

Policy analysis is comprised of a technique or process used to determine what a policy will achieve or has achieved relevant to an aspiration or purpose. Analysis can be descriptive in attempting to explain existing policy and its development or prescriptive when the analysis is used in formulating new policies and proposals. Policies that have been developed and implemented should be analyzed periodically for general acceptance and consistency with the current political environment and social and healthcare issues. Review and analysis of policies provide the opportunity for modifications as well as offering a perspective of the world of politics (Dye 2010; Longest 2005; Porche 2012). This chapter explores policy analysis and evaluation focusing on the consideration of what facilitates or impedes formulation and realization of policy. Policy analysis models are discussed. An evaluation process that includes reflexive response and adaptation in development of strategies is proposed. This chapter concludes by urging nurses, especially those leading advanced nursing practice initiatives, to become engaged in interactive policy communication to further ensure evaluation of the impact and outcomes of policy directives.

7.1 Process and Models

Policy analysis consists of a systematic evaluation of the technical and political implications of alternatives proposed to solve public problems (Birkland 2005; Porche 2012). Policy analysis refers to both the process of assessing policies or programs and the product of that analysis using qualitative and quantitative data and a variety of approaches to assess the situation. Results of analysis can facilitate discussion and debate on policy as well as provide evidence for decision-making and/or adaptations.

The context in which an issue arises or policy exists is assessed in the process of policy analysis through interpretative analysis of the policy and an evaluation of the historical context of the policy. This process may produce details regarding the association between current policy along with past and present political, social, and

healthcare contexts. If there is a disconnect between current policy and the present context, either a further in-depth policy evaluation may be warranted. The initial policy analysis could simply lead to a recommendation for policy modification.

According to Porche (2012), there are two foci for policy analysis:

- Analysis *of* policy
- Analysis *for* policy

Analysis *of* policy can be viewed as a retrospective process that explores the purpose of the policy and what comprised and established the policy. This analysis of policy studies how policy evolved onto the policy agenda and the process of formulation of the policy. In contrast, analysis *for* policy is prospective and explores potential outcomes if a specific policy is developed and implemented (Buse et al. 2005). Policy analysis is dependent upon access to data sources such as valid and reliable documents, interviews, focus groups, and government or agency reports (Porche 2012)

The product of the policy analysis is a clear description of the issue, identification of policy solutions, courses of action with expected outcomes along with a contextual, and comprehensive understanding of the policy. In addition to creating policy or assessing the need for modification of current policy, analysis can be done during all phases of policymaking from agenda setting to policy formulation to implementation (Porche 2012).

However, Birkland (2005) comments that frequently debate on policy is based on anecdotal evidence rather than scientific policy analysis. In comparing these two approaches, anecdotal evidence provides easily understood stories, while scientifically sound evidence from a study is based on factual data. Evidence may contrast with anecdotes or “common wisdom” (p. 11), and even though data are based on scientific findings, it may prove to be unpopular.

The policy feedback theory proposed by Mettler and Sorelle (2014) adds another dimension to the concept of policy analysis. Policy feedback refers to the potential for policies to transform politics and, as a result, influence future development of policy and thus transform the political landscape. The field of policy analysis, which endeavors to predict the most valuable approaches to solving social problems or to evaluate the capacity of existing policies to do so, often focuses on issues of economic value or social well-being. Policy feedback theory proposes to assess how policies affect decisive aspects of governance, such as whether policy promotes public and citizen participation or deters it, whether policy promotes development of powerful interest groups, and how they affect governing capacity. This approach attempts to clarify the impact of policies and assist in avoiding unintended consequences.

Ideally, evaluation and analysis of policy should be based on sophisticated research conducted by objective researchers. In the real world, data are at times difficult to find or do not exist and are too time-consuming to obtain, or results may be withheld due to personal reasons by the researcher (Birkland 2005). Unfortunately, due to diverse interests related to a particular issue such as a controversial topic,

empirical results may be labeled as preliminary or inconclusive to impede decision-making. As a consequence the issue disappears from the policy agenda. It is important to bear in mind that even though policy analysis appears sound and logical, by itself, it is unlikely to make a difference in a heated policy debate. Birkland (2005) suggests that ideological agreements on an issue may play a more significant part in making decisions than sound evidence. In spite of this, policy analysis can still be seen to have a role in the policy process if the empirical evidence is accurate and thorough.

7.1.1 Policy Analysis Models

It is not the aim of this publication to provide an in-depth discussion of policy analysis models but to offer an introduction to several examples of approaches that can be considered when thinking about doing a policy analysis. The following sections provide brief synopses of these models.

7.1.1.1 Process Model

The process model identifies policymaking stages and analyzes the factors associated with each of the stages including stakeholders and policymakers. The person(s) conducting the analysis uses any policymaking model as the framework to conduct the policy analysis (Lester and Stewart 2000). This model is flexible when considering its use but has been critiqued as being too simplistic, failing to take into account the multiple factors that influence the policy process.

7.1.1.2 Substantive Model

The substantive model analyzes the policy from the perspective of the policy issue. Policy content experts typically conduct the analysis and must be familiar not only with the content but with political bodies and identified strategies used in policymaking associated with the focus area (Porche 2012).

7.1.1.3 Eightfold Path

This problem-solving process is used to clarify the policy issue and determine policy solutions (Bardach 2005). The eight steps in this model are:

- Defining the issue/problem
- Collecting the evidence/data
- Constructing policy options
- Selecting the criteria for a policy alternative
- Projecting the outcomes: anticipated and unanticipated
- Come to terms with any points of negotiation or compromise
- Deciding among the various options
- Communicating the narrative: redefining the issue, reconceptualizing the options, reconsidering the criteria, rethinking the outcomes, and reevaluating possible compromises from the perspective of the identified best policy option

The steps do not need to be pursued in the order in which they have been listed. This brief description is simply an effort to describe a process with definition of the issue or problem as the beginning and relating the story or narrative usually identified as the ending point.

7.1.1.4 Logical-Positivist Model

This model is also identified as the behavioral or scientific approach. The logical-positivist model starts with a theory or theoretical framework using deductive reasoning to guide the policy analysis process. Data is collected and analyzed using either comparative or correlative measures resulting in a final report (Lester and Stewart 2000).

7.1.1.5 Participatory Policy Analysis (PPA)

This model seeks input from additional participants to ensure that principles valued by the public are included in the formulation of policy alternatives. This policy analysis model aims to directly engage citizens of the country or locale in the policymaking and analysis processes (Smith and Larimer 2009).

The introduction of models of policy analysis is intended to suggest the diversity of approaches that can be considered if policy analysis is desired when developing strategies for an ANP initiative. This is not an exhaustive presentation of policy analysis models nor is it meant to imply that doing an analysis of policy is a path to success or even required. However, policy analysis can critically appraise the extent to which a policy is a feasible and implementable option to the identified topic or issue.

7.2 Indicators and Outcomes

Indicators provide evidence that a certain condition exists or certain results have or have not been achieved and therefore can enable decision-makers to assess progress toward the achievement of intended outcomes, goals, and objectives.

Outcome indicators associated with healthcare tend to measure the broader results achieved through the provision of services. These indicators can exist at various levels: population, agency, and program. An aspect of policy evaluation is to measure the overall effectiveness and extent to which a policy has achieved its objectives, paying attention to impact and outcome.

Indicators are most often seen as quantitative measures that express the status and trends of complex phenomena based on monitoring data and that resonate with the interests of relevant audiences (Pinter and Swanson 2006). Consider the following assumptions (Hezri 2003):

- Indicators will provide clear answers to questions about environmental change and sustainability
- Indicators will help to explain how decisions and decision outcomes are linked
- Having the right indicators will result in better decisions.

These assumptions tend to be widely accepted; however, examination and review of the use of indicators reveal that these assumptions cannot be taken for granted.

Ideally, indicators should inform decision-making by helping to understand an issue and to make a direct relationship between indicators and decision outcomes. For example, indicators can be used to measure the impact of specific decisions or to measure effectiveness. The reality is that indicators or indicator sets do not readily or automatically lead to change in policymaking. Instead, indicators are often used for ulterior motives such as (Hezri 2003):

- To support a predetermined position
- To give performance assurance about appropriate decisions
- As a delaying tactic or substitute for action by stating a decision can be taken once there are demonstrated indicators

Defining, selecting, and promoting knowledge in policymaking are highly variable processes concerned not only with rational debate and decision-making but also with power and politics. Jones et al. (2012) comment that understanding the prevailing political context and how to navigate the many choices and conflicting perspectives on an issue offer insight and entry points to engage in the process.

7.3 Evaluation and Adaptation: Population Indicators

Population-level indicators measure changes in the condition or well-being of children, families, or communities (i.e., teen pregnancy rate, infant mortality rate). Changes in population-level indicators are often long-term results of the efforts of a number of different programs, agencies, and initiatives. In some cases, rather than providing information about the results achieved by interventions, population-level indicators may provide information about the context in or assumptions under which these interventions operate. For example, the overall level of unemployment provides important contextual information for job placement programs. In this case, monitoring the unemployment rate allows stakeholders to correctly interpret program results.

Agency-level indicators measure results for which an agency is responsible; program-level indicators measure the results for which a program or subprogram is responsible. Agency- and program-level outcome indicators are often defined more narrowly than those pertaining to the population as a whole; for example, they may measure pregnancy rates among teenage girls in a given county or among girls receiving a given set of services. Identification of appropriate indicator levels ensures that expectations are not set unrealistically high.

7.4 Determining the Correct Path to Follow

Historically, multiple theories have provided significant insights into the idea of translating knowledge to the policy process or to the realization of policy in actual practice. In various ways, all of these theories offer insights into the importance of understanding the political context surrounding policymaking and the power

relations among decision-makers (Jones et al. 2012). The author has attempted in various ways to underscore the need for nurses and proponents of advanced nursing practice to develop an interactive process between knowledge conducive to policy-making and the policy process. This emphasis includes (Jones et al. 2012):

- Developing a shared understanding of what questions to ask
- How to go about answering them
- How best to interpret responses

Reviewing a range of theories and concepts contributes to an awareness of the many levels of nuance associated with policy decisions and policymaking. As a result, is it not possible to construct a one-size-fits-all model for analysis of the success of a policy or action. Defining, selecting, and promoting knowledge relevant to the policy process and strategic thinking are highly variable, based as much on matters of politics and power as with rational discussion and problem-solving. The complex nature of interactions between decision-makers will depend on the nature and timing of interventions by various stakeholders, “creating windows of opportunity or tipping points” (Jones et al. 2012, p. 6).

The challenge when trying to identify the correct path for developing policy is to think pragmatically about theoretical principles in light of what can be gained to promote better understanding as it relates to policy and developing strategies for ANP. The ability to do this requires the reader to think systematically about the context in which they work, the dynamics of the processes they face, the array of decision-makers who influence policy, how any of the issues are currently being addressed (or not), and strategies that might be linked more effectively to the policy processes.

Conclusion

“It is rarely the case that there is simply a gap between knowledge and policy that requires bridging” (Jones et al. 2012, p. 120). The link between knowledge and policy differs depending on the policy issue. Policy analysis is explored in this chapter as a technique that can be used to identify current policy issues and to facilitate formulation and/or modification of policy. Ideally, the outcome of policy analysis includes a description of the issue, identification of policy solutions or alternatives, and courses of actions with expected outcomes along with a contextual and comprehensive understanding of the policy. This chapter introduces several models to consider when using policy analyses in policy refinement and adaptation. The significance of evaluation indicators and outcomes is explored. By now, following discussion of strategic planning and the policy processes in prior chapters, it should be well established that these processes do not necessarily proceed along an orderly path. Determining the diverse aspects of strategic thinking is a complex process. This chapter builds on prior chapters in trying to disentangle different perspectives in order to improve an understanding of what it takes to launch a context-specific advanced nursing practice initiative.

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