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Social Work and Social Welfare

An Introduction

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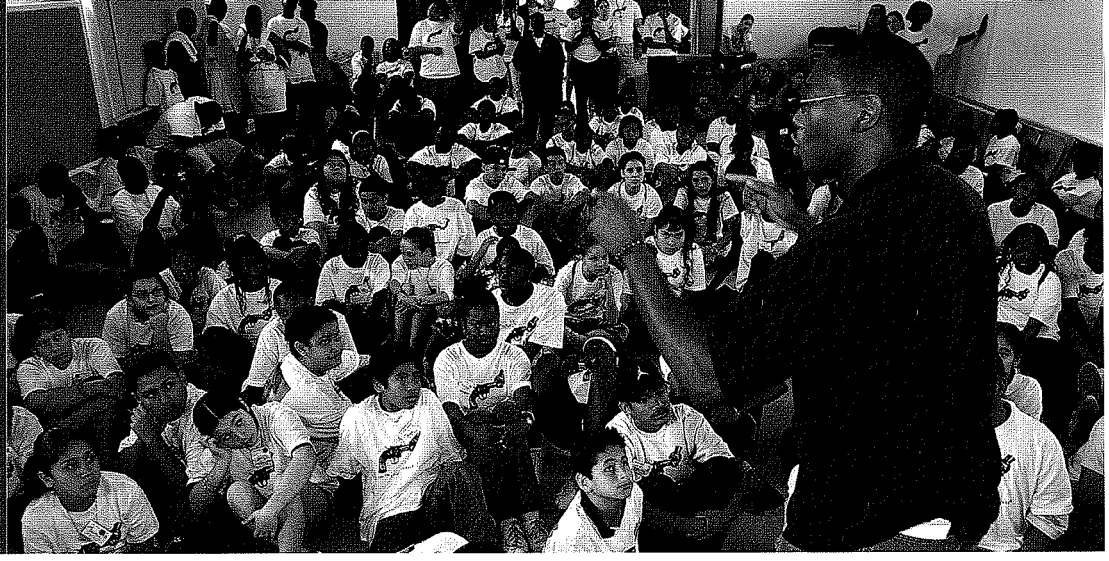

Social Work, Policy, and Advocacy

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Core Competencies in this Chapter (Check marks indicate which competencies are covered in depth)				
✓ 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

SOCIAL WORKERS ENGAGED IN POLICY PRACTICE

The final chapter in this text takes a closer look at social work, policy, and advocacy. This is because social work practice often involves policy. Policies impact the many social programs, benefits, and services of the U.S. social welfare system. Policy also provides the context in which social workers carry out their roles and responsibilities.

More specifically, **policy practice** in social work, by definition, involves the formulation, enactment, implementation, and assessment of social welfare policies. Usually the policy under examination is an organizational policy affecting the agency in which the social worker is employed. In this case, the social worker may become involved in revising agency policies or formulating new agency policies. Sometimes the policy involves legislation addressing a social problem that impacts agency clients. In this instance, social workers frequently contribute information on behalf of their agency and clients to legislative policymakers in state capitols and in Washington, D.C., our nation's capital. Social workers share their specialized knowledge on many social problems, from child neglect to elder abuse. This information is typically provided by social workers at public hearings. In fact, many social workers are asked by policymakers to help write specific bills before the bill goes to hearing. In this way, social workers assist in developing new legislation resulting in programs, services, or benefits for client populations.

Other social workers are engaged in policy practice while employed as policy analysts or planners. Such positions are frequently located in government at the national, state, county, and city levels. These positions can also be found in private nonprofit organizations such as advocacy organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Child Welfare League of America, the Children's Defense Fund, and the American Association of Retired Persons (now AARP) are examples. Social workers in these positions do analysis that results in research reports, issue papers, fact sheets, and chart books.

Still other social workers who hope to have a greater impact on social welfare policy run for public office. Social workers serve in Congress and in state legislatures, while many others have been elected to county/borough, city/municipal, and school board positions. Social worker and U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski from Maryland is one prominent example.

Similarly, social workers become involved in policy practice by working on the campaign of someone running for public office. As previously indicated, the candidate may be running for mayor of a city, governor of a state, U.S. Congress, or any number of other public offices. Social workers in these campaigns frequently research and write brief "position papers" on various social problems. Position papers serve to educate political candidates about individual social problems and help the candidate develop a position or stand on one or more issues related to the problem. If elected, these lawmakers often invite social workers to serve on committees or on their staff to continue their policy analysis.

Various Approaches to Problem Definition

Social workers get involved with policy in order to better address social problems of concern to them and various client populations. Consequently, they

know it is important to thoroughly define the problem.[1] Social workers do this because they know they must have a thorough grasp of the social problem and related key issues before researching possible problem solutions. In doing so, they find it helpful to think about different approaches to problem definition that can be utilized depending on the situation.[2] In other words, consistent with social work values and ethics, social workers choose the method most useful in achieving their intervention goals.

One approach to problem definition is the **functional approach**.[3] According to this approach, a social problem is any condition that upsets the smooth functioning of society. An obvious example would be the problem of terrorism in America, particularly after the September 11, 2001, airplane crashes into the World Trade Center towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.[4] Street crime is another example. Both can make people fearful of going about their normal daily routines.

A second way to define a problem is the **normative approach**.[5] The normative method stresses that a social problem is any condition that deviates from accepted societal norms. An illustration of such a condition would be the child sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, a problem that began to receive widespread public attention in 2002.[6] Child sexual abuse violates society's norms, and the fact that some Catholic priests have carried out such abuse makes the whole problem even more shocking to average Americans.

A third approach to problem definition is the **objective approach**, which maintains that a social problem is recognized when the quantitative indicators of a problem become indisputably large over time.[7] For instance, about a quarter of the total American labor force was unemployed at the height of the Great Depression.[8] No reasonable observer could dispute that the country was in economic crisis and that something drastic had to be done. Thus, Roosevelt was able to push through his New Deal legislation.

The **subjective approach** to defining social problems is a fourth method that should be considered by policy developers.[9] In this approach, the quantitative evidence has been available for a considerable amount of time; it is the public's perception of the data that changes. To illustrate, domestic violence was once considered a personal matter, a private family issue. Today, in contrast, domestic violence is considered a social problem that requires public attention.[10]

The social worker may also want to look at the selected problem and key issue in terms of **value conflict**.[11] This approach to problem definition argues that social problems are created when groups have conflicting values. A good example is the "pro-life" versus "pro-choice" debate around abortion in America. Given the passion associated with the values of both groups, it is not a problem likely to be "solved" in the near future.

A sixth and final approach to problem definition is the **claims-making approach**. This approach uses social construction theory to argue that problem definition is, in fact, "the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative condition."[12] In short, humans construct social problems. Therefore, it is the process of constructing social problems that is the focus in the claims-making approach. Problem definition becomes an outcome of negotiation among competing groups.

In any case, a rigorous examination of the social problem and its key dimensions may benefit from the distinct insights derived from each of these approaches to problem definition. And while each perspective can provide a unique contribution to problem definition, the six approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. There is overlap among them. The "value conflict"

Case Study: Social Justice and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s

To illustrate the "claims-making" approach to problem definition, consider the evolution of African American segregation from a (supposedly) natural condition to an intolerable social injustice.[13] One of Martin Luther King's organizing strategies in the civil rights movement of the 1960s was to make the segregation of African Americans problematic for Southern business and political leaders. To this end, King and other civil rights organizers persuaded the African American community of Montgomery, Alabama, to stop riding city buses until laws regarding segregated bus seating were abolished. In a second civil rights campaign, King and others organized a boycott of businesses in Birmingham, Alabama. The boycotts continued in each case until negotiation between civil rights leaders and Southern segregationists resulted in an end to racial segregation.

approach, for instance, is inherent in the "claims-making" approach. All incorporate the "objective" approach to some extent.

Furthermore, various approaches to problem definition may be useful in organizing partnerships among special interest groups to pass and implement proposed legislation. That is, social workers engaged in policy development may solicit the support of individual stakeholder groups through selection of one or more of the six approaches to problem definition. Some groups are motivated by statistical information that quantifies the problem and its key aspects. The social worker, in this case, may want to emphasize the "objective" approach. Other potential supporters are more motivated by their values concerning the problem. They don't need statistics; they just know what they believe to be important in the matter. For these groups, an approach such as the "value conflict" approach to problem definition may be more effective. In short, the way a social problem is defined can assist in generating support for policy proposals.

THE SOCIAL WORKER AS ADVOCATE

A significant aspect of professional social work involves **advocacy**. For social workers, advocacy means promoting the rights of client populations, whether those "clients" are individuals, groups, or communities. With respect to policy, there are various ways that social workers advocate for (or against) the enactment of new policy to better meet the needs of clients. Perhaps the

Research Informed Practice with Neglected Children

Edleson, Gassman-Pines, and Hill published their qualitative research (*Social Work 51* [2006], pp. 167–173) on a policy mistake made by the Minnesota legislature. The legislature amended the state's definition of child neglect in 1999 to include a child's "exposure to family violence." The change resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of domestic violence exposure reports, reports that had to be investigated by state child protection workers. However, there were not enough funding, services, or trained legal personnel to handle this large increase in cases. Most counties in the state were overwhelmed. Consequently, the change in the definition of the child neglect was repealed after only one year.

How might this research inform your efforts as a social worker engaged in policy advocacy? What does it tell you about problem definition? What does it tell you about the implementation stage of policy development?

proposed policy in the form of a legislative bill focuses on a certain client population such as people with disabilities. Perhaps the policy recommendation pertains to an organizational policy such as equal benefit policies for same-sex domestic partners. In any case, a social worker may not only present facts and information regarding policy alternatives to policy decision makers, the social worker may be in a position to advocate for a specific policy proposal and against other proposals.

There are several advocacy roles that social workers can play.[14] One is simply as a communicator. That is, social workers involved in policy advocacy may communicate the details of social problems and new policy alternatives to professional colleagues and fellow community members. Such discourse furthers awareness and concern as a first step in building support for progressive changes.

A second advocacy role for social workers might be found in the context of an association's lobbying campaign. In such a campaign, a social worker may play the role of a paid lobbyist. In so doing, they may contact government officials on behalf of the association to provide information and their recommendations regarding a specific policy issue. Telephone calls, fax messages, e-mail, and letters to elected politicians are typical means of communication.

A third role for social work professionals is as a persuader. To provide one illustration, social workers advocating for new policy can influence the opinion of the general public on a policy issue using their professional position and expertise. Letters written to the editors of major newspapers informing readers about the proposed policy and issue, for example, are a way to educate and persuade the community.

In addition, social workers serve as a witness in advocating for specific policy recommendations. They may take part in a congressional or other public hearing on the key policy issue. The setting may be a hearing on welfare reform before a congressional committee in Washington, a state appropriations hearing regarding annual health and human service spending, or a hearing before a city or town council on its health and human services budget. In each case, social workers can bring to the public forum their firsthand knowledge of the specific needs of various populations.

Critical Thinking Question

There are several advocacy roles that social workers involved in policy practice can play, including communicator, lobbyist, activist, and campaigner. Given your personality and interests, in which role(s) would you feel comfortable?

Social workers also play the role of activist for a policy recommendation. In this role, the social worker takes planned, concrete action to produce social change on behalf of clients. These actions may include participating in an organized demonstration, march, sit-in, or boycott to draw attention to the social problem and new policy alternatives.

Furthermore, let's not forget that social workers can take an active role as a political campaigner, whether working for a political party or candidate or running for office themselves. Social workers often work behind the scenes gathering information to help candidates develop positions and recommendations on specific policy issues. However, there is no reason why a professional social worker couldn't be elected president of the United States. A former community organizer, Barack Obama, already has!

And finally, as part of a political strategy to get a specific policy proposal passed, social workers may play the role of collaborator. For example, social workers can organize or participate in a coalition to address a specific social problem and promote specific policy recommendations. As the previous chapters in this book illustrate, U.S. history shows many examples of advocates, including social workers, networking through various voluntary associations to promote social reform, whether it was abolition, women's suffrage, civil rights, or mental health parity.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Social workers, as discussed in the previous section, often perform the advocate role in policy practice. This may mean advocating for a proposed policy within the agency in which the social worker is employed. The new policy may impact employees of the agency or it may affect the clients of the agency. At other times, social workers advocate for proposed policy at the city or county level—new policy that would address social problems in local neighborhoods, for example. Still other social workers advocate for new policy in the form of legislative bills before state legislatures and Congress.

Social and economic justice is of fundamental importance to the social work profession; therefore, social workers prioritize social and economic justice when formulating and advocating for new policy. In order to do this, social workers need to have a conception of what "justice" means to them.

Three major contemporary philosophies of social justice are libertarianism, utilitarianism, and egalitarianism.[15] The **libertarian** view holds that individual liberty is primary and that individuals must be free from coercion by the government or other entities, including coercion to part with property they have acquired legally.[16] Thus, a "just society" from the libertarian viewpoint is one in which individuals are essentially free from intrusion of any kind from government or other bodies. In the libertarian view, programs such as public assistance and affirmative action are problematic because they impede on individual self-determination and rights to property in an attempt to redistribute property, power, or other resources among citizens. Although libertarianism is focused on individual rights, utilitarianism is focused on the concept of the "greatest good."[17] In the **utilitarian** view, a just society is one that achieves the greatest good for the greatest number. This is not as simple as it sounds, however, as what constitutes the "greatest good" for a given society is open for debate. Finally, **egalitarianism**, a philosophy developed by John Rawls (1971), holds that both an equality of liberties and an equality of opportunity must be present in a just society.[18] Furthermore, inequalities in power, property, and other resources may exist only if they work to the benefit of a society's most disenfranchised members. The redistribution of resources—such as wealth, power, and access—is therefore an essential component of social justice in the egalitarian view.

[M]ore than eight million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive.

—Jeffrey D. Sachs

The social work profession draws upon each of these philosophies in its understanding of social justice and professional ethics; however, egalitarianism is the philosophy most consistent with social work's overall mission and core values. Thus, from a social work perspective, **social and economic justice** pertain to a society in which all individuals in the society have "equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities," a society in which discrimination, oppression, and inequalities that prevent people from meeting their basic human needs do not exist.[19] As social workers, a core part of our work is to ensure that society moves closer to this state of justice.

Critical Thinking Question

In what ways could the United States move closer to a society in which discrimination, oppression, and inequality do not exist?

Diversity, Oppression, and Human Rights

In order to further social and economic justice, variables such as gender and race need to be important considerations in policy advocacy. Not only must current policies and programs be reviewed in terms of how they impact populations subject to oppression; social workers feel that the very definition of a

social problem needs to be critically examined in terms of its influence on these groups. For example, does the way in which the problem is defined actually blame women or minorities for their unmet needs? Did these populations participate in defining the problem? Do policymakers hear their voices? Any definition of a social problem should be reviewed with these considerations in mind. Before finalizing and advocating for a policy recommendation, social workers return to the identified social problem to evaluate it in these terms.

Similarly, in an effort to better address existing social problems, social workers critique new policy proposals in terms of human rights and each proposal's influence on historically oppressed groups. Given the discrimination and oppression of women historically in the United States and around the world, for example, any policy proposal should be critiqued regarding its potential influence on women. That is, the basic human rights and needs of women (including the right to an education, to vote in a democracy, to marriage equality, etc.) should be considered when formulating the policy recommendation. In this case, the "gender variable" becomes an important variable in the policy analysis.

More specifically, the following five questions could be considered when developing policy recommendations that may affect women:[20] Does the proposed policy materially improve the lives of women? Does it build self-respect for women? Does the recommendation empower women? In addition, does the proposed recommendation educate women politically? And finally, will the policy recommendation weaken patriarchal control of institutions, thereby giving women more of a voice in society's institutions such as business and government?

Social workers ask similar questions to critique policy proposals in terms of their potential influence on other vulnerable populations, such as children and older adults. The major point here is that social workers play the role of advocate, in part, so that existing policies and proposed policies maximize social and economic justice for diverse and vulnerable populations.

STAKEHOLDERS, COLLABORATION, AND POLITICAL STRATEGY

Policy Research

In developing and advocating for social policy, social workers must collect a great deal of information. There are a number of sources of such information. Writings by political scientists, sociologists, social workers, and historians in various professional journals are one such source. Government Web sites are a second source. For instance, the Library of Congress maintains a Web site called "Thomas," as in Thomas Jefferson.[21] This Web site contains much information on current and past legislation. Social work advocates can search for specific legislation on a policy issue by typing key words, as in other Internet-based searches. The Web site also includes the *Congressional Record*, which contains the text of bills and other documents. The *Congressional Record* provides information on any action taken on a given day on a specific bill as well as a record of remarks made by various participants in the policymaking process. Furthermore, the Thomas Web site offers committee reports, historical documents, and information on your congressional representatives.

State governments are also helpful.[22] Individual states maintain a legislative Web site accessible to policy analysts and other interested parties. Similar to the

federal government's Web site, state Web sites offer information on recent bills introduced in their respective state legislatures. This information typically includes the names of sponsors of the bill, committees, the last hearing date for the bill, and the outcome of recent hearings on the bill. Legislative information on specific bills often includes both a summary of the bill as well as the full text of the bill.

Professional organizations, such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), are an additional source of legislative information.[23] The NASW maintains a Web site that includes an advocacy link for social workers concerned with policy issues. This advocacy link includes the key issues on which the NASW will focus in the current congressional session. It also includes more in-depth NASW position papers on each key issue. The NASW's individual position papers, like most position papers, describe the background of the key issue and what action the organization supports regarding the issue. The Web site then assists you to take action by contacting key policymakers through various means, including e-mail messages, printed letters, and YouTube video advocacy messages.

Major Stakeholders

Another major research activity for social workers engaged in policy advocacy is to identify major stakeholders involved with the new policy proposal.[24] This is sometimes called a "stakeholder analysis." With respect to policy advocacy, a **stakeholder** by definition is any individual or group that can affect or be affected by proposed or existing legislation. Let's use advocacy at the state and national level to illustrate. Obviously, many groups will be affected by a new social policy; therefore, it is important to identify the most influential stakeholders in relation to the key policy issue. Some stakeholders have more power than others, and some stakeholders will have more interest than others in the identified issue. Some stakeholder groups, including social work clientele, may be more impacted by a specific policy proposal than are other stakeholder groups. In addition to populations whose needs will be addressed by the new legislation, major stakeholders typically include congressional or state legislative leaders, the chairpersons of pertinent committees and subcommittees, government agencies, and usually, taxpayers.

At this point, social workers often find it helpful to obtain organizational charts of decision-making bodies involved with the selected policy issue. In addition, an outline of the policymaking process is often developed. For example, on the national level, the social work advocate needs to determine which congressional committees would hear a bill on the selected issue, which subcommittees might be involved with the bill, who are the chairpersons of these committees and subcommittees, and so forth.

Identifying major stakeholders will enable the social work advocate to understand which influential groups and individuals will be involved in the policy development process. In so doing, the social work advocate typically ascertains whether or not each major stakeholder is likely to support or oppose the proposed legislation. Strong support among major stakeholders will increase the probability that the new legislation passes and that sufficient resources will be available to implement the policy adequately.

This is the "political viability" criterion. With this criterion, the social worker attempts to answer the question: Would a majority of the most powerful and influential stakeholders support the proposed legislation?

Social work advocates evaluate "power" in several ways. One way is to estimate for each stakeholder group the amount of resources available to it, resources such as money, information (including research on the key issue), volunteers, and political connections. Money will greatly determine the group's ability to make political contributions and mount an effective campaign in opposition to or support of a policy proposal. The number of volunteers will be closely associated with the membership size of the stakeholder group. Obviously, the larger the group's membership is, the greater its ability to recruit volunteers in a campaign to support or oppose the policy proposal. For these reasons, one way to estimate the power of a stakeholder group is to examine the amount of resources available to the group.

Critical Thinking Question

Social work advocates evaluate "power" in several ways. What sources of power do college students possess to influence their university or state social welfare policies?

A second and related way that social work advocates measure power is to estimate the ability of a group to mobilize its resources. In calculating this, the social worker should look at the internal cohesion of the group. That is, how much solidarity is there within the membership of the group? Also, is there a virtual consensus within the group on the policy recommendation? Furthermore, just how effective is the leadership of the stakeholder group? Is there a nationally known leader with many political contacts in Congress? Is the leader generally regarded as an expert on the policy issue? Is the leader able to galvanize the group's membership in a campaign in support of or opposition to the policy recommendation? Social advocates address all of these questions.

Finally, another indicator of the stakeholder group's power is its access to key policy decision makers. Do the members of the stakeholder group, particularly its leadership, have direct access to key decision makers? Do they have an opportunity to meet one-on-one with key decision makers regarding various policy issues? Do policy decision makers ask them regularly for information and opinions on various policy issues? Social work advocates, when analyzing the overall power and influence of each major stakeholder group, examine all of these dimensions of power. It is this influence with key decision makers that is of utmost importance in getting new policies passed.

The Strengths Perspective and Policy Advocacy

Social workers involved in policy practice try to utilize the strengths of client populations.[25] Policy planning from a "strengths perspective" might proceed as follows.

1. Identify basic needs and barriers to meeting those needs.
2. Negotiate with client groups (regarding step #1).
3. Identify ways that barriers are currently overcome.
4. Identify opportunities and resources required.
5. Formulate policy.
6. Negotiate consensus on policy goals.
7. Design programs.
8. Implement programs.
9. Evaluate program outcomes.

First of all, the social worker would initially identify the basic needs of a client group and the barriers this group faces in meeting those needs. A second step, closely related to the first, is to involve that client group in a negotiation regarding these needs and barriers. In other words, client populations should be

included in any formal and conclusive identification of their basic needs and of the barriers to meeting those needs.

A third step in the policy formulation process would be the identification of ways barriers are currently overcome by clients and the programs that serve them. This step would also involve clients, perhaps sharing stories of ways in which they have overcome barriers to need fulfillment. This third step would then lead to a fourth step, which is the identification of opportunities and resources required for people to meet their basic needs.

Only after these first four steps have been completed is the social worker ready to formulate a policy proposal—the fifth step. In developing this policy proposal, policy goals would be established through a negotiated consensus with relevant stakeholders, including policymakers and client groups. Once policy goals are established (the sixth step), then the seventh step would be to design programming to achieve these policy goals. The eighth and ninth steps, respectively, would be to implement these programs, and then, finally, evaluate the outcome of the implemented programs. This final step would involve clients in the evaluation of the program as well.

The strengths perspective has an ethical value to professional social workers involved with policy work. In particular, using a strengths perspective in policy practice can result in a more inclusive approach to policy development. This is because, when client populations are viewed as having strengths, they are more likely to be included in policy formulation. A more active involvement for those impacted by these policies can be empowering. In addition, any time a strengths perspective is used, there is a greater possibility that negative labeling of clients will be avoided and individual dignity respected.

Policy Windows of Opportunity

Social workers involved with policy advocacy know that there are "windows of opportunity" for getting new policies enacted.[26] Taking advantage of these opportunities involves agenda building, problem recognition, available solutions, and the right socio-political environment. **Agenda building** can be defined as the process of developing a list of problems or other subjects that one or more people intend to address at some point in the immediate future.

With respect to agenda building and legislative advocacy, social workers distinguish between government agendas and decision agendas in policymaking. **Government agendas** are defined as general public agendas that contain problems and potential solutions that have been introduced in the policymaking arena at some point in time. In other words, these problems and/or solutions have been "floated" in the policymaking arena to gauge how important or attractive they may be to decision makers. They now are beginning to receive serious attention by policymakers. However, no serious action has been taken on either an individual problem or an individual solution by policymakers. An illustration would be the many years that the sponsors of the first national health insurance bills spent attempting to get serious hearings before Congress. Dating back to the 1940s, Medicare was a solution that was well known to policymakers, yet really did not get serious attention until the late 1950s and early 1960s.[27]

In contrast to the general government agenda, the **decision agenda**, by definition, is located within the general government agenda and contains problems and solutions ready, or close to ready, for authoritative action by policymakers.[28] The decision agenda, therefore, contains specific bills nearing a vote

by policymakers during a given legislative session. To use national health insurance as an illustration, the Forand health insurance bill was introduced and rejected in 1959, the Kerrs-Mills health insurance bill introduced and passed in 1960, and the Medicare bill introduced and passed in 1965 as part of the Great Society legislation.[29] More recently, President Obama introduced and passed healthcare reform during his administration. All are examples of legislative proposals that made it to the decision agenda!

The challenge for social workers involved in policy advocacy is to get the problem of interest to them from the general government agenda to the more immediate decision agenda. Techniques used by social work advocates to push a specific problem from the general government agenda to the decision agenda include using the media to educate the public about the problem. In this way, pressure may be put on elected officials to take action on the social problem. A second technique is to organize a coalition of people who are concerned about the problem. An example might be the organizing of a coalition of child care professionals and advocates to bring attention to the problem of inadequate child care in a given state. Similarly, organizing demonstrations, rallies, and/or marches concerning the problem is a third technique. An example is the 1987 demonstration in Washington, D.C., during the first Bush Administration for increased federal funding to address the AIDS epidemic.[30]

Another way to move a problem onto the decision agenda of policymakers is to support a political candidate for office who will champion the cause. At various times, people running for office will identify themselves with an issue such as education and, as a result, commit themselves to taking action on a given problem if elected to office.

In addition, the social work advocate might present the problem as a crisis that will get worse if no action is taken. An example, again, is the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s. And finally, framing the problem in a way that lends itself to available solutions may encourage policymakers to take action. President George H. W. Bush's use of the "available" U.S. military after the end of the Cold War to fight a "War on Drugs" is one illustration.[31]

To take advantage of an opportunity to pass new policies, social workers must be knowledgeable about possible solutions to the social problem of interest. By "solutions," we mean the various policy mechanisms (such as sanctions, administrative strategies, program designs, and treatment methodologies) currently in use. If they are not in use, they are at least known to academics, social work practitioners, and policymakers. Solutions, therefore, include those potential problem-solving initiatives currently receiving attention by policymakers as part of the general government policy agenda.

Again, the challenge for social work advocates is to get a preferred solution coupled with an identified problem on the decision agenda of policymakers during a given legislative session. Social workers considering the feasibility of a given policy proposal often forecast the various techniques for doing this. First of all, they could present their preferred solution as the most feasible solution to an existing social problem. It may be most feasible technically (in terms of current research), financially, ideologically, and/or administratively. To provide an illustration, the administration of President George W. Bush, which took office in 2001, advocated increased federal funding of "faith-based" organizations (meaning religious organizations) to address a variety of social problems.[32] Given his religious convictions, President Bush clearly took office with this as a preferred solution to many human service problems.

Social Work Stories: Taking a Stand for Equal Rights

Many women believed the right to vote to be a solution to women's oppression. Witness Alice Paul. Alice Paul was a strong women's rights advocate working for the passage of the 19th Amendment and also authoring and lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) until her death in 1977. Paul's activities in the suffrage movement included participating in various forms of advocacy, including protest marches and parades, rallies and demonstrations, congressional lobbying, visits to the White House, and public meetings.

Paul also coordinated picketing of the White House, for which she was arrested and sentenced to seven months in jail. While in jail, Paul went on hunger strikes that resulted in daily force-feedings by jail staff intended to coerce compliance. She was allowed no visitors, denied access to her lawyer, and was not allowed to receive mail. The door was removed from her cell, the windows were covered, and she was awakened every hour throughout the night with a bright light. The tactics and techniques that Paul used, as well as the treatment that she endured, demonstrate her lifelong quest for women's rights.[33]

Another technique is to run for office with a desired solution to a major public problem as the centerpiece of the campaign. An illustration of this technique would be the campaign of millionaire and fiscal conservative Steve Forbes for president in 1996, presenting the "flat tax" as the solution to an unfair and overly complicated U.S. tax system.

Social work advocates must also examine the socio-political environment in which policy is developed. They do this in order to determine whether or not there is sufficient support for new policy proposals. For Congress and state legislatures, the "socio-political environment" consists of public opinion, constituent support, campaign donors, advocacy groups, lobbyists, the media, and powerful political leaders (e.g., committee chairs). For other types of public organizations, such as the Department of Health and Human Services at the national level, the socio-political environment consists of legislative guidelines, administrative regulations, taxpayer views, client feedback, and the views of elected officials. Private nonprofit organizations must consider items such as funding opportunities and guidelines, professional ethics, court rulings (such as the rulings on the tax-exempt status on nonprofit organizations), advocacy groups, client demands, and community support.

Windows of opportunity for new policy occur when existing problems, available solutions, and political support converge at some point in time.[34] Social work advocates must recognize and take advantage of these opportunities. To illustrate using the history of Medicare, the problem was inadequate health care coverage for U.S. residents. The solution presented, at least for older Americans, was Medicare. However, no major legislation was passed until the problem and the solution converged in 1965 with the political support of President Lyndon Johnson, the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, Wilbur Mills, and many supportive advocacy groups.[35]

Collaboration and Political Strategy in Policy Advocacy

Social workers collaborate with others at many levels to change and develop new policies. As stated in previous chapters, this collaboration could be with coworkers in an interdisciplinary team (interprofessional collaboration) to change agency policies; it could be with other community agencies to change community policies (interagency collaboration). At the state and national

Case Study: National Coalition for the Homeless

An example of an ongoing national coalition is the National Coalition for the Homeless, which maintains a Web site at http://www.nationalhomeless.org. This coalition works to end homelessness through grassroots organizing, public education, policy advocacy, ethical assistance, and partnerships. Its Web site offers fact sheets, alerts to upcoming legislative activities, tips on communicating with Congress, forums, and personal stories of homelessness. One of the coalition's major advocacy successes was the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987![37]

levels, social work advocates are frequently asked to assist in developing a political advocacy strategy for passing policy proposals. The target of the strategy would be the policy decision maker, such as Congress on the national level or a state legislature on the state level. In terms of advocacy goals, the most fundamental goal would be to have the decision maker pass the policy recommendation. To do this, policy advocates frequently need to develop a political strategy involving partnerships with other policy proposal supporters. In this instance, the partnership may take the form of a coalition of major stakeholders identified as supportive. **Coalitions**, by definition, are usually temporary partnerships organized for a specific and time-limited purpose.[36] Such would be the case in organizing solely for the purpose of passing a piece of legislation. Some groups do continue to work together on a more long-term basis under the name of a coalition (see the case study below). Once organized, the coalition members can employ numerous advocacy tactics to influence policy decision makers.

The history of American social welfare shows that those who are successful in promoting social change are also those who have collaborated with like-minded groups. Therefore, social work advocates continually seek allies to pass progressive policy.

To illustrate, let's once again look at state and national legislation. In defining the social problem and key issues on which to focus, social work advocates ask: Which groups define the social problem in a comparable way? Which groups agree in identifying key aspects of the social problem? These are potential allies in organizing coalitions and/or associations to better address the issue.

In terms of examining the legislative history of the social problem, what committees and departments were involved in passing prior legislation related to the problem? Who were some of the important individuals on these committees and in these departments? Are these people still working in the same positions? If they are, social work advocates know that these are potential supporters in the attempt to formulate and pass new social policy. What client populations were affected by prior legislation? Do these client populations have advocacy groups? If so, these advocacy groups are potential supporters in passing new social policy.

With respect to examining past research on the social problem, which organizations were involved in conducting the research? How was the research applied and which groups benefited from the research? These are potential allies in policy advocacy.

And as previously discussed in identifying major stakeholders in the proposed policy, which stakeholders are probable supporters of the new legislation? Which of these likely supporters have the most interest in the proposed policy? Which have the most power and influence in the policymaking process?

Which will be affected most by new social policy that better addresses the social problem?

Finally, which groups are the biggest proponents of solutions of interest to the social work advocate? This is not to say that the social worker necessarily has a solution already picked out to address the social issue; however, based on their prior experience, several potential solutions may be of interest to the social worker and his or her employer. Therefore, other proponents of certain programming and treatment methodologies are potential allies and coalition partners.

Social Workers and Policy Debate

Some social work policy advocates may find themselves not only in the role of communicator, but also in the roles of lobbyist and persuader. In such cases, knowledge of debate tactics as they relate to policy communication may be helpful.

In the case of competing policy proposals, policy advocates need to offer their policy recommendation as an alternative to other, less desirable policy options. In so doing, the communicator needs to point out important distinctions between their recommendation and competing recommendations. The strengths of the policy proposal should be highlighted, while the weaknesses of other policy alternatives are identified.

Potential weaknesses in alternative policy options include those pertaining to problem definition. For instance, does the alternative policy recommendation clearly define the values, assumptions, and factors associated with the problem? Second, are there flaws in the research methodology of alternative policy proposals? For example, are there biases in survey instruments used to collect information in alternative policy proposals? Should a random sample have been used in collecting information? Do competing proposals rely too heavily on anecdotal evidence? These and other potential flaws can be pointed out when advocating for a specific proposal and against other policy proposals.

Third, the choice of criteria used in competing policy proposals can be critiqued. Perhaps competing proposals rely too heavily on financial criteria. Perhaps they don't rely enough on more technical criteria such as program effectiveness. Maybe competing policy proposals fail to examine potential unanticipated consequences of the proposal on certain populations. Maybe alternative proposals are vague in terms of their implementation planning. In these and other ways, social workers advocating for a specific policy recommendation may make the strongest case when communicating to policy decision makers and the public in general.

Demonstrating Knowledge, Values, and Skills

As a class exercise, students should divide up into two or more teams. Pick a social problem and have each group formulate a more precise problem statement, values and assumptions underlying the problem statement, and a policy recommendation that better addresses the problem than do current policies. Then have the student teams present their policy analysis, stating why they feel it is the best policy alternative when compared to competing policy proposals.

Which students were most persuasive? What tactics did they use to make their case?

Internet Advocacy

Internet advocacy is another political strategy that every social worker can employ. Today, organizations, including health and human services, develop Web sites that provide crucial information about the mission and programs of the agency to the public. Visitors to the Web site can be informed in much greater detail about the services, client populations, finances, leaders, and staff of an agency than through typical agency brochures. Interested Internet visitors can find out the latest news about an organization, upcoming events, and past accomplishments.

[W]e may decide that access to the Internet is a basic human right.
—Thomas L. Friedman

Once informed and interested in the mission of the organization, an Internet user may decide to get more involved in the activities of the organization, including those dealing with policy advocacy.[38] If an organization is mounting a campaign to get a policy recommendation passed, the agency can provide Internet supporters with ways to make a financial donation to the cause and to contact crucial decision makers and other stakeholders involved with the policy recommendation. Most advocacy organizations will provide their supporters with a prewritten letter urging decision makers to take a specific action on the issue and then allow the supporter to e-mail the message directly from the Web site. In addition, agencies can provide chat areas and links with like-minded agencies (perhaps part of a coalition) right on their Web site.

Although this option may be soon replaced to a significant degree by Twitter, the new real-time, online communication service, another communication vehicle for supporters is the use of a "listserv" that allows supporters to exchange e-mail regarding the policy proposal, the decision-making process, and other related activities.[39] Furthermore, the agency Web site can be used to allow policy advocates a chance to ask questions and provide feedback to agency leaders and staff regarding the policy recommendation and advocacy campaign. As previously stated, most advocacy agencies allow their supporters an opportunity to send e-mails directly from the agency's Web site in

Critical Thinking Question

The Internet and other new technologies are increasingly used in policy practice. Can you think of a way to use your laptop computer or cell phone to advocate for a policy change at your college?

support of or opposition to a policy proposal.[40] Printed copies of such e-mails also can be collected by the agency and presented in hard copy later to policy decision makers to emphasize support for the policy proposal.

Agencies may also choose to provide campaign material on their Web site that can be printed by supporters in trying to get a policy recommendation passed. Such material may be used for posters, fliers, brochures, anecdotal stories, or fact sheets during the advocacy process.[41] Agencies in support of a policy proposal also are increasingly employing the latest in Internet animation, sound, and video such as YouTube to create advocacy messages.

Some agencies such as the NASW also provide an "online tool kit" for supporters who want to start campaigns or other initiatives.[42] In the case of a campaign to support a policy recommendation, the tool kit may be used to help organize efforts at the state and local level. Tool kits can show supporters how to raise money, write press releases, create public service announcements, and communicate with state and local policymakers. This would include, of course, ways to use the Internet in such advocacy efforts. Environmental and human rights activists have used Internet advocacy successfully in the past. These agencies include the Rain Forest Activist Network and Amnesty International. Social work associations like NASW and various political action groups such as MoveOn.org and MomsRising.org are now doing the same.

MomsRising, for instance, is a grassroots membership organization that advocates for family economic security. It uses its Web site to provide a national soapbox for mothers to discuss issues, policies, and services involving families. And these moms are tech savvy! Their Web site allows members to participate in national and state advocacy campaigns by employing e-mail, blogs, Twitter "tweets," videos, and more. And all of this can be done from the living rooms of their homes and apartments!

Did You Know?

Did you know that Twitter, a service that broadcasts brief messages over the Internet or by text message in real time, turned out to be a critical tool used by millions of Iranians to protest the questionable results of the 2009 presidential election in that country? Twitter helped protesters in their advocacy efforts because it is highly mobile, fast, free, public, and read on many high-tech devices.

SOCIAL WORKERS AND ADVOCACY SUCCESS

> Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.[43]
>
> —John Rawls

The American market economy produces a relatively high standard of living. Yet, when change is needed, government and voluntary associations often play leading roles in the effort. In fact, the history of American social welfare is filled with successful collaborative efforts at social reform. Social workers at times have been leaders in these reform movements. At other times, they have been called upon to implement programs and services as a result of new social legislation. In any case, don't let the cynicism of some critics fool you. As a social worker, you can make a difference!

The foremothers of social work were successful in many advocacy efforts. Dorothea Dix, one of the first great social advocates, was certainly a success in establishing state services for the mentally ill.[44] Using their excellent

communication skills, women such as Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton during the 1800s contributed significantly to the abolition movement.[45] Many of the same women fought for women's suffrage and were ultimately successful in gaining the right to vote.

The driving force behind much social reform during the Progressive Era was the grassroots advocacy of women. The General Federation of Women's Clubs was a national advocacy network, starting at the local community level, which was very influential in passing many of the reforms of the Progressive Era. The National Congress of Mothers was another advocacy organization heavily involved in reform efforts during the Progressive Era.[46] Depending on the specific issue, at various times, these organizations partnered in coalitions with other reform groups, including progressive business associations, trade unions, farm groups, urban political machines, and the emerging social work profession.

Social workers Jane Addams, Grace Abbott, Edith Abbott, and other settlement house workers were successful in their efforts to improve the quality of life for immigrants in inner-city neighborhoods.[47] And they did so by personally witnessing the growing social need and stressing social cooperation among business, government, and voluntary associations to address this need.

Like the settlement houses, charity organization societies also stressed community collaboration in addressing social problems. Led by professionals such as social worker Mary Richmond, many of these organizations later evolved into community chests and ultimately the United Way system, a nationwide partnership between business and nonprofit health and human service organizations.[48]

Workers' Compensation and, later, Social Security and Unemployment Compensation, created during the New Deal have been a success.[49] Settlement house workers Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Hopkins, and Frances Perkins were top advisors to President Franklin Roosevelt during the creation of the New Deal programs.[50] Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the great campaigners and advocates in American history!

The programs of the Great Society, despite continuing criticism, have been successful in many ways. The Food Stamp Program has helped the poor obtain critical food supplies.[51] Medicare, despite issues of cost control, has provided many older Americans with needed health care, while keeping them from falling into poverty.[52] Community health centers, also established during the Great Society, provide accessible services in low-income communities.[53] Poor children have benefited from the early educational support of Head Start, a Great Society program that increases the likelihood of future high school graduation and employment.[54] And the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 ended segregation in the South and led the way to the election of the first black man as president of the United States, Barack Obama.[55]

The point is that many social programs, although perhaps not perfect, perhaps not completely solving the various problems they address, have, in fact, been successful, providing needed services and support to millions of Americans. Contemporary social workers and students studying to be social workers should be proud of these successes. American social welfare is the result of a cooperative effort,- a collaboration - among various institutions, groups, and individuals to further national well-being. To the extent that this collaboration at times has needed to be coerced, American social welfare reflects a rich heritage of advocacy that can be built upon by today's social workers. The next successful social reform movement involving social workers might address current issues involving Social Security , health care, or homelessness. It might

Research Informed Practice

One of the most important roles of a social worker is to act as an advocate. The NASW identifies ways to be an advocate on its national Web site, www.socialworkers.org. Look for "Advocacy" and click on "Legislative Advocacy Network." *Which issues are currently top priorities for social workers? What is NASW doing to advocate for these issues?* Learn how you can take action on the federal issues important to social workers by contacting your members of Congress through the Legislative Advocacy Network.

Poverty exists because we've built our philosophical framework on assumptions that underestimate human capacities.

—Muhammad Yunus

address international issues related to globalization and international poverty. It might address any number of concerns. Whatever the cause, social advocacy will continue, and hopefully, social workers will play a lead role in the effort.

In so doing, let a vision of social justice guide the profession of social work, a vision based on respect for diversity, individual dignity, self-determination, human rights, and empowerment. Every graduate, upon leaving social work education, should have a personal and professional vision of social justice to guide his or her future activities as a social worker. Without this social vision, social work becomes a profession without passion, a profession without power!

SUMMARY

Social workers engage in advocacy in order to promote social and economic justice. This could mean advocating for a proposed policy within the agency in which the social worker is employed. The new policy may impact employees of the agency (e,g., better health care) or it may affect the clients of the agency (e.g., stricter client confidentiality procedures). At other times, social workers advocate for proposed policy at the city or county level, promoting new policy that would address social problems in local neighborhoods, for instance. Still other social workers advocate for new policy in the form of legislative bills before state legislatures and Congress. When doing so, social workers may play one of several advocacy roles, including that of a witness, collaborator, lobbyist, or activist. Furthermore, social workers have a long history of successful advocacy. These successes include child labor laws, maternal and child health services, Social Security , unemployment compensation, food stamps, housing assistance, early childhood education, and civil rights legislation. These laws, policies, programs, and services have helped millions of people to lead healthy, productive lives. If you agree, perhaps a career in social work would be right for you!