women had the better deal: those who had children to care for or the others. No conclusion was ever reached (Van Velden, 1977; Keith, 1951; Hooykaas-van Leeuwn Boomkamp, 1946).

At first, all children under 16 years of age were imprisoned in the women’s camps. The older boys formed a special problem. They were brought together in one room, barrack or such like. On the one hand, they had to do much work and felt very independent, but, on the other hand, many of them were upset when they were separated from their mothers and brothers and sisters. These barracks were initially presided over by old men, then still imprisoned in the women’s camps. The boys were often rebellious and many of these older leaders were pestered so much that they had to resign. In September, 1944, all boys of 11 years of age and older were taken to men’s camps; in January, 1945, the boys who would be 11 during that year were also taken from the women’s camps. For the mothers as well as the boys this was a horrible experience (Van Velden, 1977; Hooykaas-van Leeuwen Boomkamp, 1946).

For the men it meant that they were confronted with children to look after. In a number of camps they made a real effort. A mentor was provided for every boy in some camps. But many boys had a very difficult time in the men’s camps as they missed the feeling of safety and belonging which the women’s camps had given them. Although the arrival of the boys had a positive influence on some camps and gave some men a new goal (Van Velden, 1977), there is no evidence of a large-scale ‘parental’ activity on the men’s part that could have provided them with more resilience as a defence against camp life. There were instances of boys being left almost completely alone or being given tasks which should not have been imposed on children. The situation in some camps on Java was especially bad where boys were imprisoned along with old and sick men.
After the war, women and men gave their opinion about the influence being imprisoned with their families would have had. In retrospect, most men thought that it would have been better (or was better) if they had been (or were) imprisoned in family camps. Most women, however, were not of the same opinion. They saw as negative aspects of family camps that life would have been more complicated and that the stress would have been greater. There seems to be only one conclusion left:

although there were no systematic differences between the men's camps and the women's camps which gave women a better chance of survival, women coped better with camp life than men.

The question remains why.

Why Are Women Better Able To Cope With Camp Life Than Men

In all the reports, it becomes clear that women were better able to adapt themselves to the changed situation. They were very determined to survive, not to let themselves become too depressed and to keep their hopes fixed on a better future. Women were often more practical than men. For example, they did not brood too much about international regulations being violated, or illegal oaths they had to swear, but kept their energy for the more practical matters to hand. They also had fewer problems with feelings of humiliation because of the work and chores they had to do and/or were forced to perform.

Although nearly all the women had been used to servants and had not done housework themselves for years, they felt no resentment when they had to cook, to clean, to wash and look after the children. The women also had a strong drive to look after themselves. They tried to keep their clothes clean and mended. They did not let themselves go, which was the most dangerous thing to do. If someone ceased to struggle, to keep going, the chances of surviving decreased enormously. Women were less inclined to give in. When the elderly couples were separated, for example, the condition of the men deteriorated rapidly but that of the women continued unchanged.

The women were determined to make a home for themselves and their children. Even when finally there
was no more than 50 cm of a wooden board per person, the mattress was rolled up daily to form a couch, the space thus obtained becoming a table with something for a table-cloth. Decorations were hung up if possible, curtains were used in attempts to secure some privacy, etc. All this helped to create a 'home' amidst the turmoil of camp life with far too many people in small areas, with constantly crying, yelling and quarrelling children, with quarrels between adults, with many sick people always around, with constant fear of Japanese intervention. The children's birthdays, all kinds of festivals, like Christmas, were celebrated under all sorts of circumstances. Little 'outings' were organized. Watching the sunset in a certain corner of the camp, watching the blossoming of vegetables one had grown.

On the rare days the small sugar supplies were brought in, a whole camp would get excited because of the 'sweets' the women would make then. Even being transported from one camp to another was sometimes turned into a kind of picnic, at least for the children. From old garments new garments were made, little pieces of all kinds of material transformed into toys, handkerchiefs, decorations, little presents. Almost right up to the end, women in most camps were able to get emotionally aroused by the plight of their neighbours or newcomers and to take action about it. Such an event could, I remember, inspire a whole camp with healthy activity.

The atmosphere in a camp was, of course, largely determined by the circumstances (which could vary greatly), but not completely. It was important that people could, personally and as a group, accept the situation as it was, and use one's diminishing energy to make the best of it, not just on one occasion, but all the time: when one was transported to a new camp, or had to move within a camp, when newcomers came in, when new regulations were being issued, when there were inspections, collective punishment, etc. This adapting had to be a continuous and conscious process till the end.

It would seem to be a justifiable conclusion that flexibility and adaptability, along with retention of personal integrity, were the important factors for survival.

This conclusion is supported by other data too. It turned out that Dutch prisoners, women as well as men,
had less trouble adapting themselves to the changed circumstances than prisoners of other nationalities (Van Velden, 1977: 372-374). The British and American prisoners, for example, had a very hard time accepting native food and having to perform certain chores.

A very striking example was provided by the situation in the large family camp Santo Tomas in the Philippines. The camp was one of the best-known, the accommodation and medical care were not too bad, it was well-run and well-organized, the food situation was better and the period of malnutrition much shorter than elsewhere. The death rate, however, was relatively high. The deaths occurred mainly among the American prisoners, only a few of the British prisoners dying, and none of the Dutch. It seems that the capacity to adapt oneself is not sufficient by itself, it has to be combined with a fighting spirit directed towards survival. Adaption in the form of fatalism was very hazardous. This attitude was generally far stronger with the native population than with the 'Westerners'. The Eurasians, for example, who had a more oriental outlook, and other imprisoned Asians had a far more fatalistic approach to life: 'it is all pre-ordained, we cannot do anything but be resigned'.

Conclusions

It would appear that living in families as such offers no better chance for survival when disaster strikes, as in times of war, occupation and actual imprisonment.

Living in families did not enhance the chance to survive in an unilinear way, the association with others which implied care and responsibility, however, did. Women showed more resilience in their ability to engage in caring relationships with others, even with complete strangers. Next to the ability to form 'caring' relationships with others, if necessary repeatedly with new persons, there were other factors which influenced the chances of survival: the capacity to adapt oneself to continuously changing and worsening conditions without losing the urge to keep one's self-control and to show the world that one can persevere.

It seems that the traditional role-division in the individualized nuclear family, prepares women far better in all these respects than men. The socialization of women for
their family role, even when they do not live in families, gives them greater chances of survival when their world is completely turned upside down. This conclusion would seem to necessitate a change in the current views on the division of labour between men and women. A new division of labour - paid and unpaid, household and other, obligatory and voluntary - between men and women had been and is claimed by women in order to better their position in normal everyday life. It would seem that for men there is even more at stake! For them, this new division of labour would perhaps result in a better chance of surviving disaster.

In this respect the study of Bernard about the future of marriage (Bernard, 1972) deserves and should get more attention. Bernard shows how men are more dependent on the family for their well-being than women, i.e. the family that we prefer and support in (western) Europe and North America at an institutional level.

If we return to the two questions asked on p. 46, we now have reached the following answers:

- It is not living in families which gives individuals a better chance of surviving or coping with disaster, but the ability to engage in a mutually caring relationship. This can coincide with the family unit one belongs to though, not necessarily so.

- It is not clear whether the individualized conjugal family gives a better chance of survival. All the evidence, however, points to a far better ability of women for coping with disaster than of men.