Influencing Social Policy: A Community Psychology Perspective

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Vision; Skills

• What contributions can you see yourself making to social policy in the years ahead? (your vision)

• What skills will you need to make these contributions?
Overview

I. Community psychologists in the arena
II. Policy-relevant research
III. Policy influence skills and tools
I. Community Psychologists in the Policy Arena

- The Promise
- Policy domains, phases, levels, roles
- Examples
Research Project

Influencing social policy: Applied psychology serving the public interest
(SCRA Book Series)
Interviewees (N=63 to date)

Community Psychologists  28
- Academic; Intermediary; Policy Insider

Developmental  19
- Academic; Intermediary; Policy Insider

Social, Other  16
- Academic; Intermediary; Policy Insider

Varied policy domains, levels, expertise
Interview Protocol

• Pathways, experiences
• Greatest success, challenges, work context
• Disciplinary background and training
• Policy-relevant research
• Policy influence skills and tools
• Incremental vs. transformative policy
• Building capacity, moving forward
The Promise

“Our field brings something unique to the conversation.”

- Multi-level, ecological framework
- Joint focus on research and social action
- Social justice focus
Policy Arena: Domains and Phases

- Legislative
- Executive
- Judicial
- Intermediary or Advocacy Organizations
- Citizens
- Media
- Systems/Settings

Agenda Setting Formulation Implementation Evaluation
Policy Arena: Domains and Levels

Legislative

Executive

Judicial

Intermediary or Advocacy Organizations

Citizens

Media

Systems/Settings

Int. National State Local
Policy Influence: Domains and Roles

- Legislative
- Executive
- Judicial
- Intermediary or Advocacy Organizations
- Citizens
- Media
- Systems/Settings

Advocate  Research Expert  Insider
Community Practice

• Tom Wolff (Massachusetts)
  – Developed and worked with local coalitions
  – Relationships with legislators
  – Statewide advocacy networks
  – Policies: health care, transportation
Researchers

- Mary Beth Shinn (New York City)
  - Advisory panel member
  - Homelessness

- Roger Weissberg (Illinois)
  - Scientific advisor & consultant, State of Illinois
  - K-12 Social Emotional Learning Standards

- Leonard Jason (national)
  - Model program
  - Youth tobacco access
Intermediaries

• Clinton Anderson (states; national)
  – APA, Public Interest Directorate
  – Gay rights court rulings (amicus briefs)

• Judith Meyers (Connecticut)
  – Director Children’s Fund (foundation)
  – Children’s mental health system reform

• Brian Smedley (national)
  – Study director, National Academy of Sciences
  – Racial health disparities (Affordable Care Act)
Policy Insiders

• Charles Barone (national)
  – House Subcomittee staffer (Rep. George Miller)
  – No Child Left Behind legislation

• Keith Humphreys (national)
  – Senior advisor, White House drug policy office
  – Substance use policy (Affordable Care Act)

• Debra Starnes (Atlanta)
  – City council member
  – Major homelessness initiative
II. Policy-relevant research

“What do you see as the characteristics of effective and useful policy relevant research?” (Question 11)
Characteristics of Policy-Relevant Research (selected)

• Policy-driven question

• Applicability
  – Population
  – Feasibility (implementation; cost)

• Timing (policy stream)

• Quality

• Exemplar (campaigns)
  – McArthur Foundation Research Networks
Policy Research: Types

- Highlight magnitude of a social problem
  - Epidemiology; Social indicators; Population studies; Need assessments

- Change view of a problem, population
  - Alternative view of causes; Alternative view of people

- Generate new policy approach
  - Creative, practical ideas; Pilot program; Integrative

- Evaluation studies
  - Outcome evaluation; Cost-benefit analysis; Research syntheses

- Implementation Studies
  - Program-level; Policy-level
An awful lot of effort by psychologists is wasted because they simply are not on mark in terms of what policy questions are relevant to begin with...[because] they are not effectively linked to policy makers from the outset...They may accidently or otherwise produce some results that are useful [but] they don't have the connections to get those findings...to the right people. “ [Intermediary]
Creative Methodological Solutions

“...methodological skills, both qualitative and quantitative. Doing some of the stuff really requires somewhat creative methodological solutions” (Researcher)
III. Policy Influence Skills and Tools

• Most important policy-influence skills?

• Most important policy-influence tools?
Policy Influence Skills

**Relationship Building**
- Trust/Credibility; Bidirectional; Time; Face-to-face; Networking

**Communication**
- Oral; Written; Translational; Policy story (framing)

**Research**
- Quality; Synthesis; Cost-benefit; Critique

**Strategic Analysis**
- Policy analysis; Strategy development

**Other**
- Coalition-building; Negotiation; Management; Perseverance
Policy Influence Tools

Meetings w policymakers/staff
• One-on-one; Hearings; Briefings; Conferences; Family impact seminars

Consultative relationships
• Advisory board/commission; Expert consultant; Advisor

Amicus briefs; Court testimony
• Written; Oral; Management; Lawyers

Advocacy Initiatives
• Organizing; Coalition-building; Media

Other
• Synthesis reports; Game changers (findings; ideas); Media
## Policy Priorities:
Top Social Issues/Problems for SCRA Policy Focus

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Issue/Problem</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>Health care reform</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
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<td>Affordable housing</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Achievement gap</td>
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<td>Mental Health</td>
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<td>Impact of reduced services</td>
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<td>Economic Inequality</td>
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<td>Widening income gap</td>
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<td>Community Development</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>City development related to health</td>
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<td>Prevention/Promotion</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>Cost-solving mechanism</td>
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<td>Violence</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Youth violence reduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Dream Act</td>
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Questions/Comments