

Shirley Zimmerman

Family Policy Research

FAMILY POLICY RESEARCH: A Seminar (FSoS 8251)

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Seminar Description

This seminar identifies:

- the characteristics that distinguish family policy research from other areas of policy research and family research more generally
- the kind of questions family policy research seeks to answer the conceptual frameworks that can help in seeking the answers to such questions
- the methods that can be used to answer such questions,
- the role that conceptual frameworks play in helping to interpret the answers to such questions, and the role that family policy research can play in policy making and knowledge building processes.

The seminar is based on the assumption that students will have had previous course work in research methods as well as family theory and/or policy.

Seminar Rationale

Although all policy affects families directly or indirectly, the conceptual relationship between families and public policies is often not articulated, in part because it is poorly understood. Students need to understand the conceptual and reciprocal relationships between families and public policies in order to ask the kinds of questions that family policy research seeks to answer. They also need to know how to use theory to guide their research, interpret their research findings, and draw conclusions about their findings that are relevant to both policy and families. Particularly important is inquiry into the distributional effects of policies in different sectors, i.e., income maintenance, social services, health, housing, etc., on families of different races, social classes, ethnic backgrounds, and structures, and factors that account for these differential effects. Students also need to be aware of the information and feedback functions that research findings can serve in the policy making process -- and that impede or facilitate the use of research findings in this process.

Seminar Objectives

The seminar is designed to enable students to:

- frame a research question that relates a policy issue to a family issue
- draw on conceptual frameworks in both the family and policy arenas for their research perspective
- articulate the assumptions underlying their research question
- delineate the methods they would use to obtain the information they would need to answer

their research question

- consider the evidence they would need to answer their question
- draw conclusions from such evidence with respect to both policy and families
- consider the audiences for whom their findings would be most relevant
- consider how their findings can be disseminated to different audiences and the factors that may affect audience attention to and acceptance of their findings.

Student Requirements

Students are expected to stay current with seminar readings and actively participate in seminar discussions. They also are expected to search out research articles in their area of interest in preparation for the research proposal they will develop and present as part of seminar requirements.

Student research proposals should:

- ask a research question about a policy issue that relates to families and that is of special interest to them
- state the significance of the issue or problem by briefly reviewing its history, and theoretical and practical relevance for families and policy
- state the assumptions underlying their research question
- state and discuss the theoretical framework that will guide their research and how it relates to the policy issue under investigation
- operationalize the variables they will be using from the conceptual framework they have chosen, i.e., the real world referents of these variables
- delineate the methods that would best provide the information they need to obtain to answer their research question
- state the evidence that would be needed to support their research hypothesis(es)
- state the conclusions to be drawn from such evidence based on the conceptual framework they are using
- state the implications of such evidence in both family and policy terms
- state the audiences for whom the findings are most applicable and why.

An alternative assignment could be the preparation of a set of abstracts of family policy research studies appearing in one of the major family journals for the past 15 years or so (there are not that many). This could be a group project. To be further discussed further in class.

Students will be held responsible for all of the assigned readings. Although no exams are planned, the instructor may quiz students on the gist of the readings from time to time.

Required Readings:

1. Majchrzak, A. 1983. Methods for Policy Research. Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Publications.
2. Schram, S. F. 1995. Words of Welfare. The Poverty of Social Science and the Social Science of Poverty. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
3. Zimmerman, S. L. 1992. Family Policies and Family Well-being: The Role of Political Culture. Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Publications.
4. Zimmerman, S. L. 1995. Understanding Family Policy(2nd ed.): Theories and Applications. Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Publications.
5. Additional readings are in a packet that may be purchased at the St, Paul Student Union bookstore. The packet includes a wonderful out of print book by David Paris and James Reynolds, The Logic of Policy Inquiry.

Seminar Topics

Session 1

The Seminar in Perspective: The Knowledge/Policy Connection

- An introduction to the seminar: Exploring the research and policy interests of students and their understandings of family policy and family policy research. Also to be discussed is why anyone would want to do family policy research.

Session 2

The research/policy connection: Uses and abuses of research findings in policy research

- Bozeman, The credibility of policy analysis: Between method and use, Policy Studies Journal, 1986, June.
- DeLeon, Democracy and the policy sciences: Aspirations and operations. Policy Studies Journal. 1994, Spring.
- Hendrick and Nachmias, The policy sciences: The challenge of complexity. Policy Studies Review. 1992, Autumn/Winter.
- Moen and Jull, Informing family policies: The uses of social research Journal of Family and Economic Issues. 1995, Spring.
- Nachmias and Felbinger, Utilization in the policy cycle: Directions for research. Policy Studies Review. 1982, November.
- Portz, Problem definitions and policy agendas: Shaping the educational agenda in Boston. Policy Studies Review 1996, Autumn.
- Snare, Windows of opportunity: When and how can the policy analyst influence the policymaker during the policy process? Policy Studies Review, 1995/96, 14,3/4.

All of the above readings are in the readings packet. Students should come to class having written an abstract of the article to which they were assign-ed in session 1 and be prepared to discuss it in class in session 2, raising questions about the research/policy connection that the readings evoke.

Session 3

An illustration of the research/policy connection and uses and misuses of research findings in the making of policy.

- Schram: Words of Welfare
 1. Suffer in Silence: The subtext of social policy research
 2. Discourses of dependency: The politics of euphemisms
 3. Inverting political economy: Perspective, position, and discourse in the analysis of welfare
 4. Bottom-up discourse: Narrating the privatization of public assistance
 5. Home economists as the real economists
 6. Rewriting social policy history
 7. The real uses of a false dichotomy: Symbols at the expense of substance in welfare reform
 8. The feminization of poverty: From statistical artifact to established policy
 9. Waltzing with the rapper: Industrial welfare policy meets postindustrial poverty

Students should read the entire Schram book and write a 1-2 page summary of the chapter to which they were assigned in session 2 that they will share with the class in session 3. They should be prepared to raise questions about the implications of the book and the chapter to which they were assigned in particular for family policy research. A provocative book, the focus for this class is on issues in the research/policy connection that students should keep in mind in doing family policy research.

Sessions 4, 5, 6, and 7

Going ahead with the research anyway: Some theoretical frameworks for guiding family policy research

- Zimmerman, Understanding Family Policy: Theories and Applications Definitions, trends, models for understanding family policy: Chapters 1- 4
- Policy choice as process and content: Chapters 5 - 8
 - The institutional framework
 - The rational choice framework
 - The political culture framework
 - The incremental choice framework
 - Game theory: Rational choice under competitive conditions of no authority
 - Interest group theory
 - Elite theory
 - Systems theory
- Family frameworks for assessing family outcomes: Chapters 9 & 10
 - Systems theory
 - Exchange and choice theories
 - Symbolic interaction
 - Family stress theory
 - Conflict theory
 - Other conceptual frameworks
 - Feminist theory
 - Cultural theory
 - Marxist theory
- Summary: Chapter 11

Students should be thinking about the theoretical framework they might use for guiding their research.

Session 8

Using one of the conceptual frameworks discussed in class to generate research hypotheses

- Students should come to class prepared to share the research hypotheses they have generated based on one of the conceptual frameworks presented in class.

Session 9

Policy research methods: How students might pursue testing their research hypotheses or answering their research questions

- Majchrzak, Methods for Policy Research (Whole book)
- The out-of print book The Logic of Policy Inquiry by David Paris and James Reynolds included in the packet is more philosophical than the Majchrzak book, and lends depth and insight into the nature of policy inquiry. Students should come to class prepared to raise questions about both books in relation to the research proposal they are writing and the methods they might use to pursue their research question.

Session 10

Applications

- Zimmerman, Family Policies and Family Well-being: The Role of Political Culture. An illustration of the application of theory, values, and research methods to questions about the relationship between policy and family well-being. This book draws on political culture and social integration theories.
 - Attitudinal survey
 - Attitudes toward Government and Families: The role of political culture, Chapter 4
 - Content and comparative analysis States' policy approaches to families: The role of political culture, Chapter 5
 - Statistical and historical studies based on secondary data analysis, Family policies and family well-being: The role of political culture, Chapter 6
- Nachmias and Ridgeway, Attitude measures in evaluation research Policy Studies Review, May 1986, Vol 5, No. 4

Session 11

Applications (continued)

Rettig, Tam, & Yellowthunder (1995, May). Family Policy: Critical science research in facilitating change. Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 16, 1

Session 12

Policy Research Methods (continued)

Stum, The context of financing long term care: Implications for families Multi-method approach (an example of organization setting as context for policy research).

Session 13

Student Lab - The lab will focus around student's questions about the research proposals they are preparing for class presentation during sessions 14 & 15

Session 14

Student presentations

Session 15

Proposals (or set of abstracts) Due

REFERENCE LIST

Theoretical

Alexander, J., Giesen, B., Munch, R. and Smelser, N. 1987. The Micro-Macro Link. Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press.

Danziger, M. 1995. Policy analysis postmodernized: Some political and pedagogical ramifications. Policy Studies Journal 23, 3, 435-450.

Hoos, I. 1983. Systems Analysis in Public Policy. Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press (rev. ed.).

Lerner, D. and Lasswell, H. 1951. The Policy Sciences. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press.

Rokeach, M. 1973. The Nature of Human Values. New York: Free Press.

Schram, S. F. 1995. Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and the Social Science of Poverty. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Thompson, S. & Hoggett, P. 1996. Universalism, selectivism, and particularism: Towards a postmodern social policy. Critical Social Policy 46 (SAGE: London, Thousand Oaks, Ca., and New Delhi) 16, 1, 21-43.

Yanow, D. 1995. Built space as story: The policy stories that buildings tell. Policy Studies Journal, 23, 3, 407-422.

Zundel, A. 1995. Policy frames and ethical traditions: The case of homeownership for the poor. Policy Studies Journal, 23, 3, 423-434.

Social Indicators

Andrews, F. and Withey, S. 1976. Social Indicators of Well-being: Americans' Perception of Life Quality. New York: Plenum Press, 1976.

Andrews, F. (ed.) 1986. Research on the Quality of Life, Ann Arbor, Mi.: Institute for Social Research.

Bauer, R. (Ed.) 1966. Social Indicators. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT, 1966.

MacRae, D., Jr. 1985. Policy Indicators: Link between Social Science and Public Debate. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

General Policy Research Methods

Dale, A. and Davies, R. 1994. Analyzing Social and Political Change: A Casebook of Methods. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications.

Majchrzak, A. 1984. Methods for Policy Research. Newbury Park, Ca.: Sage Publications.

Manhelm, J. and Rich, R. 1986. Empirical Political Analysis. New York: Longman.

Mayer, R. and Greenwood, E. 1980. The Design of Social Policy Research. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Nagel, S. 1988. Policy Studies: Integration and Evaluation. New York: Praeger.

Paris, D. and Reynolds, J. 1983. The Logic of Policy Inquiry. New York: Longman.

Polls and Surveys

Bradburn, N. and Sudman, S. 1988. Polls and Surveys: Understanding What They Tell Us. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc..

Kweit, M. and Kweit, R. 1981. Concepts and Methods for Political Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc.

McClosky, H. and Zaller, J. 1984. The American Ethos: Public Attitudes toward Capitalism and Democracy. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Public Perspective: A Roper Center Review of Public Opinion and Polling. Published bi-monthly.

Case Studies

Hochschild, J. 1981. What's Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Quinn, L. M. and Magill, R. S. 1994, December. Politics versus research in social policy. Social Service Review, 68, 4:503-520

Secondary Data Analysis

Lammers, W. and Kilngroan, D. 1984. State Policies and the Aging: Sources, Trends and Options. Lexington, Ma: Lexington Books.

Linsky, A. and Straus, M. 1986. Social Stress in the United States: Links to Regional Patterns in Crime and illness. Dover, Ma: Auburn House Publishing Co.

Wilensky, H., Luebbert, G., Hahn, S., and Jamieson, A. 1985. Comparative Social Policy: Theories, Methods, Findings. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wilensky, H. 1975. The Welfare State and Equality: Structural and Ideological Roots of Public Expenditures. Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press.

Zimmerman, S. L. 1992. Family Policies and Family Well-Being: The Role of Political Culture. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Zimmerman, S. L. & Gager, C. 1997. A potential case of social bankruptcy: States' AFDC payments and their teen birth rates. Policy Studies Journal.

Qualitative Research

Rose, R. 1989. Ordinary People in Public Policy. Newbury Park, C.: Sage Publications, Evaluation Research (an excellent book - qualitative analysis)

Wells, K. and Biegel, D. (Eds.). 1991. Family Preservation Services. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Some Journals That Report Policy Research Related to Families

- Family Planning Perspectives, published annually, Allan Guttmacher Institute
- Family Relations, sometimes, published quarterly, NCFR
- Family Issues, sometimes, published quarterly, Sage/NCFR
- Focus, published quarterly, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Free. Call and ask to be put on mailing list.
- Journal of Family and Economic Issues, published quarterly, Human Sciences Press
- Policy Studies Journal, published quarterly, Policy Studies Organization
- Policy Studies Review, published quarterly, Policy Studies Organization
- Social Philosophy and Policy, published quarterly, Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Social Service Review, published quarterly, University of Chicago Press.
- Social Work, sometimes, published quarterly
- Washington Social Legislation Bulletin, Child Welfare League of America, Washington D. C.

Government Data Sources

- Current Population Reports, Census Bureau
- Monthly Labor Review, published quarterly
- National Center for Health Statistics, Monthly and Annual Statistical Reports on Marriage, Divorce, Birth, and Death Rates
- Social Security Bulletin, published monthly
- State Government Finances, published annually, Census Bureau
- U.S. Bureau of Census, U. S. Statistical Abstracts (published annually)

Other Data Sources

- Brookings Institution, Washington, D. C.
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Washington, D.C.
- Children's Defense Fund, Washington, D.C.
- Congressional Quarterly, Inc., Washington, D.C.
- European Observatory on National Family Policies
- Institute for Research on Poverty, Madison, WI
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- The Roper Center Review of Public Opinion and Polling
- United Nations
- Urban Institute, Washington, D.C.