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INTEGRATING
Social Welfare Policy
— **&** —
Social Work Practice

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Policy Evaluation, Research, and Analysis

We often design programs that seem curiously out of touch with the problems that arise in practice... we seem unable to grasp the real nature of action, which remains hidden, tacit, and inaccessible. Clearly, there is more to understanding policy than the task of legitimizing action. At the least, we seek to discover meaning and purpose from our action.

—MARTIN REIN, 1983, p. xi

As Martin Rein indicates in the opening quote, social welfare policy is often “curiously out of touch with the problems that arise in practice.” The programs and policies developed and implemented in the ways discussed in the first six chapters might be inadequate to meet the real needs of the clients we serve. It is not difficult to find practicing social workers who shake their heads in disbelief at the impracticality or inefficiency of new social welfare policies and programs. It often seems as though policy makers develop policies in a political vacuum rather than in close consultation with the clients and social workers who live with those policies.

On the other hand, the social work profession can legitimately be accused of offering only vague recommendations about the need for specific policies or improving current policies. Comments such as “somebody has to do something” or “it will never work with my clients” are offered rather than coherent, carefully composed suggestions for a more effective social welfare policy.

This chapter helps you develop the skills necessary to engage in program evaluation, policy research, and policy analysis. These are three ways of gathering empirical evidence to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of current and proposed social welfare policy. This text examines evaluation, research, and analysis separately because each has a specific role in policy assessment.

Specifically, this chapter includes the following:

- ♦ A description of the program evaluation process in which an agency or staff member assesses the purpose and procedures of a program within an agency
- ♦ An exploration of the process of social welfare policy research, the assessment of a policy or program conducted by administrative or academic researchers using the scientific method of examining the effectiveness and efficiency of large-scale social welfare policies
- ♦ Introduction of the ANALYSIS model for evaluating policies and programs that directly affect your work with clients

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program evaluation refers to "the critical and rigorous examination of a program's operation and outcomes with attention to the program goals and other effects, intended or unintended" (Rutman, 1977, p. 13). Program evaluation is conducted within a public or private agency to examine a program's efficiency and to determine whether a new program has achieved its goals for the service population. For example, a child welfare agency might want to assess the success of a specialized program to promote the adoption of children with special needs. By examining the components of the program's operation, the agency can determine whether the program is operating with the maximum amount of service and the minimum amount of waste or effort. By comparing the original goals of the program with the results, or outcomes, the agency can determine whether the goals were realized and thus determine whether a program should be continued, discontinued, or modified.

The Purpose of Evaluating Programs

Social welfare programs are evaluated for several reasons. First, a competent evaluation can assist the agency in future planning and management of the agency's programs (Portney, 1986). If the special-needs adoption program already mentioned is expensive to run and results in a small number of adoptions, management must decide whether the investment in personnel, marketing, and services is cost-efficient for the agency. Perhaps the money used to run the special-needs program might be more efficiently used in the treatment

foster care program, providing special supplements to foster families for long-term care of children with special needs, rather than permanent adoption or institutionalization.

Programs are also evaluated as a means of maintaining accountability to funding sources. Purchase of service contracts, demonstration grants from sources outside the agency, and targeted funds from community sources may require agencies to evaluate a program. Funding sources have the right to know whether the funds are being used for their intended purposes and used in the most efficient way possible.

Programs are evaluated to determine whether the program has had unintended effects. As we know from Chapter Two, decisions are made within the constraints of bounded rationality, meaning that no one can know all possible alternatives or the consequences of those alternatives. A program begun with good intentions may have negative consequences that could not have been predicted. For example, the state of Wisconsin has a program called Learnfare, which requires that teenagers who receive AFDC or who are in families that receive AFDC must attend school on a regular basis or risk a reduction in the amount of their welfare checks. One of the unforeseen consequences of this program has been the increase in the number of teenagers receiving AFDC who apply for a waiver from the program. Because they cannot secure child care for their dependent children or transportation to day care, these teenagers are not required to attend school. Those on whom the program was meant to focus, teenaged parents, can be legitimately excused from school attendance. The demand for day care far exceeds the funds allocated to the Learnfare program to supplement existing resources for child care. This type of unforeseen consequence is an important part of evaluating the worth of a program such as Learnfare. Instead of saving the state of Wisconsin money on the AFDC program, it has resulted in an increase in the amount of state money allocated for day care, a very expensive and difficult program to run.

Programs are also systematically evaluated to obtain quantifiable and empirical descriptions of a policy's operation and outcomes. Vague and undocumented observations about a program's effectiveness are not helpful in making management decisions. Administrators need empirical observations—that is, numbers, specific case examples, and cost-benefit ratios on which to base sound management decisions.

Preevaluation Activities

Before evaluators engage in the full-scale evaluation of a program within an agency, four important questions must be answered.

First, *who will evaluate the program?* Programs are often evaluated informally within the agency by administrators or agency staff. Internal evaluations can take less time because staff know how the program operates and have access to the information necessary for the evaluation. It is unlikely, though, that internal evaluations of social welfare programs will be unbiased

(Rutman, 1977). The most comprehensive and credible program evaluations rely on outside evaluators, who are less likely to be biased about the program's operation. It is easier for outside evaluators to be objective because their jobs are not at stake should the evaluation reflect poorly on the program in question. They will not be affected by the pressure within the agency to evaluate a popular program positively or an unpopular one negatively. Their lack of preconceived notions about agency programs and staff can promote a more rigorous and critical evaluation of the program.

Second, *will the evaluation examine output or impact, or both?* If evaluators simply look at the numbers of clients served, hours of service, number of personnel, expenditure of funds, and other quantitative measures, the evaluation is referred to as an **output evaluation**. Output evaluations are primarily descriptive, not analytical. They report the numbers pertinent to a program's operation but do not analyze the effects of the program. Output evaluations are reports, not evaluations in the true sense of the word. **Impact evaluations** include the same quantitative materials as output evaluations but also include descriptive and analytical material about the nonquantifiable aspects of a program. The perception of a program in a community, the morale of staff and clients, the effect of a program on other programs in the community, and the effect of the program on specific clients are examples of materials included in an impact evaluation.

Some programs do not lend themselves to impact evaluation. When goals are poorly articulated or unmeasurable, only output measures can be assessed. Other programs may have small and unimpressive quantitative measures, but significant nonquantifiable impact on an agency or community.

Let's return to the example of a special-needs adoption program. For the purposes of discussion, let's say the demonstration program placed only six special-needs children in adoptive homes during the year of operation at a cost of \$45,000. Permanent adoption saved the state more than \$30,000 a year for each child placed in a permanent home rather than in an institution. That is a savings of \$135,000 per year. The number of placements may not be impressive, but the cost savings certainly are. These figures are evaluations of output.

In addition, a greater number of couples from the community inquired about the special-needs adoptive process after they observed the support services offered by the agency in the adoptive process. The local newspaper cooperated by running a series of informative pieces on the adoptive process and about specific children to help find special-needs homes. This led to an increased sensitivity in the community to the importance of educational services for children with special needs through the local school system. These are components of an impact evaluation. If this evaluation had been restricted to the placement of six children, we would have missed the importance of the impact of those six placements on the process of special-needs adoption in the community.

Third, *how will the findings of the evaluation be used?* Evaluations are frequently conducted because decision makers request them, and the evaluation

is connected to a political agenda (Palumbo, 1987; Rein, 1983). It is easy to evaluate a program with the specific intent of finding what is wrong with the program and minimizing its positive impact. It is just as easy to evaluate a program emphasizing its positive impact and minimizing its negative aspects.

For example, the Learnfare program in Wisconsin underwent a preliminary output evaluation in the fall of 1990 for the specific purpose of assessing the characteristics of the population affected by the Learnfare program (Quinn, Pawasarat, & Stetzer, 1992). The evaluation was preliminary and did not purport to analyze whether the goals of the Learnfare program had been met. It was useful, however, in identifying problems the strict attendance requirements of the Learnfare program had created for the individual student, the school system, and county departments of social services. It was also useful in identifying the number of AFDC teens who were exempt from Learnfare restrictions due to age, inability to obtain day care, or formal expulsion from school. A private research and evaluation firm was hired to conduct the evaluation to minimize the criticism that an evaluation was strictly politically motivated by the governor who had developed the program. The results were not those the governor had intended, and the report was discredited. The evaluators were accused of being hostile to the intent of the program and were referred to as liberals. As of this writing, another policy evaluation group has been contacted to evaluate the program. This is a particularly poignant example of the effect of politics on program evaluation.

Fourth, *can the program be evaluated at all?* Rutman (1977) contends that three conditions must be met before a program can be legitimately evaluated.

- ◆ Programs must be clearly articulated; that is, there must be a clear, concise statement of what the program entails.
- ◆ There must be a set of clearly specific goals or expected effects of the program.
- ◆ A rationale must link the program intervention to its expected goals or effects.

Returning to Learnfare, we see the rationale that students who complete at least high school are less likely to become dependent on welfare as adults. Students cannot complete school if they do not attend. Therefore, it seems logical that school attendance is linked to a reduction in current or future welfare spending. If AFDC teens do not attend school, the state reduces their assistance or assistance to their families, thus saving money. Either way, it appears that the state will save money by requiring students to stay in school. Or will it? This conclusion is based on an erroneous assumption that being in school ensures that a student will receive an education or attain the skills necessary to obtain and keep a job. Perfect attendance does not translate directly into the attainment of minimal literacy or job training skills. In this

case, the program and its goals may have been clearly articulated, but there is no rational link of programs to their desired goals or effects. If the Learnfare program is based on an erroneous set of assumptions, can it legitimately be evaluated?

These four questions constitute the preevaluation activities necessary for program evaluation. If the necessary conditions for conducting an evaluation cannot be met, the suitability or wisdom of initiating a program evaluation must be questioned.

Identifying Program Goals

The first step in the program evaluation process is identifying program goals and variables by which those goals can be measured. Comparing the output of a program with the original goals formulated during program development is the simplest and most straightforward way to evaluate a program. In fact, if all social programs had clear and measurable goals, program evaluation would be relatively simple.

Chapter Two discusses the difficulties inherent in articulating goals for social service programs because of the ambiguous technology of social work and the difficulty in quantifying social service intervention. These difficulties further compound the complexity of conducting impact and output evaluations in the social services field. How can we evaluate whether a program has achieved its goals if we cannot articulate or measure the goals?

In cases where program goals have not been clearly articulated, it may be necessary to reconstruct the goals before evaluating the program. The child welfare agency's special-needs adoption program already discussed may not have included quantifiable measures in its original goal statement; however, it might be possible, through conversations with administrators and workers, to reconstruct goals that can be used to measure its success. There is an inherent danger in doing so. It is difficult to reconstruct original intent, especially if one is pushing for a positive evaluation of a program.

Identifying Variables for Evaluation

The Object of Analysis. Once the evaluator has either identified the original goals or reconstructed a set of goals, it is essential to identify the **object of analysis** (Tripodi, 1983). The object of analysis refers to the client, group, program, or organization that will be studied as a means of assessing the program under evaluation. In evaluating the special-needs adoption program, the clients and the program are the objects of analysis. It is important to observe the effects of the program on the children with special needs who are involved in it as well as to draw conclusions about the role of the program within the child welfare agency. In evaluating the Learnfare program, we would want to look at individuals, their families, the schools, and the AFDC program. All these objects of analysis are important to drawing conclusions about the program.

Selecting Variables for Analysis. The second step in choosing variables is to identify exactly the quantifiable variables to be studied. For example, in the Learnfare program we would want to know attendance levels for AFDC families before the program as well as after. We would expect to examine the amount of money spent in AFDC grants to these families before and after the program went into effect. Quantifiable variables give us hard numbers to use in an evaluation; they are the strongest measure of both output and impact.

Variables should not be limited to measurable items. Equally important for a sound program evaluation is inclusion of nonquantifiable measures, such as the reaction of families on AFDC to the program, the experiences of the schools required to keep impeccable attendance records, and the reactions of the social workers who continue to be involved with families despite the actions of the Learnfare program. It is in these subjective areas that we can most often identify the unintended consequences of a policy decision.

Identifying Sources of Data. Data, the information we need to assess a program, can be found in existing sources or can be gathered through a survey, a questionnaire, or interviews. Existing sources of data include public and private agency records and government data bases. For example, in evaluating the special-needs adoption program, we would want to examine the child welfare agency records, including the number of children adopted, the cost of adoptive services versus the cost incurred by the adoptive families, the cost of institutional placement for these children, the number of couples inquiring about special-needs adoption, and the like, both before and after the establishment of the special-needs program. The second source of information would be interviews or questionnaires sent to the adoptive families, the social workers who supervise the placements, and agency administrators. Questionnaires are a good source of nonquantifiable information and anecdotal evidence of a program's effectiveness.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

Once the data sources have been identified, data must be collected and analyzed. This can be a formal process involving computer data analysis or a simple computation of the results of the data collection, depending on the size of the program to be evaluated. In large-scale program evaluations, the methods discussed in the next section on policy research would be most appropriate. For small-scale program analysis, a simple description of the findings is sufficient.

An important part of the analysis of data collected for a program evaluation involves providing "before and after" information. If we assess the situation before the program began and again after the program was in operation, we are likely to obtain a more accurate, meaningful idea of the impact of the program. Thus, it is helpful to view the program as an intervention, much the same way we assess the importance of a social worker's

TABLE 7.1

**Examples of Intended and Unintended
Consequences in Selected Social Service Programs**

PROGRAM	INTENDED CONSEQUENCES	UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES
<i>Aid to Families with Dependent Children</i>	Single-parent families become more economically secure.	Two-parent families may break up to become eligible for support.
<i>Child Support Enforcement</i>	Both parents share financial support of child according to their ability to pay.	Unresolved issues around original divorce come up as dissension about money. May result in unwelcome contact with absent parent.
<i>Food Stamps</i>	Certain portion of monthly income must be spent on food for the family.	Program does not cover items such as diapers. May result in illegal sale of stamps to get cash to buy other necessities.
<i>Medical Assistance</i>	Children and parents have a way to pay for medical care even if they do not have insurance.	Without incentives, families may use hospital emergency room to receive routine care.

intervention in the life of a client. For the special-needs adoption program, it would be possible to assess the number of special-needs adoptions completed by the agency before the implementation of the special program. Then we could assess the number of special-needs adoptions and the increased interest in special-needs adoption after the program has been implemented. By comparing these numbers, we can draw some preliminary conclusions about the program's impact. This is looking directly at *intended* consequences of the program.

At this stage in program evaluation we need to examine *unintended* consequences of the program as well. Sometimes these are unexpected positive consequences, as is the case in the special-needs adoption program. Other times, the unintended consequences are negative, as in the example of the Learnfare program. Assessing the unintended consequences can be more indicative of the true worth of the program than assessing only the intended consequences. Even if a program meets its original goals and can demonstrate positive consequences, it might not be advisable to continue the program if the unintended consequences are serious and detrimental. Table 7.1 illustrates examples of the intended and unintended consequences in several common social welfare programs.

Reporting Evaluation Results

The final step in program evaluation is reporting the results of the evaluation. In informal evaluations, results are presented in a report to the program administration or a board of directors. Quality evaluations give equal weight to the positive and the negative findings of the evaluation. As in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of clients, it is important to report the strengths and weaknesses of a program. The observable strengths serve as the building blocks on which a program can be improved or modified; the weaknesses will need to be strengthened or eliminated.

Most program evaluations include recommendations based on the findings of the evaluation. Should the program be continued, discontinued, expanded, or contracted? What unintended consequences appear positive, and which are so negative they must be addressed? Does the expense of the program appear to be justified in view of the benefits derived from it? Does the program need more money to be effective? These questions are all examples of the recommendations that are usually included in the evaluation report.

In summary, program evaluation consists of six distinct steps, which are summarized in Box 7.1. First, the purpose of the evaluation must be clearly understood. Why and for whom is the evaluation being conducted? Second, several preevaluation activities must be completed, including deciding whether output or impact will be assessed, how the findings will be used, and assessing honestly whether the program is clearly articulated enough to be evaluated. Third, program goals must be identified either from program goal statements or through a process of reconstruction. Fourth, variables must be identified that will provide a meaningful evaluation of the program components to be assessed. Fifth, data must be collected and analyzed. Finally, the results of the evaluation must be presented in a format usable to those who have requested the evaluation or to decision makers.

Program evaluation is the most common kind of evaluative process you will participate in outside of your own professional or personal evaluation of a program. Next we examine large-scale policy evaluation, known as policy research.

POLICY RESEARCH

Large-scale policy research is most frequently the domain of professional policy and academic researchers and follows a more rigorous methodology than evaluation of a program within an agency. Policy researchers on this level are usually concerned about the effects of specific and general policies on a large number of people, not just those served by a particular agency. For example, researchers study the effects of national employment legislation on the abilities of AFDC recipients to obtain adequate employment or

BOX 7.1**Steps in Evaluating a Program**

Step 1: Define the purpose of the evaluation.

Step 2: Complete preevaluation activities.

- ◆ Who will evaluate the program?
- ◆ Will the evaluation examine output or impact?
- ◆ How will the findings of the evaluation be used?
- ◆ Can the program be evaluated?

Step 3: Identify program goals.

Step 4: Identify variables for evaluation.

- ◆ What is the object of analysis?
- ◆ What variables will be observed and measured?

Step 5: Collect and analyze data.

- ◆ Identify intended consequences of the program.
- ◆ Identify unintended consequences of the program.

Step 6: Report the results of the evaluation.

- ◆ Identify the program's strengths and weaknesses.
- ◆ Describe the effectiveness of the program.
- ◆ Recommend changes if necessary.

the effects of deinstitutionalization from psychiatric facilities on the number of homeless, chronically mentally ill people. Large-scale studies on the use of food stamps, Medicaid, and income maintenance programs are common examples of large-scale policy research.

The Scientific Method and Policy Research

For policy research of this nature, researchers use the **scientific method**, a precise set of procedures by which traditional empirical research is conducted. These steps are summarized in Figure 7.1. The scientific method in policy research consists of six specific steps, which resemble the steps used in program evaluation. In the following description of conducting a research project, the effect of deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill on the number of homeless people will be used as an example.

Statement of the Research Problem. The first step in empirical research on social welfare policy is stating the research problem; that is, the researcher

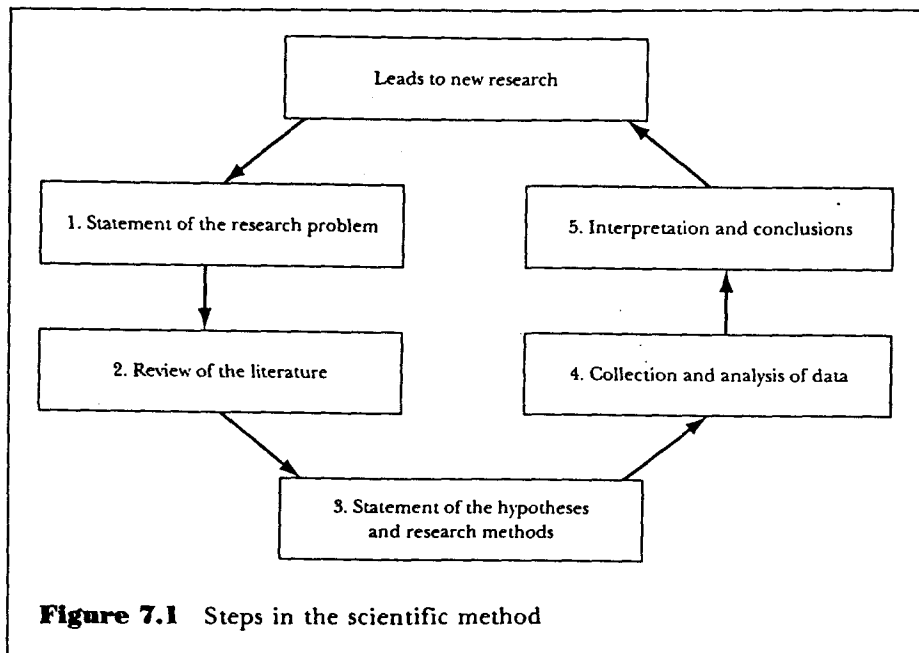


Figure 7.1 Steps in the scientific method

must clearly state the purpose of and reason for studying the research issue. What factors have prompted the research, and for what purpose might the research be used? In the case of the deinstitutionalization issue, the researcher might indicate that the number of homeless mentally ill appears to have grown significantly since mentally ill individuals were moved out of institutions into independent living arrangements beginning in 1961 (Johnson & Schwartz, 1991, p. 233). The researcher might indicate that a quantitative assessment of the number of people who were institutionalized and who now are homeless might give policy makers a clearer idea of the amount of money and kinds of programs that will be needed to provide community support for this homeless population.

The statement of the research problem is also a brief introduction to the research process that will be used. Indicating whether questionnaires, surveys, or existing sources of data will be used to gather data and the means by which that data will be analyzed provides a blueprint for the research.

Review of the Literature. Once the general research statement has been articulated, the researcher must review existing research in this area. Have other studies addressed this same issue? If so, what were the results? What factors appear to be connected with the likelihood of ending up homeless after having been institutionalized? What programs and policies have been instituted to minimize the chance that someone will become homeless?

The review of the literature helps the researcher avoid repeating research that has already been done and directs the researcher's attention

to factors that have been shown to be important in assessing the research question. If a researcher discovers that the size of the community has repeatedly been identified as a predictor of homelessness in the deinstitutionalized, this information should be included in the research question. If previous research has indicated that gender is not a factor in predicting homelessness, it may not be necessary to include it as a variable in future research. The review of the literature is helpful in providing the researcher with a solid assessment of what research has been done, what variables appear to be important in understanding the research question, and in what areas knowledge to date has been insufficient.

Extensive time and attention is spent on the review of the literature and statement of the research problem because empirical research of this nature is extremely expensive. Careful thinking before the research begins is imperative to avoiding costly mistakes and repeating research that has already been conducted.

Statement of the Hypotheses and Research Methods. Once the literature has been thoroughly examined, the researcher can usually offer a number of **hypotheses**, or tentative statements about the relationships between variables. For example, a researcher might predict that the number of chronically mentally ill who are homeless is directly related to the geographical proximity of a psychiatric facility. This hypothesis is based on the conclusion that if people have been deinstitutionalized in a community, it is unlikely that they will move very far away from that community because they lack social support outside that community. Their only social support may be others who were hospitalized with them. Another hypothesis might be that the number of homeless mentally ill is directly related to the availability of single-room occupancy hotels, a source of affordable housing for individuals with low incomes (Lamb, 1984). With limited incomes and some difficulty in living with others, the chronically mentally ill might be restricted to these single-room occupancy hotels rather than to traditional apartment living. These hypotheses focus the research and guide the data collection.

Once hypotheses are stated, the researcher selects the **research methods** to be used; that is, how the researcher will obtain the information needed to determine whether these tentative statements about the relationship between two variables are valid. Hypotheses can never be proved. Rather, the best a researcher can say is that the findings of the research either support or fail to support the hypotheses. Examples of research methods include the use of surveys or existing data sets such as the Census or the General Social Survey. Original data may also be collected if existing data sets cannot be used. Planning the statistical and analytical methods to be used to evaluate data in relationship to the general hypotheses of a research project is an important part of determining the methodology to be used.

Collection and Analysis of the Data. After collecting the data, the researcher applies the analytical methods described in the methodology section

of the research. This section can include a descriptive summary of the data, such as the number of homeless persons studied, the length of previous institutionalization, and other factors that help us understand the basic characteristics of the population being studied. The analytical reports of the research include clear statements of the relationships of the findings to the original hypotheses. Does a statistically significant relationship exist between the geographical location of a psychiatric facility and the number of mentally ill homeless in a community? In communities with little or no low-income housing, are there significantly larger numbers of homeless mentally ill?

In this step of policy research, the researcher and the consumer of the research must be very careful not to suggest relationships between variables when the relationship is not strong enough to be meaningful. For example, most urban areas have both psychiatric facilities and homeless mentally ill. This relationship is only significant if the homeless mentally ill are prior residents of the hospitals in that area and can state with some certainty that they chose to stay in the area because of friendships with other former patients. The numbers must be large enough to be more than coincidental. The analysis of the data in relationship to the hypothesis must be rigorous and unbiased.

Interpretation and Conclusions. The final step in policy research is interpreting the research findings and their relevance to social welfare policy. What variables identified in the research seem most closely associated with the growing number of mentally ill homeless people? What policy initiatives suggest themselves as solutions to the problem? What appears to be effective in minimizing the negative consequences of deinstitutionalization? In promoting the positive consequences? Answers to these questions can help policy makers and implementers determine what, if any, changes are necessary in the program.

Approaches to Policy Research

Three main approaches are used in policy research. Each examines a slightly different aspect of social welfare policy.

Researching the Policy-Making Process. One approach to policy research assesses the policy-making process, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Six. The premise of this type of research is that understanding the process of making policy helps us understand why and how policy is made and how this process determines the final product (Portney, 1986). This approach to policy research is primarily descriptive rather than analytical. Although analysis about the policy-making process itself is included, it does not draw extensive conclusions about the impact of policy once it has been formulated. This kind of research is known as **formative policy research**; that is, it focuses on the formation of policy rather than on describing its impact on clients and agencies (Tripodi, 1983).

The problem-solving model used to describe the formation of the Task Force on Teen Parenthood in Chapter Six is a good model for this type of descriptive research.

The Cause and Consequences Approach. A second, more analytical approach to policy is called the **cause and consequences** approach to policy analysis (Portney, 1986). This type of research assesses the process of going from identifying a social problem to implementing a policy and assessing the impact of that policy on the original social problem. The result is an evaluative assessment of the worth of social policy, similar to the process identified under program evaluation.

The actual policy can be either the independent or the dependent variable. As an independent variable, the policy is examined in terms of its impact on an existing social problem. In other words, the research examines the consequences of the policy once it has been implemented. Policy can also be seen as a dependent variable—that is, as an examination of the antecedents in terms of social problems that resulted in the formation of a policy. This type of policy research is known as **summative policy research**, which is descriptive and analytical, and can be generalized to other, similar policies.

The Prescriptive Policy Research Approach. A third approach used in policy research is the **prescriptive policy approach** (Portney, 1986). The prescriptive approach recommends or prescribes a policy based on previous information about the impact of existing policies with a projection about the continuing effectiveness of these policies into the future. The intent is to quasi-scientifically suggest the best course of action for future policy decisions. Prescriptive policy research is often the domain of research institutes connected to colleges and universities that have access to sophisticated computer modeling techniques.

THE ANALYSIS MODEL

The methods of program evaluation and policy research discussed in this chapter are most often used by professional policy analysts who are hired specifically for that purpose. Both methods require training well beyond the scope of this book. What about you, the social work practitioner who must evaluate the importance and impact of social welfare policy every day in your work with clients? As stressed throughout this book, no social work practitioner remains untouched by the implications of social welfare policy both for the clients they serve and for the environment in which they work, the social service agency.

Unfortunately, practitioners too often rely on personal reactions to a policy and its effectiveness instead of carefully examining a policy in a systematic, critical manner. It is difficult to be a critical consumer of social welfare policy without first understanding the policy.

The model that follows is designed specifically for social work practitioners. It provides an easy way to remember the kinds of questions that should be asked both in evaluating policy as it is being proposed (formative policy evaluation) and in assessing the impact of policy once it has been implemented (summative policy evaluation). The eight areas of importance are easy to remember using the acronym ANALYSIS as a mnemonic device.

A (Approach)

As we have seen both in program evaluation and policy research, a brief summary of the program to be evaluated is important in setting the stage for the evaluative process. It is important to understand first the basic *approach* of the policy being evaluated. Is the program a cash, in-kind, or service program? Does the program have eligibility requirements (means tested) or is it available to all regardless of income and assets (universal)? Is the policy designed to meet an immediate need, a **consumption approach**, or is it aimed at long-range goals, an **investment approach**? What are the stated goals of the program? Answering these basic questions helps you understand the dynamics of the program and helps set the stage for the rest of the ANALYSIS approach to policy assessment. Many of the criticisms of current social welfare policy result from a poor understanding of the policy and its original intentions.

What *attitudes* and values are reflected in the policy? Society's attitudes and values shape much of the social welfare policy we have today. Now and in the future, these attitudes and values will continue to shape those policies. What attitudes does a policy such as Learnfare address? Clearly, the attitudes of social control and punishment are reflected in the policy. If AFDC families do not care enough to insist that their children attend school, the state will give them a financial incentive to do so. However, will an attitude of social control or punishment effectively address this issue in the long run?

It is also important to assess the policy in terms of the attitudes and values of the social work profession. The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (see Appendix A) outlines the basic set of professional values that guides the social work profession. More often than not, social welfare policy operates in contradiction to those values (Prigmore & Atherton, 1986). For example, Learnfare is in direct contradiction to the social work value of client self-determination. It violates the principle of respecting the right of clients to make decisions for themselves. Often the practitioner's negative reaction to social welfare policy results from feeling uneasy about these value conflicts. Identifying specifically what attitudes are reflected in the policy under consideration can help us refine our professional assessments of the policy.

N (Need)

The second step in the ANALYSIS model is to carefully assess what *need* the policy is intended to meet; that is, what social problem prompted the

development of the policy? Has the need been carefully documented, or was the policy a legislator's impulsive reaction to constituents' demands? Is the need widespread or isolated? For example, federal energy assistance is an important program in states with severe winters and makes the difference between life and death for many low-income families. However, it has far less relevance to those in warm climates where it is unlikely that a low-income family would freeze if their power were disconnected.

How is the need addressed by the program defined? If we determine that teenagers in low-income families need an education, does mandatory school attendance address that need? It is not clear that lack of marketable skills and inability to get a job are directly linked to school attendance. It is more logical that the need is addressed by intensive skills training and job development. Once teenagers have an education, can they do anything with it? Will sitting in school help students who have not been able to benefit from the traditional educational model?

In assessing the need, you will want to ask whether the policy is rationally connected to meeting that need. In the case of the Wisconsin Learnfare program, mandating school attendance as a means of minimizing future public dependency appears to be rationally connected until we examine the issue more carefully. We know that just attending school does not guarantee getting an education. But does the Learnfare program address the issue of why these children are not attending school or whether, once they graduate from high school, they could find a job anyway? Although based on good intentions, the program may not make the best connection between an identified need and a program to meet that need.

A (Assessment)

The first two steps in the ANALYSIS model are primarily descriptions of the basic premise and operation of the program or policy and the scope of the need addressed by the policy. The evaluative component of the ANALYSIS model begins with a preliminary assessment of the effectiveness of the program. By identifying concrete evidence of both the strengths and weaknesses of the program or policy, we can begin to draw preliminary conclusions about its effectiveness.

Identifying Program Strengths. Although we may disagree with a proposed or existing policy, it is important to acknowledge that most social welfare policies and programs are developed with good intentions. However, we can recognize the good intentions of a program without condoning its operation. For example, the Wisconsin Learnfare program appropriately identified the significant connection between education and economic self-sufficiency. Young people cannot achieve any level of financial security without at least a high school education. Addressing this connection is the strength of the program. An additional strength is that forcing teenagers back into the classroom has helped school systems identify many of the problems that

cause students to drop out of school in the first place, such as special learning needs and inadequate day care.

Continuing with our identification of program strengths, we need to know if there is empirical evidence that the policy has accomplished its original goals. What can we learn from program records or conversations with program participants? The Learnfare program could be assessed by comparing graduation rates of AFDC teenagers before and after the inception of the program with the number of teenagers graduating from high school who eventually become economically self-sufficient. This method, although impractical for the practitioner, is the ideal. A more practical alternative would be to speak with high school guidance counselors, principals, public assistance workers, and a small sample of teenagers affected by the program. Although such an assessment is not considered scientific, it can give you a preliminary idea of the program's strengths and weaknesses. This is a more professionally responsible approach than simply considering your personal reaction to a policy as a valid policy assessment.

Identifying Program Weaknesses. The primary reason for you to engage in policy or program analysis is to identify elements of a policy that must change to serve your clients better. What are the indicators that the policy or program has not accomplished its goals or has had dangerous unintended consequences? Is the program a threat to a client's legal or ethical rights? When you gathered information about the program or policy, what weaknesses or problems did program participants identify?

The assessment phase of the ANALYSIS model is analogous to the assessment stage of the problem-solving model used in social work practice. Assessing policy weaknesses helps us identify what needs to be changed, whereas program strengths serve as the building blocks for change.

L (Logic)

Are the goals of the policy under consideration logically connected to the program designed to meet those goals? Does the intervention intended follow the logic of how people behave? Our knowledge of human behavior indicates that we cannot force people to change unless they want to change. Does it logically follow that a child who does not want to be in school can be forced to stay there? Every student knows exactly what to do to be expelled if he or she does not want to be in school. Every parent knows that he or she can force children to do some things and cannot force them to do others, including going to school. Can a parent convince a child that it is more desirable to stay in school, at least through high school, to increase the odds of obtaining minimum-wage employment after graduation than to quit school and become involved in the underground economy for fast and easy money now? Some policy decisions simply make no sense from the perspective of the logic of human behavior.

Is the program a logical expression of what we know about effective delivery of services? How the service is delivered or the program is

administered has a powerful effect on its chances for success. In-kind programs, such as food stamps, have been very effective in targeting money for food for low-income families yet restricting recipients' choices about how they spend their monthly income. Cash income maintenance programs allow recipients freedom of choice about where their incomes will be spent but cannot guarantee a family will not face eviction for failing to include rent as part of monthly expenses. Learnfare employs a punishment (loss of some portion of AFDC benefits) for not complying with program requirements (attendance in school). Some behaviorists contend that the threat of punishment is more effective in influencing behavior; others believe people respond more consistently to rewards. The Learnfare program could just as easily raise the amount of monthly benefits for families whose children attend school regularly. Which do you believe would be more effective?

Y (Your Reaction as a Practitioner)

Part of the process of maturing as a professional social worker is learning to trust your intuition and judgments about both clients and social welfare policy. In this aspect of the ANALYSIS model, you are asked to carefully consider what you think, independent of anyone else's comments or insights about social welfare policy. Does the policy make sense to you? In what ways have you seen it affect clients and social workers? What problems or benefits has the program resulted in for the social service agency in which you work?

What concerns or impresses you about the policy? Have you seen unintended consequences of the policy that have been more detrimental than beneficial to the client population? Has the policy also had unintended positive consequences? What do your clients say about the policy? Combining your own feelings and insights with more empirical data about the policy can make the process of policy analysis much more meaningful for you.

S (Support)

From where, if anywhere, does the money to implement the policy come? Some policies do not involve additional services but are regulatory, designed to enforce rules rather than to provide services. If the program is funded by a grant from an outside source, its existence can be precarious. Therefore, the program will be carefully scrutinized before it is funded again or designated for a long-term funding commitment on the part of the social service agency. Other programs are required by state or federal law, and their fiscal allocation is tied to more conventional funding sources. How does the source of funds dictate what can and cannot be done with the program? How is the program financially accountable to outside sources?

A second aspect of evaluating financial support is assessment of whether a program is cost-effective in terms of what is accomplished. If a program is extremely expensive and serves only a few clients, its cost-effectiveness will be challenged. If a program requires a lot of tax dollars but saves money in the long run, its cost-effectiveness will be much easier to justify.

A third aspect of support is the general support of the program by those who are paying for it. Some people have such strong beliefs about the immorality of abortion that they would rather pay to support a child on public assistance for 18 years than have tax dollars go to pay for an abortion for a low-income woman. Their assessment of the cost-effectiveness of a program has little to do with financial considerations.

I (Innovation)

Innovation refers to the channels through which changes can be achieved in the program. Does the program appear to be working well but need more staff or more money? Can the program be improved with minor changes, or does it appear to need a comprehensive overhaul to be more effective? Can these changes be made on the agency level, or must other regulatory bodies make changes in administrative law to correct the flaws?

S (Social Justice)

Is the policy or program consistent with the social work profession's commitment to social justice? Does the policy address past inequities in treatment or opportunities for those who have been oppressed by society (that is, women, minorities, gays, and lesbians)? If social welfare programs and policies perpetuate inequities or create obstacles for those already powerless in society, as practitioners we cannot placidly accept these programs and policies. Inadequate child care for working AFDC mothers is not tolerable, even if the employment program is excellent. Discriminating against women in favor of male heads of households in designing employment training programs is not acceptable, no matter how many families are helped. Current and proposed social welfare policy *must* be sensitive to issues of social justice. It is in drawing attention to and advocating on behalf of those who suffer from social injustice that we perform our most important professional function. It is our professional role to speak for those who have no voice.

Summarizing the ANALYSIS

In considering all of the elements of the ANALYSIS model, what conclusions can you draw from your perspective as a social work practitioner? What improvements, changes, or decisions would you recommend? Who needs to know about your conclusions? Have you analyzed the policy so you can understand it better?

SUMMARY

This chapter explores three major types of social welfare policy assessment. Program evaluation entails assessing the effectiveness of a specific program,

BOX 7.2**The ANALYSIS Model of Policy Evaluation**

A (Approach): Brief description of the methods used in the current or proposed policy. What attitudes or values are expressed in the policy? Is the policy consistent with acceptable values for helping people to meet their needs?

N (Need): What need does the policy attempt to address? How has the need for intervention been documented? What are the indications that the policy has met these needs?

A (Assessment): What are the program's or policy's strengths and weaknesses? What is the evidence from public records or from the experiences of professionals and program participants of the program's success or failure?

L (Logic): Does the proposed or current policy logically address the connection between the need and a means of solving the problem, based on what we know about human behavior and acceptable means of delivering services to clients?

Y (Your reaction): From your professional experiences, does the policy seem effective? Have you or your clients had especially good or bad experiences with the policy?

S (Support): What is the financial support for the program? Are the finances sufficient to meet the goals of the program? Are sources of program financing stable?

I (Innovation): What provisions have been made for changing the program if necessary? Is there sufficient opportunity for feedback on the program?

S (Social justice): Does the program address the important issue of social justice as expressed by society and the social work profession?

usually within a single agency or community. Policy research requires using the scientific method to systematically assess the relationship between empirical observations and hypothetical statements about policies. The ANALYSIS model offers a series of questions you should ask about policies being proposed or about policies that have been implemented. Box 7.2 recaps the ANALYSIS model. All three approaches require you to carefully formulate questions to gather the information necessary to assess whether a program has been effective in reaching its original goals.

If these approaches to evaluating policies identify a policy that is inadequate, ineffective, or unjust, it is our professional responsibility to work toward changing that policy. Chapter Eight explores the practitioner's role in influencing change in public policy at any level.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of the models of policy evaluation would be most appropriate in evaluating the following programs?
 - a. A state-sponsored work program for AFDC recipients
 - b. A city program for the homeless mentally ill
 - c. The effect on retirees of an increase in Social Security benefits
2. What is meant by object of analysis in program analysis? How would changing the object of analysis change the purpose and usefulness of the evaluation?
3. Why are preevaluation activities critical to a comprehensive program evaluation?
4. What are the six steps in the scientific method? Which step do you feel is most important?
5. What is the difference between the summative and prescriptive approaches to policy research?

SUGGESTED PROJECTS

1. Obtain a copy of a program evaluation done recently at a social service agency in your community. Compare the evaluation report with the elements of program evaluation discussed in this chapter. What information is missing? What information does the report contain that is not discussed in this chapter?
2. Following the steps of the scientific method, design a policy research process on some area of social welfare policy that interests you. Where could you find a data set that would provide the information you need to complete the project?
3. Select a policy or program in your community, and analyze that policy using the ANALYSIS model.

IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS

causes and consequences
 approach
 consumption approach
 data
 formative policy research
 hypothesis
 impact evaluation
 investment approach

object of analysis
 output evaluation
 prescriptive policy
 approach
 program evaluation
 research methods
 scientific method
 summative policy research

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