Social Problem and Policy Analysis Frameworks

Foundations of Social Work Policy Practice

Analyzing Social Problems

- Not all conditions are defined as social 'problems' and not all 'problems' are 'social problems'.

- Problems are identified based on incongruence with powerful values/priorities, status of those affected, and sheer number affected.

- "To understand a social problem is to understand how and what another person/group thinks and believes about the social events being defined as a problem."

Defining Social Problems

- State the concrete observable signs by which its existence is to be known—how do you know a problem when you see it?
- Examine the causes of the social problem, and its consequences *(causal chain).*
- Identify the values and assumptions embedded in the problem definition.
- Who gains and who loses through the existence of this social problem (who pays, who benefits, and how much?)
  - We're all affected—the key is how and how much?

Refining the Problem Statement

- Population
- Problem
- Perspective of stakeholders
  - Values
  - Interests
  - Beliefs
  - Ethics
  - Slants
- Policy area

Social Policies to Address Social Problems

- Although social policies are designed to address problems, sometimes they create social problems.
- Each component of the problem analysis corresponds to a policy piece:
  - Definition—eligibility rules, target populations
  - Causal Analysis—types of benefits, services
  - Ideology/values—goals, amount of financing
  - Gainer/loser Analysis—method of financing

Elements of Good Analysis Framework

- Analyze systematically
- Context sensitive
- Rational methods of analysis, reliable, evidence-based
- Explicit (others able to reach same conclusion)
- Commitment to greatest good at smallest cost
- Take into account unintended consequences
- Considers alternative policies, use of resources
- Examine potential impact of policy on public, other policies
- Explicit about value preferences
- Grounded in practice experience

Value-Critical/Criteria-Based Policy Analysis

- Use value-based criteria to analyze policy problems, assumptions, functioning, and goals.
- Goal=provide frame of reference for determining if social policy is a good one re: goal of attempting to correct injustice.
- First must decide criteria on which to evaluate, and then battle over interpretation of data.
- Evaluation criteria:
  - Basic elements consistent with social problem analysis (including practice wisdom)?
  - Equity (both horizontal/absolute and vertical/proportional)
  - Adequacy
  - Efficiency
  - Trade-offs
  - Access/coverage effects

Framework for Policy Analysis

- Policy Elements (in each, examine range of alternatives, social values that support, theories/assumptions implicit)
  - Mission, goals, objectives
  - Forms of benefits/services
  - Entitlement rules (basis for allocation)
  - Structure/strategy for delivery
  - Financing (public vs. private, also level)
  - Interaction among elements
- Evaluation Criteria
  - Fit of policy element to social problem
  - Consequences for adequacy, efficiency, equity
  - Criteria uniquely useful to one element

Policy Goals

- "Statement of the desired human condition or social environment *expected to result* from implementation of the policy" (Chapin, 2007 p. 135, emphasis added)
- Both stated/manifest and implicit/latent
- Both short-term and long-term
- How do you find them?
- How to incorporate clients' perspectives?

Benefits and Services

- Types of benefits
  - Personal social services
  - Hard benefits (cash, goods)
  - Positive discrimination/status
  - Credits/vouchers
  - Subsidies
  - Loan guarantees
  - Protective regulations
  - Supervision of deviance
  - Power over decisions/access
- Adequacy, equity, stigma, target efficiency, trade-offs, substitutability
- Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness

Eligibility Rules

- Types
  - Prior contributions
  - Administrative rule
  - Private contracts
  - Relationship to eligible person
  - Professional discretion
  - Administrative discretion
  - Judicial decision
  - Means testing
    - Type of resource counted
    - Concept underlying idea of need
    - Beneficiary unit
  - Attachment to the workforce
- Residual vs. institutional
- Rational?
- Avoids excessive social control/stigmatization?

Service Delivery Systems

- Subtypes
  - Centralization
  - Federation
  - Case management
  - Staffing with indigenous workers
  - Referral agency
  - Client-controlled
  - Privatization
- Utilizes existing resources?
- Cost-efficient?
- Integrated?
- Empowering/offers choice?
- Strong accountability?
- Easy to navigate?

Financing

- Sources of funding—influences stability, interference, adequacy, equity, public perception
  - General revenue (state, federal, local)
  - Special revenue funds
  - Employee benefits
  - Tax expenditure
  - Social insurance/prior contributions
  - Voluntary contributions
  - Fees for service
- Amount
- Means of funding

Barusch's Questions for Policy Analysis from a Social Justice Perspective

- What are the costs and/or benefits under consideration?
- Who bears the cost, who receives the benefits, and what is the relationship between these two entities?
- Is anyone who is affected by this policy being labeled 'other', and does everyone affected by this policy have an equal voice?
- What are the rules, both formal and informal, that govern who receives and who pays?
- Is this policy fair?

Sections of Analysis Framework

- Historical background of policy
  - How handled previously, original understanding of problem, past support/opposition
- Description of problem that necessitated policy
  - Nature, scope, magnitude, population affected, causes
- Description of policy
  - Opportunities expected to provide, eligibility, implementation, goals/outcomes, administration, funding mechanism, evaluation, theory underlying
- Policy analysis
  - Political/economic/administrative feasibility, policy goals, effectiveness/efficiency

Crafting Policy Alternatives

○ Good policy solutions are:
- Reasonable Cost (cost-effectiveness)
- Stable (successes maintained despite social change)
- Reliable (consistently effective, transferable)
- Invulnerable (works even if part fails)
- Flexible (serves multiple purposes)
- Low-risk (likely to succeed)
- Communicable
- Reversible (can be undone)
- Acceptable (context can be softened to facilitate)
    - ○ This includes political calculations
- Residually valuable (benefit gained from proposing)
- Meritorious (has face validity)

International Comparative Policy Analysis

- National variables (need similar variables and measures to allow comparison)
  - Culture
  - Political structure
  - Economic system (capitalist, socialist)
  - Population characteristics (demographics)
- Factors influencing policy development in a country
  - Interest groups, political pressures
  - Needs
  - Resources (can they finance social welfare?)
  - Goals (general direction regarding objective)
  - Means (delivery system)
  - Outcomes (social indicators provide macro-level information about output of a social welfare system)

Class Discussion Questions

- Where is vertical equity more appropriate than horizontal?
- What are the advantages of the value critical vs. value committed approach to policy analysis? Vice versa?
- Is social control a legitimate social policy goal? When and why?
- What social welfare benefits do you receive? Have you thought of them that way?

More Questions

- What are the relative merits of cash vs. in-kind benefits? As a social work administrator, what would influence your choices?

- Do the costs of means-testing outweigh the benefits in targeting? What about the increased stigma?

- Why is it important for social work administrators today to have a framework for international comparative policy analysis?

More Questions

- Have you experienced social programs run by indigenous workers? What advantages and challenges do you see?

- Privatization is most appropriately understood as a continuum. What challenges and strengths do you see for service delivery along that continuum?

- What are the costs of 'unfunded' policies? How do we calculate these?

Final Questions!

- Using the policy analysis framework, how do you understand the differences between child welfare, anti-poverty, and children/family policies in the countries studied?
- What cautions are there in attempting to apply these lessons?
- How does the U.S. compare on values of equity, adequacy, and efficiency?
- How do differences in the understandings of social indicators influence these comparisons?

Tasks for Policy Practice

○ Social problem and policy analysis are only parts of policy practice

○ Also must include:

- Agenda-setting and softening the context

- Proposal preparation and communication (developing specific solutions)

- Policy enactment (legislative and/or agency advocacy) and implementation