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Analysis: Basic Concepts*

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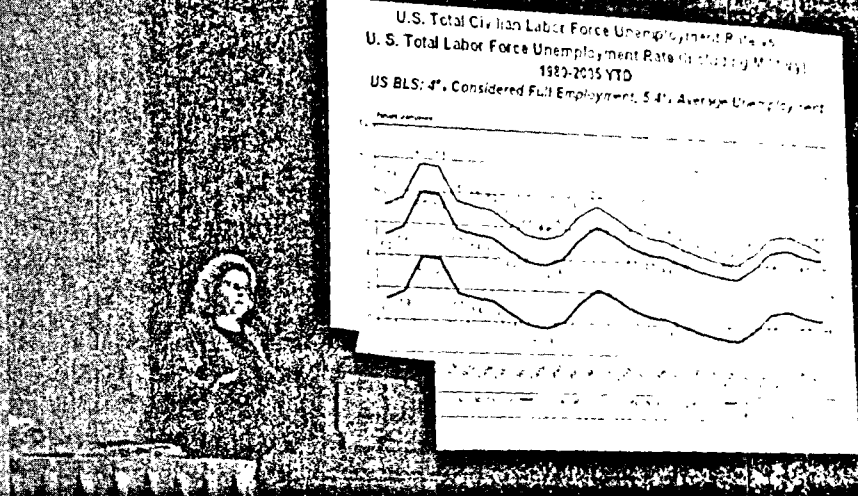
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Social Welfare Policy Analysis

Basic Concepts

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The Many Meanings of Policy Analysis 33

Methods of Policy Analysis 36

Descriptive Analysis

Process Analysis

Evaluation

Policy Analysis Methods as Ideal Types

Policy Analysis as Science, Art, and Politics 50

Conclusion 52

Practice Test 53

Diversity
in Practice

Engage
Assess
Intervene
Evaluate

Ethical
Practice



CONNECTING CORE COMPETENCIES in this chapter

Professional
Identity

Ethical
Practice

Critical
Thinking

Diversity
in Practice

Human
Rights
& Justice

Research
Based
Practice

Human
Behavior

Policy
Practice

Practice
Contexts

Engage
Assess
Intervene
Evaluate

In Part I, we sought to identify policy as central to the social work profession and to define the term. It logically follows that if policy is as important as we assert, then it is important to develop systematic means of studying and understanding policy in all its dimensions. This is the goal of Part II. We begin this section by discussing what policy analysis is (a very slippery subject in its own right), and we then move on to discuss the analysis of various dimensions of social welfare policy. We will basically follow the outline presented below. Before you become overwhelmed with the level of detail presented, note that we are presenting this as a way of discussing the immensely complex subject of policy analysis, not as a model to be actually applied in all its detail by a social work practitioner. This outline can be applied at any level of detail, from one very specific policy (i.e., the Older Americans Act) to a general policy area (i.e., social welfare policies enacted to deal with the problems of elderly citizens). It is not always necessary to apply the whole framework in every policy analysis; policy analysts in the real world selectively apply various parts of the outline, guided by the specific policy they are concerned with and the purpose of the analysis. In Part III of this book, we will demonstrate how practitioner policy analyses are done using examples from fighting poverty, aging, mental health, substance abuse, and child welfare.

Policy Analysis Outline

- I. Delineation and Overview of the Policy under Analysis
 - A. What is the specific policy or general policy area to be analyzed?
 - B. What is the nature of the problem being targeted by the policy?
 1. How is the problem defined?
 2. For whom is it a problem?
 - C. What is the context of the policy being analyzed (i.e., how does this specific policy fit with other policies seeking to manage a social problem)?
 - D. Choice analysis (i.e., what is the design of programs created by a policy and what are alternatives to this design?)
 1. What are the bases of social allocation?
 2. What are the types of social provisions?
 3. What are the strategies for delivery of benefits?
 4. What are the methods of financing these provisions?
- II. Historical Analysis
 - A. What policies and programs were previously developed to deal with the problem? In other words, how has this problem been dealt with in the past?
 - B. How has the specific policy/program under analysis developed over time?
 1. What people, or groups of people, initiated and/or promoted the policy?
 2. What people, or groups of people, opposed the policy?
 - C. What does history tell us about effective/ineffective approaches to the problem being addressed?
 - D. To what extent does the current policy/program incorporate the lessons of history?
- III. Social Analysis
 - A. Problem description
 1. How complete is our knowledge of the problem?
 2. Are our efforts to deal with the problem in accord with research findings?
 3. What population is affected by the problem?

- a. Size
 - b. Defining characteristics
 - c. Distribution
- 4. What theory or theories of human behavior are explicit or, more likely, implicit in the policy?
- 5. What are major social values related to the problem and what value conflicts exist?
- 6. What are the goals of the policy under analysis?
 - 1. Manifest (stated) goals
 - 2. Latent (unstated) goals
 - 3. Degree of consensus regarding goals
- 7. What are the hypotheses implicit or explicit in the statement of the problem and goals?
- IV. Economic Analysis
 - A. What are the effects and/or potential effects of the policy on the functioning of the economy as a whole—output, income, inflation, unemployment, and so forth? (macroeconomic analysis)
 - B. What are the effects and/or potential effects of the policy on the behavior of individuals, firms, and markets—motivation to work, cost of rent, supply of commodities, etc.? (microeconomic analysis)
 - C. Opportunity cost; cost/benefit analysis
- V. Political Analysis
 - A. Who are the major stakeholders regarding this particular policy/program?
 - 1. What is the power base of the policy/program's supporters?
 - 2. What is the power base of the policy/program's opponents?
 - 3. How well are the policy/program's intended beneficiaries represented in the ongoing development and implementation of the policy/program?
 - B. How has the policy/program been legitimized? Is this basis for legitimation still current?
 - C. To what extent is the policy/program an example of rational decision making, incremental change, or of change brought about by conflict?
 - D. What are the political aspects of the implementation of the policy/program?
- VI. Policy/Program Evaluation
 - A. What are the outcomes of the policy/program in relation to the stated goals?
 - B. What are the unintended consequences of the policy/program?
 - C. Is the policy/program cost effective?
- VII. Current Proposals for Policy Reform

Every once in a while, a policy study appears that is so interesting and well written that people read it for relaxation and enjoyment. Jason DeParle's book *American Dreams: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare* is one example.¹ This, unfortunately, is a rare occurrence. Generally, people read policy literature for practical reasons, namely to gain an understanding of the dynamics of our collective response to various social problems. Policy analyses are read to answer questions such as: How do we deal with poverty? What do we do about health care for people who are sick but have no insurance and no money? What is being done to help children who are being mistreated? Is our response to drug abuse the best one and, if not, what other options are available?

When you seek the answers to questions such as these, you will first consult the policy analysis literature. Two aspects of this literature will, at least initially, puzzle you. First, you will notice that the policy analysis literature is spread all over the library. Some is shelved, as you would expect, with the social work literature. You probably won't be too surprised to find some policy material with sociology, political science, history, and economics. A small amount, less predictably, will be with business, and a rather substantial amount will be with religion and philosophy.

Second, once you have ferreted out sources on a policy issue (for example, on antipoverty policy), you will find that, though different sources deal with the same topic, the approaches look very different. Some policy analyses look like literature, being composed mostly of stories. Some look like mathematics texts, with lengthy and complex formulas, tables, graphs, and so forth. Some look like stories in a newspaper or magazine (in fact, may *be* stories in newspapers and magazines). To help prevent the confusion you may experience in simply identifying and locating sources of policy analysis, we begin with a discussion of the policy analysis field.

THE MANY MEANINGS OF POLICY ANALYSIS

Like most terms and concepts in the study of social welfare policy, the term *policy analysis* tends to be used in vague and inconsistent ways. David Bobrow and John Dryzek refer to the policy analysis field as "home to a babel of tongues."² The late Aaron Wildavsky, a leading figure in the policy analysis field, argued that it is unwise to even try to define the term, saying, "At the Graduate School of Public Policy in Berkeley, I discouraged discussions on the meaning of policy analysis. Hundreds of conversations on this slippery subject had proven futile, even exasperating, possibly dangerous." He referred to policy analysis as that which "could be learned but not explained, that all of us could sometimes do but that none of us could ever define."³ Although we sympathize with Wildavsky's frustration, we believe that, at least for social workers whose primary interest is not policy, it is necessary to deal with the term before any progress can be made in learning policy analysis skills. The definition we like is based on the one offered by the Canadian political scientist Leslie Pal: Policy analysis is the disciplined application of intellect to the study of collective responses to public (in our case social welfare) problems. This definition is sufficiently broad to include the wide range of policy analysis approaches we describe but is still precise enough to exclude many other types of social work knowledge-building activities.⁴

A key to defining and dealing with the term *policy analysis* is the recognition that it is broad and general. In many ways, it is analogous to the term *research*, which we all realize means many different things depending on how it is used by different people in different contexts. We all recognize the difference

between a husband saying to his wife, "We need to do some research on state parks before we plan our summer vacation," and a social worker saying, "I have received a \$250,000 grant to do research on the relationship between drug usage and marital instability." In a similar fashion, the term *policy analysis* is used to refer to everything from the processes citizens use to familiarize themselves with issues prior to voting, to a multiyear, multimillion dollar project to set up and evaluate programs using different approaches to financial assistance.

Table 3.1 presents a typology for categorizing different approaches to policy analysis. The table identifies four major dimensions on which policy analysis approaches vary. The first is the sophistication required of the person conducting the analysis. From the top of the table downward, the sophistication required diminishes. For the top two types, academic social science research and applied policy research, the analyst is generally educated at the doctoral level in policy analysis or in a related social science or applied social profession such as public administration or social work. These analysts generally spend a large proportion of their time conducting policy studies that are read and critiqued by other policy researchers and/or by actual policymakers. Because their purpose is to create new knowledge, the results are generally published in fairly accessible sources. These may range from books and articles available in a good library, to proceedings of professional conferences that may be widely circulated, to monographs and reports available in microform and on the Internet, to photocopied in-house reports, which are less widely distributed. Because of the rigorous nature of the methodology and the wide availability of results of these types of analyses, they often form the database for other approaches to policy analysis.

Because social work is a policy based profession, practitioners must be able to do skillful policy analyses in order to fully understand their jobs.

The next two approaches, social planning and agency planning/policy management, are generally conducted by professionals educated at the master's or doctoral level in applied social professions, often social work. They generally have specialized in policy/planning/administration in graduate school. Policy analysis usually constitutes only a small proportion of their jobs, with most of their time being devoted to running an agency, coordinating a community social service program, monitoring program compliance, or any of a number of other macropractice roles. The results of these analyses are generally published in-house and are distributed to members of the organization employing the analyst as well as interested community persons.

The next two types are journalistic and practitioner policy analysis. The people who do these analyses generally are not educated specifically in policy analysis, and policy research is only tangential to their primary professional role. However, they need to develop a fairly sophisticated understanding of complex policy issues. The journalist needs to communicate with the general public and the social work practitioner needs to understand and effectively function on a daily basis. Journalistic policy analysis is generally presented in either written or electronic form in the public media and is generally based entirely on the work of academic social science researchers or applied policy researchers, usually supplemented by original reporting on the effects (both

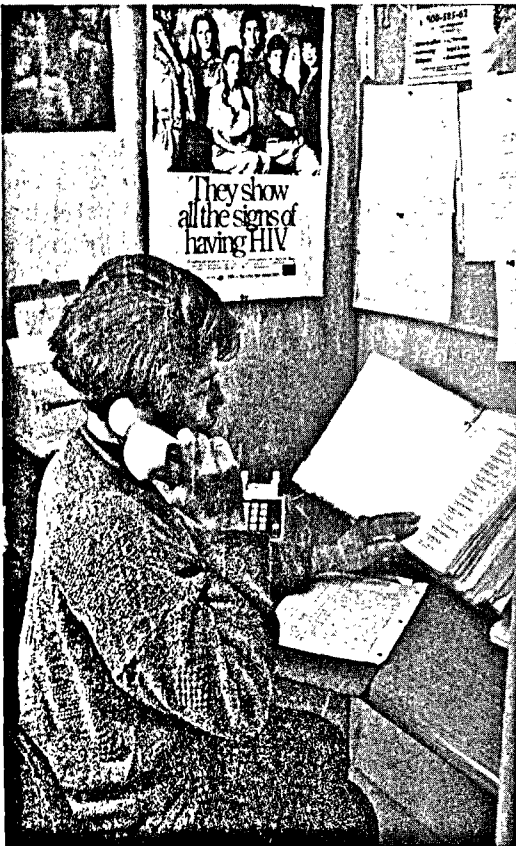


Table 3.1 Approaches to Policy Analysis

Policy Analysis Approach	Purpose	Consumer	Method
Academic social science research	Constructing theories for understanding society	Academic community	Rigorous empirical methodology, often quantitative
Applied policy research	Predicting or evaluating impacts of changes in variables that can be altered by public and/or private programs	Decision makers in the policy area	Formal research methodology applied to policy-relevant questions
Social planning	Defining and specifying ways to ameliorate social problems and to achieve a desirable future state	The “public interest” as professionally defined	Survey research, public forums, expert and/or citizen panels
Agency planning/ policy management	Defining and clarifying agency goals; explicating alternatives for achieving those goals; evaluating outcomes of attempts to achieve those goals	Boards of directors, funding agencies, interested citizens	Databases, management techniques (PERT, flow charting, decision analysis), survey research, public forums, expert and/or citizen panels
Journalistic	Focusing public attention on social welfare problems	General public	Existing documents, expert sources (professionals, scholars, people affected by the problem)
Practitioner policy analysis	Understanding the policy context within which an individual social worker functions	The social worker doing the analysis	Existing literature, government and other documents available on the Internet, expert sources
Citizen policy analysis	Clarifying issues for participation as an involved citizen in a democracy	The citizen involved in the analysis of elected officials that citizen wishes to influence	Existing literature, elected and appointed officials

Source: Adapted from D. L. Weiner and A. R. Vining, *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2004), p. 26.

intended and unintended) of policies on beneficiaries. It is important to note that although journalistic policy analysis is not based on original research, this in no way detracts from its importance. The inspiration for the massive social programs of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the 1960s is generally credited to an essay review of several policy studies, notably Michael Harrington's *The Other America*, written by journalist Dwight McDonald and published

in *New Yorker Magazine*. Randy Shilts's *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* has had a significant impact on AIDS policy.⁵ Practitioner policy analysis is the focus of the remainder of this book, so it won't be described further here.

The lowest level of sophistication is that of the citizen analyst. The purpose of this type of analysis is for a person to obtain the information required to carry out the responsibilities of an informed citizen. Although we classify this as the least sophisticated approach to policy analysis, we should note that many citizens become quite skilled in studying policy. This type of analysis is the major focus of voluntary citizen groups such as the League of Women Voters.

The next three dimensions of the approaches to policy analysis (purpose, consumer, and method) are sufficiently explained in the table. The main point is that when you read policy analysis literature you need to identify which approach to analysis the author is using. Most of the literature concerns the top two levels of sophistication and is generally read by people who identify themselves as policy analysis professionals. This literature can be frustrating for the social work practitioner who has neither the time nor the inclination to become skilled in the application of highly sophisticated, often mathematical, techniques such as difference equations, queuing models, simulations, Markov chains, and the like. Fortunately, in recent years a literature has been developing that addresses the needs of practitioners.⁶

METHODS OF POLICY ANALYSIS

In addition to different approaches to policy analysis, different methods may be employed within any of the approaches. A number of different schemes have been developed for differentiating among methods of policy analysis. Our discussion categorizes policy analysis as descriptive analysis, process analysis, or evaluation.⁷

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive policy analysis can be further subdivided into four types. These are content, choice, comparative, and historical analysis.

Content analysis

Content analysis^{*} is the most straightforward type of policy analysis. It is simply an empirical description of an existing policy in terms of its intentions, problem definition, goals, and means employed for achieving the goals. Content analysis is most often employed by agencies charged with administering a policy and is generally published in manuals, brochures, and annual reports of the agency. Occasionally, special interest groups such as the National Association of Retired Persons will publish content analyses of policies under which members may receive benefits.

Content analysis is generally not widely circulated to the general public and rarely is published in standard academic outlets. One of the most accessible, and certainly the most useful, sources of content analysis is the *Green Book*⁸ published every two years by the U.S. Government Printing Office and also available on the House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means

^{*}This is not to be confused with the research methodology of content analysis, in which qualitative data, such as words or themes in a text, are subject to quantitative analysis.

web site. The most recent edition was published in 2000 and provides 1,500 pages of largely descriptive information about federal assistance programs, such as Social Security, Medicare, Supplemental Security Income, Unemployment Compensation, Railroad Retirement, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, child support enforcement, child care, child protection, foster care and adoption assistance, tax provisions, and the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

Choice analysis

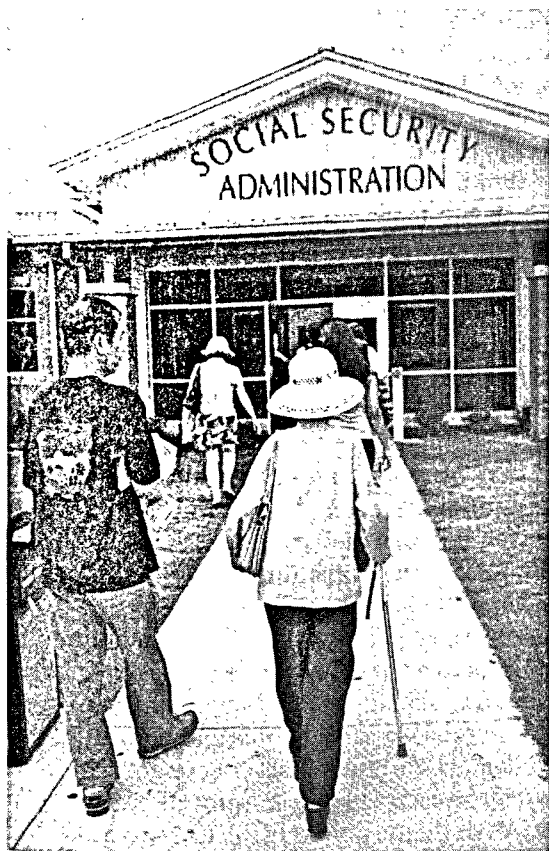
Largely developed by social workers Neil Gilbert, Paul Terrell, and the late Harry Specht, choice analysis is a systematic process of looking at the options available to planners for dealing with a social welfare problem. Gilbert and Terrell, describe this type of analysis as dealing with choices that “may be framed in program proposals, laws and statutes, or standing plans which eventually are transformed into programs. The analytic focus of such studies is upon issues of choice: What is the form and substance of the choices that compose the policy design? What options did these choices foreclose?”⁹ The four primary dimensions of choice are described in some detail below.

Bases of allocations The first dimension of choice involves the following question: *What are the bases of social allocations?* Gilbert and Terrell use this phrase to describe decisions about who will benefit from a policy. They draw two major distinctions in allocation: universal and selective provision. In the first case, “benefits [are] made available to an entire population as a social right.” Universalism assumes that all citizens are “at risk,” at some point, for common problems.¹⁰ The classic example of universal benefits is Social Security for the elderly and those with disability. Unemployment Insurance is another example of a benefit made available to an entire group of people—those who have worked a specified length of time and are now unemployed. Since the 1930s, provision for these groups of people has been considered a basic right and therefore a responsibility of the government. Eligibility depends solely on characteristics such as age and prior attachment to the workforce. Factors such as present income or geographic location are irrelevant.

The alternative to universal allocation is selectivity. In the language of social welfare policy, *selectivity* has a specialized meaning: the allocation of benefits based on individual economic need. This is generally determined through an income test; those below a certain income level are eligible to receive benefits. Students often get confused about this concept because “selectivity” suggests a variety of ways to distinguish who will be provided for (such as all mothers of young children, all nearsighted people, or all intelligent high school students seeking college scholarships). The best way to understand selectivity in social welfare is to remember its tie to income level and the fact that there is no national consensus that the benefits are a fundamental right of the recipient.

Social welfare policymakers also speak of “universal versus categorical” distinctions. In this context, the word *categorical* refers to particular categories of poor

Supplemental Security Income is an example of a categorical, selective program.



people, for example, low-income women and children, elderly individuals, or those with handicaps. Public welfare benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are examples of categorical public assistance programs. Because these programs are based on need, they are also considered a selective approach to allocating benefits.

There are many arguments for and against each type of approach. The universal basis of allocation carries relatively little stigma and fits with democratic notions of equal treatment for all. Recipients can be seen as citizens or consumers. Proponents of selectivity herald its cost effectiveness; instead of resources being spread over a vast population, money or services can be used where they are most needed. This can help fill in the gaps between needy and nonneedy groups. Debates over the future shape of Social Security in our society involve these issues, with some observers suggesting that we should stop paying Social Security to those who don't need it and instead target more money to the less-well-off elderly.

Critics of selectivity argue, however, that it may be more cost effective to provide social welfare benefits across the board rather than to spend time and money sorting out those who are "truly disadvantaged." These critics add that selectivity leads to a two-track system; benefits for low-income groups don't seem as important to society as benefits for the majority and are thus allowed to be of lesser quality. This is a common argument today in discussions of health care; the system people can afford to pay for (on their own or through insurance) is often superior to publicly financed health care for the indigent.

The broad universal-selective distinction is perhaps most helpful in discussing government income maintenance programs such as Social Security and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. Within the wide variety of social welfare programs, however, there are additional ways of allocating benefits. Benefits can, for example, be provided to groups of people with specific common needs that are not met in the economic market. Such groups might include high school dropouts or the residents of a deteriorated urban neighborhood. Another principle of allocation is compensation; this is based on membership in a group, such as war veterans, that has made a specific contribution to society. Veterans' benefits are generally made available to individuals without regard to economic need. Finally, people may qualify for assistance through technical diagnosis of a condition such as a physical handicap or mental illness. Table 3.2, developed by Gilbert and Terrell, gives a good example of various bases for allocations of benefits.

Types of benefits The second dimension of choice is concerned with the following question: *What are the types of social benefits to be provided?* A traditional way of categorizing types of provision is to distinguish between "in-cash" or "in-kind" benefits. Monthly unemployment checks are a good example of the former. Indirect forms of cash benefits, although not often viewed as such, include tax credits and exemptions such as the homeowner's deduction for mortgage interest.¹¹ Benefits-in-kind are actual goods or services. They include such things as used clothing from the Salvation Army, free inoculations for schoolchildren, and subsidized housing. Social services (for example, counseling, job training, or referrals) are a special type of in-kind benefit.

As in the case of universal and selective bases of allocation, policymakers debate the merits of cash versus in-kind benefits. Cash benefits are credited with allowing the recipient to maintain some sense of choice and control, a feature held to be important both in a democracy and a market economy. In-kind benefits, especially concrete goods, can be seen as undermining an individual's dignity and sense of responsibility. A familiar example is the Christmas basket

Table 3.2 Alternative Bases for Allocation of Day Care Services

Conditions of Eligibility	Examples of Alternative Bases for Allocations
Attributed need	All families Single-parent families Families with working parents Families with student parents
Compensation	Minority families Families of servicemen and servicewomen Families of workers in specified occupational groups
Diagnostic differentiation	Families with physically or emotionally handicapped children Families in short-term crises
Means-tested need	Families whose earnings and resources fall beneath a designated standard of economic need

Source: Neil Gilbert and Paul Terrell, *Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy*, 6th ed. by Allyn and Bacon. Reprinted/Adapted by permission.

for the poor, which may be perceived by recipients as a demeaning and patronizing type of assistance.

An advantage attributed to benefits-in-kind is the ability to ensure that the provisions will be used exactly as intended. Parents won't be tempted to "drink the welfare money"; a box of surplus foodstuffs will feed the family, whereas a food allowance might be absorbed into the general household income. These arguments imply that recipients, for whatever reasons, make unwise choices. A different, less judgmental, justification for in-kind benefits stresses efficiency and economy of scale, as in the publicly funded school lunch program.

Vouchers constitute a compromise between the two types of benefits. These are used like cash but are targeted for particular purchases. Housing vouchers, for example, guarantee that the government will pay the landlord a part of a family's rent. Vouchers are touted both for providing freedom of choice in a particular commodity or service area and for ensuring that the benefit is used as intended. However, the notion of freedom of choice may be illusory, as when housing discrimination prevents minority families from using their vouchers in certain neighborhoods. Some voucher systems, such as food stamps, are more successful, although even here individuals can encounter stigma as they proceed through the grocery checkout line.

Experiments in vouchers for private schools have attracted a good deal of attention lately. President George W. Bush has championed the use of vouchers, although Congress did not support his 2002 proposal to provide federal vouchers for poor students in "failing" schools. Some states and cities have established their own voucher programs. Polls indicate that many Americans like the idea of vouchers, although support weakens if funding for them would decrease money for public schools. So far, research on the use of vouchers for

children attending substandard public schools has failed to yield “conclusive evidence that these programs consistently improve student achievement.”¹²

Critics of publicly funded vouchers include not only those worried about funding of public schools but also African American parents who are skeptical about the acceptance of their children in white suburban schools. The fact that vouchers are often used for attendance at religious schools is another concern. In 2002, a close decision of the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the state of Ohio’s publicly financed voucher program, even though nearly all the vouchers were used for religious schools. Decisive as the ruling seemed, policy analysts noted at the time that it might not translate into widespread use of vouchers, because opposition to them in other states would continue and because private and parochial schools lacked the space to accommodate all applicants. In fact, in 2006 the Florida Supreme Court struck down a voucher program for students attending failing schools. The court based its ruling on the fact that the state constitution barred Florida from using taxpayer money to finance a private alternative to the public system. The lawyer speaking against the voucher system represented the NAACP, the ACLU, and the Florida Education System, the state’s largest teachers union. He argued that the state was paying for the “religious indoctrination of young children.” The ruling ordered the end of a program that Governor Jeb Bush had considered one of his chief accomplishments. As in housing vouchers, discrimination against minorities and the poor will probably persist. In Ohio, for example, suburban schools had to agree to accept voucher students, yet none of them did.¹³

One further distinction in benefits occurs most frequently in, but is not limited to, the area of services. Receipt of services such as counseling or medical care can be voluntary or mandatory. Court-ordered therapy for people who abuse children may have a different success rate than that chosen more or less freely by a client (we say “more or less” because the decision to seek counseling may well be influenced by family, peers, or others). Social workers struggle these days with decisions over voluntary versus mandatory services in a number of areas. For example, should we force “street people” to enter shelters or insist that emotionally withdrawn nursing home residents join in the daily crafts class?

Delivery structure The third dimension of choice is concerned with *the structure of the delivery system*. This set of policy choices relates to the details of how services or benefits will be delivered. There are a variety of administrative or organizational structures for doing this. A key distinction is the degree of centralization and/or coordination within the system. Will benefits be provided by a variety of agencies with little coordination, or will they be brought together, either under one roof or through an interorganizational network? Children’s services are an example of a decentralized system in many states: Foster care and protective services are handled through a public child welfare department; adoptions programs are carried out through both public and private agencies; and children’s health care is provided in public health departments, school clinics, and private doctors’ offices. These separate organizations may have little interaction with one another. Even within a single agency, the various programs and departments may operate relatively autonomously.¹⁴

One way to centralize services is to link them together within one organization. For example, a shelter for homeless families might provide job counseling, health care, day care for children, recreation programs, and a public welfare office branch all within one facility, stressing careful coordination between units. Another approach linking the programs of various agencies is utilized in the field

of gerontology. Publicly funded local Area Agencies on Aging are responsible for area-wide planning of social services for the elderly, for monitoring local programs affecting the elderly, and for coordination of specific federal programs.

Centralized or coordinated systems are often more convenient for clients to use, can allow for comprehensive planning of benefits, and tend to lessen duplication of services. On the other hand, centralization (in particular) usually involves a more complex bureaucracy, increasing the distance between clients and administrators.¹⁵ Decentralized or less coordinated systems generally increase autonomy and diversity in mission and approach and may lead to a competition among programs that may increase quality. In implementing policy, planners have to decide which type of structure is best in meeting policy goals.

There are many other features of delivery system structure that policymakers must consider. These include the degree of citizen participation in program decisions, the types of employees used to provide benefits (professionals, non-professionals, or consumers), and ways of relating to racial and ethnic needs.¹⁶ A particularly important distinction among the organizations providing benefits is that between public and private agencies. We turn to that distinction in the following discussion of modes of finance.

Financing benefits The final dimension of choice analysis relates to decisions on *how benefits are financed*. This can be done in a variety of ways: through taxation, voluntary contributions, or fees. Federal, state, and local taxation is, of course, a public levy on citizens; it supports public social welfare programs such as public assistance, Social Security (through a special payroll tax), public health programs, and services to veterans. Voluntary contributions are charitable donations, particular private agencies or programs, and the like. Local giving is often coordinated by United Way or Community Fund organizations. Fees for services are charged by both private nonprofit and for-profit agencies and occasionally by public agencies.

Social welfare benefits are provided by public governmental organizations on federal, state, and local levels; by private nonprofit or voluntary agencies; and by private for-profit groups. The last two decades have seen rapid growth in entrepreneurial social welfare services run on a corporate model. Important examples of these human services corporations include for-profit psychiatric and medical hospitals, home health care systems for the elderly, child care programs, and job training and job placement programs for welfare recipients.¹⁷

The social policy picture would be much simpler if each category of organization depended on a single type of funding, but one of the most important characteristics of the U.S. social welfare system today is its complicated mixture of funding sources for all three types of agencies. This mixture has a long tradition in the United States, though it has become more complex in recent years. Before discussing the overlapping nature of funding, however, we will look at the goals, advantages, and disadvantages of each type of agency in its purest form.

A system of public social welfare programs can be described as representing the general public will. It is financed by all of us and thus publicly sanctioned to do certain things. Theoretically, at least, public agencies will be openly accountable for their actions. Public social services are presumed to be available on an equitable and nondiscriminatory basis. Public financing means command of greater resources than are generally available in the private sector. Finally, the public services can reap the advantages of economies of scale as they provide their benefits.

Private agencies have certain general characteristics, although the non-profit and for-profit versions each have their own particular attributes. Private social service agencies are often thought to be more innovative in services and more likely to experiment with alternative organizational models. Many of the crisis phone lines of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, were developed by small private organizations. Proponents of private agencies also describe them as more responsive to the needs of specific groups in the community (as in the case of religious social service agencies) and better able than large government organizations to personalize services. Voluntary agencies, which receive a great deal of support from the public, have been characterized as performing social welfare tasks that neither the government nor the for-profit sector is willing to carry out. Because they are generally directed by community boards, it is assumed that they respond to community needs and goals. The for-profit sector is touted particularly for its cost-effectiveness and ability to produce better services through competition. Because consumers pay for services, it is argued, the for-profit agency will be responsive to their choices.¹⁸

The truth lies somewhere among all of these claims. Although the possibility for accountability is probably greater in the public sector, the public may have only limited influence on government agency policy. By the same token, voluntary agencies do not always represent their total communities; boards may consist of businesspeople and professionals who do not necessarily respond to the needs or desires of disadvantaged groups. Consumers of services in for-profit agencies may not have sufficient information to make informed choices about which service is best, as in the cases of mental and physical health care. In addition, the goal of maximizing profits may take precedence over a commitment to meeting clients' needs. The idea of establishing patients' rights in managed care is seen as one solution to this problem.¹⁹

In addition, cost-effectiveness may or may not occur in any of the three types of agencies; for example, in the health arena, it can be argued that duplication of expensive equipment by private hospitals has contributed to the rise in health care costs. Although for-profit and voluntary agencies can indeed experiment in new kinds of service delivery, some public agencies have been able to do this as well. Sometimes private agencies avoid what they consider to be unpopular innovations for fear of discouraging contributors. Often an important variable is the size of the organization; large bureaucracies in both public and private agencies may hamper innovation and lead to impersonal treatment (the big private hospital may be just as daunting to patients as the large public welfare office is to its clients). In sum, though certain broad distinctions can be made about the differences in mission and operation among the three agency types, it is clear that these distinctions are sometimes blurred.

Rather than relying on any one approach to social welfare, the United States has opted for a mixed public/voluntary/for-profit system. What is known as "contracting out" for services—a process in which a state public welfare department, for example, pays a private organization to provide child welfare services—has been with us in some form for a long time. By the mid-1830s, for example, many states subsidized private institutions, such as orphanages run by religious groups, for the care of dependent children. Since the 1960s, government subsidies have increased dramatically. Until recently, the bulk of government social welfare contracts have gone to voluntary agencies; now, however, an increasing number involve for-profit groups. Four states, for example, contract out case management, skills training, and job placement assistance for public welfare clients to a division of the huge defense company Lockheed Martin.²⁰ Similar patterns are occurring in the public schools (see Box 3.1).

The U.S. government has also been taking a new look at federal funding for social services provided by religious groups, including churches. Such funding has occurred on a small scale for some time, and in 1996 Congress passed legislation allowing religious groups to compete for contracts from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Building on a campaign promise, President George W. Bush began work on his “faith-based initiative” shortly after taking office. Arguing that faith can accomplish what secular programs cannot, Bush proposed that religious groups have the right to contract with other federal agencies and to use federal dollars for a wide variety of services for people in need. Whereas earlier recipients of federal money were generally large agencies such as Catholic Charities, Bush was particularly interested in bringing federal money to religious congregations. It appeared that this focus might be especially appealing to African American congregations, which have had a long tradition of providing charitable aid in their communities.²¹

Not surprisingly, Bush’s proposals unleashed a vigorous debate, both in Congress and among the public at large, over the boundaries between church and state. According to one survey, most Americans were ambivalent about the president’s plan. Although they supported giving federal grants to religious social service providers, they believed the proposal placed too little emphasis on holding religious groups accountable. The plan raised fears that religious agencies and congregations would attempt to proselytize, forcing their beliefs on recipients of aid. Opponents also pointed out that some religious agencies do not hire people of different religious backgrounds and discriminate against gays and lesbians. Religious groups themselves were divided, some welcoming the prospect of government resources, others worrying about red tape and federal regulations.²²

Failing to get legislation passed to sanction expansion of federal funding for religious social services, Bush has recently turned to a series of executive orders. One such order makes it easier for religious groups to be funded by

Box 3.1 Will Privatization Approaches Work in the Public Schools?

The 2002 No Child Left Behind Act made it possible for private companies to offer tutoring to students in “failing public schools.” These tutoring programs can now be financed by federal money formerly spent on the schools themselves. As a result, “the federally financed tutoring industry has doubled in size in each of the past two years, with the potential to become a \$2 billion-a-year enterprise.”¹ How well has this experiment in privatization worked? In Chicago’s Wentworth Elementary School, tutors from a private company offering after-school classes failed to control the rambunctious students of Room 2007. The school’s principal noted that the tutors weren’t prepared “to deal with challenging inner city children. . . . I think they expected to find children who’d just sit down and wait for them to expound.” In fact, private tutoring companies have ended up trying to deal with the same discipline, attendance, and other problems “that have kept failing schools from raising proficiency levels on their own.”²

According to a Harvard University Study of eleven school districts in three states, the need to oversee private tutoring programs put heavy administrative burdens on those districts. In addition, “the requirement to withhold 20 percent of Title I money” for these programs ended up diverting resources “from the neediest schools.”³ Issues of poor learning in public schools have to do with many problems, including poverty, poor health care, low expectations, discrimination, and lack of adequate child care for low-income working parents. Private services, such as tutoring, have so far not been the panacea for resolving such problems.

Sources: (1) Susan Saulny, “A Lucrative Brand of Tutoring Grows Unchecked,” *New York Times* (4 April 2005), p. 1; (2) Sam Dillon, “For Children Being Left Behind, Private Tutors Face Rocky Start,” *New York Times* (16 April 2004), p. 16; (3) Dillon, “For Children Being Left Behind,” p. 26.

allowing those receiving federal contracts to maintain the practice of taking religious affiliation into account when hiring staff. Such changes in federal regulations have served to relax laws that previously made some groups ineligible to receive government funds. In the meantime, the debate over federal support for religious social services continues.²³

The growth in government contracts for social welfare services, whether secular or religious, is one factor in the increasingly close relationship between the public and private sectors. The private sector also depends to a great extent on government funding sources such as Medicaid and Medicare. The striking rise in the number of for-profit hospitals and home health care facilities, for example, is due in large part to an increase in government expenditures on health care. To make things even more complex, the line between for-profit and nonprofit social welfare activities has blurred. As voluntary agencies have witnessed a decline in contributions as a portion of their resources, they have turned more and more to what has been called the "commercialization" of their financial base, charging more fees for services and even selling products. In addition, for-profit companies have begun to compete successfully with nonprofit groups for government funding, leading some charitable organizations to seek to work collaboratively with the for-profits. For example, when Lockheed Martin received a contract for welfare-to-work services in Dade County, Florida, it subcontracted with a number of nonprofit agencies to deliver those services.²⁴

By now, you may be thoroughly confused and wondering what all of this has to do with social work. The bottom line is effective and equitable service to clients. Social workers must continue to gauge what these developments mean to people who need assistance and whether they ameliorate such problems as poverty and poor health. Evaluation research is needed to determine the advantages and disadvantages of specific public and private approaches, and social work practitioners must observe and evaluate the results of different programs for their individual clients.

Comparative analysis

This type of policy analysis involves systematically comparing policies across two or more settings. The most common form is cross-national analysis: The policy in one nation (in these examples, the United States) is compared with policies of other nations regarding the same problem. More limited comparisons, between states or communities or between public and private service provisions, for example, are also possible and useful. This is a rich approach because it provides policy analysts with "natural experiments" of alternative approaches to social welfare problems.

The recognized masters of this type of analysis in social work are Sheila Kamerman and Alfred Kahn, who have produced a number of comparative studies of social welfare policies. An example of a cross-national analysis is their study of child care, family benefits, and working parents in which they compared policies in the United States with those of five European countries. They introduce this study as follows:

This report . . . deals with one of the major family policy questions facing industrial urban societies, or perhaps the major question: . . . what are the optimum response alternatives . . . to a situation in which parents are in the paid labor force, want to have children, and want to rear them successfully? Modern societies have a stake in both childbearing and successful child rearing, but the consequences of different policy responses have not been given detailed, systematic examination. After surveying fourteen country patterns, we selected six countries which have adopted different approaches. The



How might comparing social welfare policies of the U.S. with, say, China help a social worker recognize and understand how a culture's structures and values may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power?

options represent a continuum, with those in the middle involving different mixes. . . . We have placed all this in societal context, given an overview of where children under three actually are during the day, and assessed the debate and interest group positions in each country. There is a secondary review of research on costs, effects, prices, and who pays.²⁵

An example of comparative analysis of policies within the United States is Kamerman and Kahn's study of child care policy. In this study, they compare local child care initiatives, state child care actions, private approaches, public school systems as child care providers, employers and child care, and family day care.²⁶ Comparative analysis may use any or all of the methods of policy analysis discussed in this chapter.

Historical analysis

It is difficult, if not impossible, to analyze any current policy without at least a brief review of preceding events. Historical analysis, as a policy analysis type, goes well beyond this and is based on the assumption that current policies can be fully understood only if we have a thorough understanding of their evolution. Content analysis defines *policy* as what currently exists, but the historical orientation views policy as patterns of behavior by the state and private groups extending over a long period of time. If a policy is the continuation of a long trend, as in the case of the recent welfare reform legislation, historical analysis seeks to explicate that trend and to understand why it has continued. On the other hand, if a policy is significantly different from earlier policies in the same area, such as the old-age insurance portion of the Social Security Act of 1935, for example, the purpose of historical analysis is to explain the reasons for the departure from standard practice. Historical policy analysis methods will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Process Analysis

Process analysis is less concerned with policy content than with how a policy comes into being. The focus of this analytic approach is on the interactions of the many political actors, which include public officials, bureaucrats, media, professional associations, and special interest groups representing those likely to be affected either positively or negatively by a policy. An understanding of the process is necessary to fully understand the content of a policy.

One of the better examples of a process analysis is Steiner's study of family policy in the United States. As part of this study, Steiner looks at foster care policy, specifically at the process that eventually resulted in the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980.²⁷ Steiner found a number of dynamics to be important in shaping the bill that was eventually passed. These included:

- ◆ The Catholic church, which in the 1930s opposed inclusion in the Social Security Act of federally funded foster care for urban areas. This was to protect already existing agreements between the church and several large cities for the funding of Catholic children's homes.
- ◆ Academicians, who failed to develop a useful theory on which to base public policy for children in foster homes.
- ◆ Child welfare social workers, who often did not actively seek to involve biological parents in case planning because "deemphasizing the biological parent is the safest approach for the child welfare worker, who carries in his or her head two injunctions: do the child no harm and do not embarrass the agency."

- Foster parents, who were too diverse a group to be able to get together to support a specific program.
- The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (now Health and Human Services), which had no new data or new plans to bring to Congress in support of any expansion of services.
- The Child Welfare League of America, whose main concern was opposing any attempt to put a cap on spending for foster care and related services.

The result of all these forces was a piece of legislation that did not break significant new ground in dealing with the problem of children who need substitute care.

Evaluation



Is policy/program evaluation as important for social workers as is the evaluation of individual practice interventions?

If there is a theme that describes social welfare policy in recent years it is increasing skepticism. Voters, elected representatives, bureaucrats, and academics have all ceased to assume that social welfare programs are good simply because they have good intentions. One result is a demand for evaluation of all aspects of social welfare policy. Rather than simply describing or explaining social welfare policy, evaluation is intended to judge it. The evaluation process may judge a policy's logical consistency, empirically evaluate its effectiveness and efficiency, or analyze its ethical character.

Logical evaluation

Logical evaluation is similar to content analysis in looking at the content of a social welfare policy in detail. It goes beyond content analysis, however, by assessing a policy's internal rigor and consistency. Logical evaluation generally evaluates a policy in terms of three possible dimensions—singly or in combination—as the following discussion indicates. Because social welfare policies generally have more than one goal, the first dimension of logical evaluation entails assessing the internal consistency of a policy's multiple goals. Financial assistance policy, for example, has a goal of getting people to go to work and also has a goal of enabling mothers to take good care of their children. Because taking good care of children may well involve staying home with them rather than working, these goals are often in conflict.

The second dimension of logical evaluation involves assessing the consistency between a policy's goals and the means for achieving these goals. For example, the report of the Ford Foundation Project on Social Welfare and the American Future is very critical of the internal logic of our social welfare policies because they do not have the means to achieve the desired ends. The report argues that

The current social welfare system appears oriented to picking up pieces rather than preventing the original breakage. Our policies typically do not help families with children until there is a crisis and the children are hurt. We spend large amounts to save the life of each low-birthweight baby, but skimp on the prenatal care that helps avoid future suffering. We stand aside as large numbers of children are damaged intellectually and socially in their first few years of life, and then rush in with remedial school programs and anti-crime measures when the inevitable consequences of such neglect occur. We also ask the poor to go on welfare before health care is made accessible to them. We expect most jobless and very poorly paid workers to exhaust their

unemployment benefits and their own resources before they can receive any help with retraining or other means of securing mobility in the labor market. . . . As taxpayers and as victims of a violent society we end up paying for the social wreckage that results from a lack of earlier investments in other people and their children. We cannot build enough prisons or buy enough home security systems to protect our private worlds from the social decay that spreads when true opportunity is denied to large numbers of people.²⁸

The third dimension of logical evaluation involves assessing the difference between intended and unintended consequences. As Pal has observed, "Even when goals are consistent and there is a clear logical relationship between ends and means, public policies may have unintended consequences that can be worse than the original problem."²⁹ A well-known example of this type of evaluation is the 1984 critique of the welfare system conducted by conservative analyst Charles Murray. Murray argues that although the goals of social welfare policy between 1950 and 1980 were to help people become self-sufficient, the effect was exactly the opposite. The reason he gives for this is that, in his opinion, the system became so generous in its attempts to help people that it became more attractive to go on welfare, and once on to stay on welfare, than to "tough it out" by getting a job, getting married, and working to rise through the system.³⁰

Quantitative evaluation

Social welfare policies are created to solve pressing social problems, and in so doing they expend large sums of money. Thus it is natural to demand a rigorous, data-based evaluation of whether policies achieve their intended goals and at what cost. There are generally two parts to quantitative evaluations: effectiveness (sometimes called *outcome*) evaluations and efficiency (sometimes called *cost-effectiveness*) evaluations. These evaluations encompass a wide range of research methodology, and a huge literature has developed related to both the methods and the politics of evaluation.³¹

The most common type of evaluations are *ex post facto* evaluations of programs that are set up and operating at the time researchers are brought in to assess their effectiveness and efficiency. One of the best-known examples of this is the evaluation of the Head Start Program conducted by Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University in 1968. The Head Start Program was begun in 1964 as one of the main efforts of the Office of Economic Opportunity. The premise of the program (heavily influenced by culture of poverty theory) was that poor children performed at a lower level in school than non-poor children because they came from homes in which adequate cognitive preparation for school was absent. The program originally provided eight weeks of intensive educational preparation, and in many areas this was soon increased to one year. The intent was that poor children would be brought up to the same level of educational readiness as nonpoor children and hence would be able to compete successfully in school. The evaluators randomly selected 104 Head Start programs from across the country; about two-thirds were eight-week and one-third were full-year programs. Children who had completed the program and were, at the time of the study, in first, second, or third grade were matched in socioeconomic background with children who had not gone through the program. The children were all given batteries of tests of educational achievement and cognitive development. In addition, parents were interviewed and teachers of both groups were asked to rate the children on achievement and motivation. The results of the evaluation were disappointing because the researchers found little evidence of effectiveness,

although the parents of the children in the program voiced great satisfaction with it.³² In spite of the evidence of low effectiveness, Head Start remained, and still remains, a very popular program. This fact relates to the political nature of policy in general, as discussed in Chapter 6, and of evaluation in particular, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

A less common type of evaluation is the policy experiment. In this type of evaluation, research questions and hypotheses are developed and a program to test them is designed following generally accepted social science criteria. A recent example of a well-done policy experiment concerns the disappointing results of early Head Start evaluations. Reviewing the weak Head Start results, policy makers theorized that perhaps Head Start intervention needed to begin before age three. The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services appointed an Advisory Committee on Services for Families with Infants and Toddlers, and this committee recommended a “comprehensive, two-generation program [that] includes intensive services that begin before the child is born and concentrates on enhancing the child’s development and supporting the family during the critical first three years of the child’s life”³³ The program, called Early Head Start, began in 1995/96 with programs funded at 143 sites. Mathematica Policy Research was hired to conduct an experimental evaluation of the results of this program. The evaluation was conducted by selecting seventeen sites and then randomly assigning program applicants to the Early Head Start Program or to a comparison group not assigned to the program. The children and families in both groups were then monitored and measured on a number of variables, including cognitive development, language development, social-emotional development, parenting outcomes, parent’s progress toward self-sufficiency, subsequent births to parents, and father-child interaction. The results of this study, completed in 2005, were summarized as “a consistent pattern of statistically significant, modest, favorable impacts across a range of outcomes when children were two and three years old, with larger impacts in several subgroups. Although little is known about how important this pattern of impacts sustained through toddlerhood will be in the long run, reductions in risk factors and improvements in protective factors may support improved later outcomes.”³⁴

Ethical Evaluation

All types of policy analysis discussed thus far are, at least theoretically, value-free. To demonstrate this, Pal uses the following example of an analyst asked to evaluate the Nazi regime’s policy of concentration camps:

It would be possible to provide a description of the “final solution,” an analysis of the processes that caused it, and a logical and empirical evaluation. Auschwitz could be described, its background and establishment detailed, determining political forces as well as its organizational processes outlined, logical consistency of policy probed and even an analysis of efficiency conducted. The analyst’s ethical judgement could be withheld while these technical analyses were undertaken. But the concentration camps were and are an affront to civilized ethics, and it is entirely appropriate to judge them in these terms.³⁵

One of the major points we make throughout this book is that social welfare policy is heavily value laden. The issues that social welfare policy deals with are, at their core, issues of good and bad, right and wrong, should and shouldn’t. Therefore ethical evaluation is a common and important type of social welfare policy analysis. Because there are sharp differences between



Why is skill in policy analysis essential for a social worker to engage in ethical practice?

value systems, ethical policy evaluations are often controversial. One of the best examples is the pastoral letter of the American Catholic bishops, "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy."³⁶ The bishops begin the letter by clearly stating six moral principles that provide an overview for the vision they wish to share:

1. Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.
2. Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community.
3. All people have a right to participate in the economic life of society.
4. All members of society have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable.
5. Human rights are the minimum conditions for life in community.
6. Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights.

Based on these moral principles, the bishops then analyzed a number of policy issues. They found the U.S. social welfare system deficient in a number of areas and recommended changes such as providing financial assistance recipients with an adequate level of support (they deplored the finding that "only 4 percent of poor families with children receive enough cash welfare benefits to lift them out of poverty"), establishing national eligibility standards and a national minimum welfare benefit level, and making two-parent families eligible for welfare assistance in all states. It is interesting to note that, although the bishops were almost certainly aware of the discouraging final report of the Seattle and Denver Income Maintenance Experiments (SIME/DIME—see Chapter 7), which found more generous approaches to income maintenance such as a negative income tax actually reduced work participation by recipients, one of their concluding recommendations was that the negative income tax "is another major policy proposal that deserves continued discussion." Apparently, based on the moral principles the bishops were using as the framework for their analysis, the fact that a quantitative evaluation had indicated that the negative income tax resulted in lowered labor force participation did not detract from the attractiveness of this approach.

Policy Analysis Methods as Ideal Types

While reading the preceding discussion of policy analysis methods, you may have asked yourself questions such as: How can you do a historical analysis without its also being descriptive? Aren't empirical evaluations based on some ethical principles (for example, SIME/DIME obviously embraces the work ethic)? Don't ethical evaluations use data as the basis for some of their arguments? These questions point out that none of the methods we have described actually exists in pure form in the real world. Rather, they are what sociologists refer to as *ideal types*. That is, we have artificially separated them and described what they would look like in pure form if such a form existed. In reality, there is much overlap among the methods, and most policy analyses contain elements from several of them. Good policy analysis almost always begins with solid description and historical analysis, always is based on the best empirical data available, and then proceeds to focus on logic, efficiency, effectiveness, or ethics. In addition, good policy analysis is often comparative.

POLICY ANALYSIS AS SCIENCE, ART, AND POLITICS

As a rule, policy analysts consider themselves to be social scientists and what they do to be science. Policy analysts generally employ conventional methods of social science, beginning with formulating the problem and proceeding to stating the hypotheses, developing data collection procedures, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, and generalizing from the results. When attempting to read a policy analysis textbook, the lay reader can easily be overwhelmed by the complexity of the technical methods employed.

Although there is no doubt that policy analysis seeks to be a science, and there is little doubt as to the appropriateness of this quest, it is important to understand that there are limits to the degree that conclusive knowledge can be obtained regarding policy questions. Charles Lindblom gives four reasons why analysis cannot provide conclusive answers to policy questions:

1. Policy problems are simply beyond the analytic capacities of human beings. Lindblom explains that “the basic difficulty stems from a discrepancy between the limited cognitive capacities of the human animal and the complexities of policy problems. Even when extended by a range of devices from written language to electronic computers, the mind at its best simply cannot grasp the complexity of reality.”
2. Policy issues are based on values and interests that are often in conflict. A policy that may be optimal based on the values and interests of one group may be in conflict with those of another group. For example, what is the correct abortion policy? For one group, the right of a woman to choose is the paramount value, and for another, the right of a fetus to live is most important. It is impossible to quantify these values and reach an absolute conclusion.

3. The more a policy analysis approaches complete understanding of an issue, the more time and money will be required to conduct it. Most policy decisions cannot wait until “all the data are in” and therefore are made based on less than complete information. For example, the SIME/DIME studies referred to previously took nine years and many millions of dollars to conduct yet provided only partial answers to a few rather limited questions regarding the optimal approach to income maintenance.

4. A purely analytic formulation of the question a policy addresses is impossible. What is the problem

The documentary *Harvest of Shame*, by famed journalist Edward R. Murrow, used the art of TV documentary production to present a scathing and effective analysis of migrant labor policy.



for antipoverty policy? Is it lack of motivation among the poor? Lack of equal opportunity? Inadequate economic growth? These questions contain moral components and, as such, must be settled by politics rather than analysis.³⁷

If policy analysis cannot be purely scientific in the sense that single, definitive answers are rarely found, what does this mean? First, it means that we must recognize that policy analysis is as much an art as it is a science. Wil-davsky asserts that policy analysis is synonymous with creativity. "Analysis is imagination. Making believe the future has happened in the past, analysts try to imagine events as if those actions already had occurred."³⁸ One of the means for doing this is what is known as the "thought experiment." This means simply taking a program, either real or imaginary, and—as systematically as possible, based only on logical thought—analyzing the likely effects. The conservative analyst Charles Murray does this to great effect in *Losing Ground*. He describes a young couple, Harold and Phyllis, who are not married but are seriously involved; they have learned that Phyllis is pregnant. Murray proceeds to imagine what their behavior would have been in 1960, when there were few social programs to assist them, and in 1970, when there were generous AFDC benefits (he places them in Pennsylvania, a state with benefits among the highest in the nation), public housing, Medicaid, food stamps, as well as other programs. His conclusion from the thought experiment is that in 1960 they would have chosen to get married and to take jobs, even unattractive ones, because there were no other options available. This choice, he argues, would have put them on the first rung of the ladder of success, or at least to participation in mainstream U.S. society. In 1970, Murray imagines, they again would have taken the rational course of action—which now would be to *not* get married so Phyllis could avail herself of all the "generous" social program benefits. This would result in Harold's eventually drifting off because his role had become extraneous to the lives of Phyllis and the baby, who would be doomed (his view) to a life as a single-parent welfare family. From this, Murray concludes that present social welfare policies result in more harm than good and probably should be discontinued.³⁹ As this example illustrates, thought experiments, perhaps even more than other forms of policy analysis, are heavily influenced by the political perspective of the analyst.

Whatever the technique employed, the impact of those policy analyses is due more to their art than to their science. Analyses such as Murray's conservative *Losing Ground*, or Harrington's liberal *The Other America*, or even television documentaries such as Public Broadcasting's *Eyes on the Prize* or Edward R. Murrow's famous *Harvest of Shame* have been well written and well organized and because of this have had great impact.

This leads us to introduce an important point that will be noted again in Chapter 6: Policy analysis—whether conducted using rigorous, scientific methodology or more as an art—is, in the final analysis, political. Lindblom argues that analysis, regardless of its form, becomes part of the play of power, a tool of persuasion. He uses the term *partisan policy analysis*. By this he means that effective policy analysts realize that their analysis will be used in the play of power. They therefore target it to people or groups of people they wish to influence. This is done by taking the values of the group or person to be influenced and analyzing the policy to show how those values can be furthered.⁴⁰ For example, imagine that an advocate for increased economic assistance to the poor was attempting to get support for increased welfare benefits from a member of Congress known for supporting defense spending. The advocate for the poor would attempt to demonstrate that increased welfare benefits

would in some way serve the interests of national defense, perhaps by improving the health, education, or social adjustment of the young people who make up the pool of potential soldiers. Although this example may be a little far-fetched, the point is not. Policy analysis, be it art or science, is used as one of a number of tools of persuasion in the political process.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have knowingly strayed a bit from the major focus of this book; we have addressed policy analysis more from the perspective of professional academic policy analysts and less from the viewpoint of practicing social workers who need to understand the context of their practice. There is a reason for this: When you begin to conduct your own practitioner policy analysis using the methods described in the following chapters, you will be relying heavily on the work of professional academic analysts. Their work can be confusing unless you understand a few simple points, described in this chapter. Now, with this basic understanding of the policy analysis field, we proceed to address methods you can use in your own practice.

The Policy-Based Profession

An Introduction to Social Welfare
Policy Analysis for Social Workers

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