

Family Policy Definitions and Dimensions

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The following definitions and dimensions help students understand what is within and outside the parameters of the field.

What is “FAMILY POLICY?”

- Public Policy
Social Policy
Family Policy
- Family policy is fundamentally concerned about the family as the basic social institution

Family Policy as:

- A perspective – for understanding and thinking about the actions of government and consequences of these actions for families
- A process – of collective decision making
- A field of activity – the wide range of family-related programs that result from policymaking (e.g. family preservation, family and medical leave, income supports)

Family Policy

- Is a course of action directed at the family (including marriage and kinship) with the intent of guiding, influencing, determining:
- The structures it assumes

The functions it performs

The processes of change

The behavior of its members

Types of Family Policy

- Explicit – those policies in which the consequences for families are deliberately structured
- Implicit – those that have nonfamilial objectives but which nonetheless affect families

Explicit Family Policy is directed at:

- Family Composition: Childbirth, marriage, divorce, adoption, foster care
- Economic Support: Families’ abilities to provide for their dependents’ basic needs (food, shelter, health and clothing)

- Development of Children: Parents' ability to nurture, rear, educate children
- Family Care: Families' ability to care for members and relatives who are chronically ill, frail, or have disabilities
- Partner Relationships: Families' ability to foster and maintain committed, stable partner relationships

Policymaking Arenas

- Level of Government
 - Federal
 - State
 - Local (county, city, school board)
- Branch of Government
 - Legislative
 - Executive
 - Judicial

Dimensions of Family Policy

- Policy to maintain the status quo or as a force of change?
- Policies for family groups and systems for individuals?
- Policies that see the family (children) as a public or private institution?
- Policies that are targeted or universal?
- Policies at the macro-level (economic support, housing, etc.) or micro-level (care giving, nurturing)?
- Policies that promote treatment strategies or preventive ones?
- Policy at the federal, state and/or local level?

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