

### IN FOCUS

- F1 Promoting Marriage in Unmarried Parents Through Education and Job-Based Interventions: A Cautionary Tale
- F3 Overview and introduction
- F4 The Unintended Consequences of Child Welfare Policies for African American Families
- F6 Family First Prevention Services Act: Intended and Unintended Consequences
- F9 Overlooked: Minorities' Mental Health Gains from the ACA and the Consequences of Repeal
- F11 Reducing Unintended Consequences of Zero-Tolerance School Policies Through Family Life Education
- F14 Course Policies and Unintended Consequences: Issues of Indulgence, Barriers, and Family Science Principles
- F18 Sensitivity and Responsiveness and the Consequences in Policymaking: Editors' Reflections

Additional references for articles are available online.

Judith A. Myers-Walls, Ph.D., CFLE  
Family Focus Editor  
reporteditor@ncfr.org

Issue Advisor:  
Karen Bogenschneider, Ph.D.

In the next issue  
of Family Focus:  
Families Living Outside  
Society's Systems

## Promoting Marriage in Unmarried Parents Through Education and Job-Based Interventions: A Cautionary Tale

*Hannah C. Williamson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, University of Texas at Austin, hwilliamson@utexas.edu*

### In Brief

- **An intervention meant to encourage unmarried fathers to marry by improving economic capacity had the opposite and unintended consequence.**
- **Unmarried couples with children need interventions that reduce stress rather than add demands.**
- **Interventions provided to individuals will affect the entire family system.**

The percentage of children born to unmarried parents has increased sharply over the past half century, from 5% of births in 1960 to 40% of births today (Child Trends Databank, 2018). In recognition of the poor cognitive, emotional, social, and economic outcomes experienced by children born to unmarried parents, as compared to those born to married parents (Amato, 2005; Brown, 2010), promoting and supporting marriage has become a central focus of federal funding and policy efforts. From 2006-2011 Congress appropriated \$100 million per year toward activities that promoted and supported healthy marriages among low-income populations (Hawkins, 2010). The federal appropriation was renewed in 2012 at the rate of \$75 million per year, and funding for what is now called the Healthy Marriage & Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) initiative continues to this day (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). This article

summarizes some past and ongoing marriage promotion efforts conducted under HMRF (see Heath, 2012, for a full history of HMRF) and discusses research that found unintended consequences of intervening with at-risk families.



**Hannah C. Williamson**

The primary approach HMRF has taken toward marriage promotion is the provision of relationship education (RE) to teach skills such as conflict resolution and social support that will improve relationship functioning and promote stability. A significant early project under HMRF was the Building Strong Families (BSF) study, conducted from 2002 to 2013, which targeted unmarried new parents (Dion, Avellar, & Clary, 2010). BSF enrolled 5,102 unmarried couples with young babies, half of whom were randomized to RE and half to a control condition. Unfortunately, the evaluation of BSF found that the intervention had no effect on their likelihood of staying together or getting married (Wood, Moore, Clarkwest, & Killewald, 2014). A similar randomized controlled trial focused on low-income married couples also found that RE had no effect on their likelihood of staying together (Lundquist et al., 2014).

These results are, unfortunately, not surprising. Although unmarried parents do report that a strong relationship is a prerequisite to marriage, they identify financial instability as the biggest obstacle to marriage (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005). Thus, stabilizing vulnerable families by targeting their economic prospects seems to be a more promising approach to intervention with this population.

Faced with the failure of RE alone to promote marriage among unmarried parents, HMRF has moved to incorporate economic interventions into its programs. The current round of studies sponsored by HMRF focuses on addressing couples' economic needs by embedding job and career advancement services into healthy marriage programs. One of these studies, Parents and Children Together (PACT), recently reported results from two sites that offered a combination of RE and economic-focused interventions to low-income couples (Moore, Avellar, Patnaik, Covington, & Wu, 2018). At a 1-year follow-up, the programs had no effect on likelihood of marriage for unmarried couples and no effect on income for men and women. Thus, the combination of RE and economic-focused interventions seems to be no more effective than RE alone, although the researchers have not yet released any analyses that attempt to isolate the effects of the economic-focused intervention.

However, a recent study addressed this question using data from the earlier BSF program (Williamson, Karney, & Bradbury, 2017). Some couples who participated in BSF received economic interventions focused on increasing educational attainment (e.g., getting a GED, taking ESL classes) or finding a job (e.g., job training, job-search assistance) in addition to RE. This study assessed the effect of these economic interventions above and beyond any effects of RE. Results showed that men and women's participation in a job-based intervention, and women's participation in an education-based intervention had no effect on marriage rates. However, men's participation in an education-based intervention reduced couples' likelihood of entering marriage over the following three years; 10% of these men went on to marry the child's mother, as compared to 17% of comparable men not participating in these programs. Mediation analyses indicated that this effect emerges

because participation in the education-based intervention interfered with fathers' ability to provide financial resources to their child and to see their child on a daily basis.

The lack of positive effects, and in some cases harmful effects, of economic-focused interventions for unmarried parents do not suggest that it is misguided to try to improve these families' financial situations. What it does suggest is that the way economic interventions are being implemented is ineffective at best and harmful at worst. Several studies have found that economic interventions increase marriage rates of low-income individuals (e.g., Schneider, 2015 for a review). However, those interventions were delivered to single individuals, not to new parents. It makes sense that single individuals who are able to finish their education and get a stable job are much better candidates for marriage down the road. However, trying to encourage a specific couple to marry, rather than increasing the future marriageability of an individual to any partner, is a different enterprise. As family practitioners, we know that intervening with one individual in a family will change the dynamics of the entire family system. It seems that asking fathers to take time and money away from their child while participating in job training or GED classes might tip the balance of an already precarious family system too far.

### Implications for Family Practitioners

How could interventions be better designed to improve economic outcomes without adding to the stress of the family? First, interventions could improve financial stability directly by offering direct cash transfers, rather than attempting to increase family income indirectly by engaging individuals in job training and education. Although critics of this approach say that it is a short-term solution, evidence from cash transfers conducted outside the United States has indicated that families often invest in things like equipment needed to start a business, turning a short-term cash infusion into a long-term financial strategy (Haushofer & Shapiro, 2016). Even if this sort of long-term investment did not come from a short-term cash infusion, arguably, a short-term solution may be what unmarried new parents need. The transition to parenthood is a time of high stress for everyone (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman,

2009), and it is possible that job training or education may be more effective if delivered when the child is older, and cash transfers offered early in the child's life could help stabilize the family without making demands on the parents' time during the most difficult early year(s). Another strategy would be to offer cash transfers while a parent is engaged in an economic intervention to help mitigate some of the negative effects of spending time in school or job training instead of working. This approach is in line with the welfare reform proposal developed by David Ellwood (1988), which called for, among other things, providing assistance for a few years while recipients pursued education and training, and then requiring work later after training was complete. Ellwood's proposal formed the basis of President Clinton's 1993 welfare reform bill. Unfortunately, it was stripped of many of its important facets, including providing support for families while they undergo education and training (Edin & Shaefer, 2016).

For family practitioners working with these couples, it is likely important for them to help partners talk openly about the sacrifices they will have to make. Time and money are two of the most important resources parents have to invest in their children (Thomson & McLanahan, 2012), so it is important to help couples understand that they temporarily have less family time and finances that are even tighter while one partner is involved in an economic intervention. Additionally, unmarried mothers evaluate fathers' financial support when making decisions about whether the father can spend time with the child and how viable their relationship is in the long-term (Garasky, Stewart, Gundersen, & Lohman, 2010). Thus, practitioners should also ensure that both partners agree that the potential long-term benefits in increased income are worth the short-term sacrifice in decreased ability to support the child. If both partners see themselves as working toward shared goals for their family, rather than one partner doing something to better only him- or herself, this may decrease the likelihood of these types of interventions being detrimental to the couple and family relationships.

Overall, improving economic outcomes should be a promising approach to stabilizing unmarried parents' relationships,

but much more research is needed to determine an effective way to deliver this sort of intervention. Future efforts must design interventions with the entire family in mind rather than taking approaches that have worked with single individuals and attempting to apply them to new parents. \*

### Selected References

Gibson-Davis, C. M., Edin, K., & McLanahan, S. (2005). High hopes but even higher expectations: The retreat from marriage among low-income couples. *Journal*

*of Marriage and Family*, 67, 1301–1312. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00218.x

Heath, M. (2012). *One marriage under God: The campaign to promote marriage in America*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Moore, Q., Avellar, S., Patnaik, A., Covington, R., & Wu, W. (2018). *Parents and Children Together: Effects of two healthy marriage programs for low-income couples*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from

[www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/pact\\_hm\\_impacts\\_to\\_opre\\_b508.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/pact_hm_impacts_to_opre_b508.pdf)

Williamson, H. C., Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2017). Education and job-based interventions for unmarried couples living with low incomes: Benefit or burden? *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 85, 5–12. doi:10.1037/ccp0000156

Wood, R. G., Moore, Q., Clarkwest, A., Killewald, A. (2014). The long-term effects of Building Strong Families: A program for unmarried parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76, 446–463. doi:10.1111/jomf.12094

## Overview and Introduction

# Policies with Unintended Consequences

Judith A. Myers-Walls, Ph.D., CFLE Emeritus, Professor Emerita, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Purdue University, [reporteditor@ncfr.org](mailto:reporteditor@ncfr.org)

Family policy shapes the conditions in which families operate. It is meant to support them and society. Intentions are positive and often laudable, but the reality does not always live up to the intended goals, as demonstrated by the articles in this edition of *Family Focus*. To begin this edition, Hannah C. Williamson describes a marriage-promotion program that was based on research showing that stronger employment was associated with stronger marriages. Surprisingly, the intervention program, meant to encourage unmarried fathers to marry by enhancing their educational credentials, had the opposite effect.

Next, Ruby M. Gourdine and JaNeen Cross discuss the unintended consequences of child welfare policies for specific segments of the population. In theory, child welfare policies are well-intentioned, but they have been inequitably applied across racial and ethnic groups. Similar themes are addressed in the next article that examines the proposed changes of the 2018 Families First Prevention Services Act, one of the most dramatic reforms of child welfare in the last 20 years. In an analysis by Morgan E. Cooley and Brittany P. Mihalec-Adkins, the Family First Prevention Services Act's goals such as increasing evidence-based programs and decreasing congregate foster care are commendable theoretically, yet unexpected consequences seem likely to arise in implementation.

The next article by Natasha D. Williams and Elaine A. Anderson puts a slightly different twist on the question of unintended consequences by identifying some positive outcomes of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) for people of color and the LGBT community that were not necessarily foreseen or intended. The repercussions of a repeal of

the ACA could be negative for these two groups because the unintended positive impacts would be eliminated.

The next two articles then look at policies in educational settings. First, Katrina Akande, Eman Tadros, and Charlene Harris talk about zero-tolerance policies in public schools and their contributions to the “school-to-prison pipeline”. They outline the ways students being pushed out of the classroom are disproportionately associated with academic failure, school suspension, and expulsion, thus leading to involvement in the juvenile justice and prison systems. The final analysis addresses a topic that brings home the importance of policy and its unintended consequences to family professionals—teaching Family Science courses. Jacki Fitzpatrick proposes that classroom policies—or the lack thereof—may set the stage for later students’ work in the family field. Fitzpatrick raises the provocative question: If instructors teach that society should make adjustments when families face serious problems, should classroom policies do the same for students?

In the final contribution, the editors provide some reflections based on all the other articles and resources for analyzing policies for family impact.

My appreciation is extended to Karen Bogenschneider who served as issue adviser for this edition, helping to frame the call for papers and brainstorm topics, commenting on the overview and introduction, and contributing to the editors’ reflections. Our wish is that these articles help to remind all of us to be mindful regarding family policies and their consequences in whatever capacity we interact with them. \*



Judith A. Myers-Walls

# The Unintended Consequences of Child Welfare Policies for African American Families

Ruby M. Gourdine, D.S.W., LICSW, LCSW, Professor, [rgourdine@howard.edu](mailto:rgourdine@howard.edu); and JaNeen Cross, D.S.W., M.B.A., LICSW, LCSW-C, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Howard University

## In Brief

- **The child welfare system places disproportionate numbers of Black children in foster care.**
- **Although child welfare policies might be appropriate in theory, implicit bias, poverty, and inadequate training of workers lead to unintended consequences for Black families.**
- **Programs that focus on family needs and worker training could reduce unnecessary family separations.**

Historically, there was a sense that the needs of African American children were not being fully met by the child welfare system (Billingsley & Giovannoni, 1972). The goal of that system as stated on its official website is to “protect children’s safety, support families, and help prevent child maltreatment” (Children’s Bureau, n.d., para. 1). That responsibility includes, when deemed necessary, removing children from the care of any parents who are judged to be a danger to the children and placing those children in foster care. This is an admirable policy if evenly and appropriately implemented—but more recently there has been attention directed toward the disproportionate numbers of African American or Black (terms used interchangeably) children in the child welfare system. This means that the number of African Americans placed in foster care exceeds their representation in the general population. For example, African American children account for approximately 13.8% of the total population but nearly 22.4% of the population in the child welfare system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Additionally, they are placed in foster care more often and stay longer than other racial groups (Becker, Jordan, & Larson, 2007). This article presents evaluative findings of a study conducted

to determine racial equity in two states identified as having an overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system, suggesting that child welfare policy is having unintended consequences as it is implemented.

## Understanding Overrepresentation

Several studies have examined the phenomenon of overrepresentation of African American children in the child welfare system. Researchers and practitioners have indicated that overrepresentation occurs during critical decision-making points at the entry point to child welfare. Similarly, there is acknowledgment of a correlation between a worker’s understanding of the family and the discerning placement criteria that are used. For example, due to diverse cultural experiences workers may have different understanding of parenting styles. Therefore, implicit bias may be a factor as early as decisions being made at entry. Dettlaff et al. (2011) indicated in their research that possible racial bias should be examined when decisions are made to remove African American children from their homes. In society generally there is a belief that African Americans neglect or abuse their children more often than other races do. These beliefs about families, if held by workers, could be transferred to bias in foster-care placement.

The factors that contribute to negative views of African American families are associated with implicit bias and poverty. Data indicate that African American wealth is lower than that of other racial groups (Chibnall et al. 2003; Miller, Cahn, & Orellana, 2015; Wilson, 2009). Studies have found a correlation between poverty and child neglect. Most children who are removed from a home are removed for neglect rather than physical or sexual abuse (Ards, Myers, Malis, Sugrue, & Zhou, 2003; Dettlaff & Rycraft, 2008; Riveaux et al., 2008). *Neglect* is a broad term that is vulnerable to racial bias. A worker’s



Ruby M. Gourdine



JaNeen Cross

comprehensive understanding of race and poverty can help avoid that bias and can be important in addressing the unmet needs of African American families. Policies are needed to address poverty and offer assistance to families rather than uniformly applying placement policies that emphasize removing children and result in generational dissolution and fragmentation of families.

## Racial Equity Research

Wells, Merritt, and Briggs (2009) concluded that an indication of systemic maltreatment is populations being demographically similar but treated differently because of race. It is evident that the child welfare system is guilty of this, as demonstrated by disproportionality regarding African American children.

Chibnall et al. (2003) conducted a multistate study to determine the causes of children of color’s disproportionate representation in the child welfare system. They found six areas that contributed to overrepresentation, as described by administrators and frontline workers:

1. Poverty as the reason children came to the attention of the child welfare system
2. There is a link between communities and families characterized as disintegration and the discrimination they experience
3. Discrimination based on overreporting of neglect and abuse
4. Media portrayal of African Americans as overrepresented in the child welfare system

5. Internal factors such as worker bias and agency policies
6. Federal policies such as the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

MEPA was passed in 1994 to disrupt racial matching in adoption and to get children adopted sooner. The practice had an adverse impact on African Americans who felt that their children would be culturally disadvantaged. ASFA was passed in 1997 to ensure that children would move quickly through the child welfare system. However, the time that families had to rehabilitate themselves was too short to achieve the goals set by the system.

A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2007), known as the Rangel Report, gathered data from 47 states and the District of Columbia and found that poverty was a reason for overrepresentation of African American children in the system as well difficulty in finding them permanent homes. The study also indicated that racial biases, cultural misunderstandings between child welfare workers and families, distrust, challenges, and barriers to accessing support services contributed to the problem. An interesting finding was that, although the goal of federal policies was to protect families, the overrepresentation of African American families had the unintended consequence of hurting families—they emphasized removal instead of services in the home to prevent placement.

### Racial Equity Strategy Standards Integration Project Evaluation

Gourdine, Smith, and Waites (2015) conducted a qualitative study to evaluate measures of two agencies with an overrepresentation of African Americans in their child welfare system and that were scheduled for reaccreditation. This project was a collaboration with the Black Administrators in Child Welfare, the Council on Accreditation, and Howard University School of Social Work to provide agencies with information on the best practices for serving children of color and to seek an evaluation of the implementation of these practices. The evaluation process included (a) visiting the identified agencies; (b) providing an overview of the project; and (c) conducting follow-up visits to

review records, procedures, focus groups, and interviews with key persons such as directors, managers, and information management personnel.

Upon the completion of this process, the project director issued final reports to the top-level managers of each agency that included recommendations that could enhance their progress in implementing the Racial Equity Standards Areas (RESA). These reports were issued to the agencies and evaluation team.

### Implications of Findings

During project implementation, the project director made some assumptions about policies and procedures but found that by and large in most cases the agencies were following their procedures and policies. What she did find was that despite previous claims of treating everyone the same, the data indicated otherwise. She stated:

What I found halfway through was that no one was doing anything in terms of having data stats on individual sessions that were focused on children and families of color, and they all said they were not. While the sites felt that they “treat everybody equally,” the data showed some service disparities. (Interview Transcript No. 2, March 14, 2014, lines 252–263).

Additionally, the director reported the following:

They said that they were not collecting complete data on children of color. They could give you numbers of children of color in care but they weren’t looking at it in the sense of comparing types of treatment services that were being provided to children of color (Interview Transcript No. 2, March 23, 2014, lines 131-142).

The data clearly showed circumstances in which workers were resistant or reluctant to address family needs. There were instances when policies and practices had unintended consequences.

Those reports were helpful as the director used the Black Administrators in Child Welfare’s (n.d.) RESA to evaluate the programs in terms of racial equity. She was able to recommend procedures to help create racial equity. More specifically, recommendations included using data that could indicate whether services were available to or benefited the children. An example was that the department had been contracting agencies to provide services that were not culturally appropriate to children, but there were no attempts to seek services that were a better fit for families.

In recent years, the Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare, an initiative of the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), sponsored webinars and workshops on effective use of data to help alleviate the overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare and improve services (CSSP, 2019). Such programs would be an important step toward eliminating the unintended consequences linked to overrepresentation of Black families in the child welfare system.

### Implications for Family Professionals

The overrepresentation of African American children in child welfare is a major problem in the United States. Agencies, using data analytics, could better evaluate programs and services to ensure that children and families receive appropriate services for their specific needs and avoid unnecessary family

*Welfare Policies continued on page F6*



# Family First Prevention Services Act: Intended and Unintended Consequences

Morgan E. Cooley, Ph.D., LCSW, Assistant Professor, College of Social Work, Florida Atlantic University, [cooleym@fau.edu](mailto:cooleym@fau.edu); and Brittany P. Mihalec-Adkins, M.S.Ed., graduate student, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Purdue University

## In Brief

- **The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) is the most drastic child welfare reform in 20 years.**
- **Intended consequences include changing funding structures and service provision, enhanced service provision and data collection, and higher standards of care for youth.**
- **Unintended consequences of FFPSA could benefit or harm stakeholders.**

## Introduction and Intended Consequences of the Family First Prevention Services Act

More than 700,000 children and families became involved with the U.S. child welfare system in 2014 as a result of substantiated reports of abuse or neglect, with 260,000

children being placed into out-of-home foster care placements (Children's Bureau, 2017). The recently passed Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), signed into law on February 9, 2018, intends to address several issues related to the many and complex needs of youth and families involved with the child welfare system, as well as issues faced by the service delivery system as a whole. States can opt to begin FFPSA implementation as early as October 1, 2019, with the option to defer implementation for up to 2 years (i.e., October 2020 or 2021). The overarching purpose of FFPSA is

to amend parts B and E of title IV of the Social Security Act to invest in funding prevention and family services to help keep children safe and supported at home, to ensure that children in foster



Morgan E. Cooley



Brittany P. Mihalec-Adkins

care are placed in the least restrictive, most family-like, and appropriate settings, and for other purposes.

There are many intended consequences of this legislation that will directly and indirectly influence children and families, service providers and family professionals, as well as

## Welfare Policies continued from page F5

separations. Furthermore, agency workers who exhibit cultural understanding of clientele are better prepared to serve those who are different races and cultures.

Any family professionals, whether they work directly with child welfare, should be aware of these concerns and can support families affected by the resulting challenges. Having a strong background in both family development and cultural context could put family professionals in a strong position to support training of child welfare workers and administrators. Family professionals could also help families who are dealing with the system to understand the process and learn their rights. Family professionals can also advocate for policies that focus on improving family economic well-being, parenting skills,

and communication abilities in order to reduce the need for child welfare services. ✱

## Selected References

- Chibnall, S., Dutch, N. M., Jones-Harden, B., Brown, A. W., Gourdine, R. M., Smith, J., & Snyder, S. (2003). *Children of color in the child welfare system: Perspectives from the child welfare community*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families and the Children's Bureau. Retrieved from [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/otherpubs/children](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/otherpubs/children)
- Children's Bureau. (n.d.). *Responding to child abuse: Child welfare gateway*. Retrieved from [www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/](http://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/)
- Dettlaff, A. J., Rivaux, S. L., Baumann, D. J., Fluke, J. D., Rycraft, J. R., & James, J. (2011).

Disentangling substantiation: The influence of race, income, and risk on substantiation decisions in child welfare. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 1630–1637. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.04.005

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2007). *African American children in foster care: Additional HHS assistance needed to help states reduce the proportion in care* (GAO-07-816). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www.gao.gov/new.items/d07816.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07816.pdf)

Wells, S. J., Merritt, L. M., & Briggs, H. B. (2009). Bias, racism, and evidenced-based practice: The case for more focused development of the child welfare evidence base. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 1160–1171. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.09.002

state-level child welfare administrators and policymakers (National Conference on State Legislatures, 2018). The following section broadly summarizes the major components and intended consequences of each part of the FFPSA; however, it is important to note that this brief article cannot adequately address all aspects of this legislation.

First (and perhaps foremost), the policy intends to reduce the number of children entering out-of-home placement by granting states earlier access to federal match dollars that are currently only allocated to foster care and adoption services. This will allow states to use funding to provide preventative or “early intervention” services (e.g., in-home parenting, mental health and/or substance-abuse counseling), thus reducing the trauma of removal and out-of-home placement when possible. These federal funds can also be used to support parents in residential treatment facilities that serve families (i.e., allowing parents and children to remain together during parental substance misuse treatment), as well as for kinship-care placements, or foster youth who are pregnant or parenting. Further, for the first time in U.S. child welfare history, programs and interventions must meet a standard of empirical evidence put forth by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in order to be eligible to receive this funding, ensuring that programs delivered to children and families are supported by science.

Second, FFPSA will authorize funding for the following family preservation-oriented components: (a) allow states to offer post-reunification services to children and families over a longer period of time; (b) require states to improve electronic systems for interstate placement of youth in kinship or non-kinship foster homes when an in-state caregiver is not available or suitable; and (c) reauthorize grant funding for children and families affected by substance abuse.

Third, states will be required both to comply with government standards for the licensing of kinship foster homes in order to enhance the safety of youth placed with relatives and to develop a statewide plan for addressing and reducing fatalities in foster care.

Fourth, the policy intends to reduce the use of congregate care and non-treatment-oriented group-home care for youth in out-of-home placements, to ensure the most family-oriented settings possible. The FFPSA will also require residential treatment programs to enhance assessment and documentation procedures for youth placed in group-oriented settings and will require background checks for all staff working in child care and treatment facilities.

Fifth, competitive funding will be made available to enhance efforts to recruit and retain foster parents. In addition, the policy reauthorizes multiple child and family service programs (e.g., Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services program, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Court Improvement Program, John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program). The FFPSA also increases the age of eligibility for youth who have aged out of foster care, allowing youth a longer window to obtain services and/or educational vouchers under the John H. Chafee foster care independence programs.

Sixth, the policy will reauthorize the adoption incentive program.

Seventh, technical corrections were made to Title IV-B related to various program elements of providing and administering child welfare services.

Eighth, the adoption assistance phase-in will be delayed while the U.S. Government Accountability Office examines issues related to state compliance.

### **Unintended Consequences and Implications for Policy and Practice**

Considering the nature of the many specific components of FFPSA, the policy has several potential unintended consequences. The unintended consequences and implications discussed here are grouped using an ecological theory lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which has proven useful when applied to multiple aspects of the child welfare system (Algood, Hong, Gourdine, & Williams-Butler, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hong, Algood, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Richardson, Grogan, Richardson, & Small, 2018) and to organizational structures of service delivery systems (Johnson, 2008; Yoo, 2008).

### ***Exosystem and Macrosystem Considerations***

Per Bronfenbrenner’s classification of environmental influences with varying proximity to individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994), exosystem and macrosystem considerations include federal and state governments, child welfare service systems, administration of services and professionals, and researchers and academic institutions (Langer & Leitz, 2014). Perhaps the most obvious unintended consequence that could result in this area is the impending expectation of state governments and child welfare administrators to incorporate these rather drastic changes into service provisions and state budgets (Children’s Home Society of America, 2018; FFPSA, 2018). For example, to be eligible for federal reimbursement, states must use programs with a demonstrated evidence base, as defined by guidelines such as those established by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (2019). Only programs and services rated as being “well-supported,” “supported,” or “promising” will be considered eligible for federal dollars under FFPSA (2018). While many scholars and practitioners support the move toward empirically sound practice (Wharton & Bolland, 2012), there are currently large gaps in the evidence that will greatly limit states’ options for service delivery funded under FFPSA. Most programs currently in operation do not meet these standards, and there are areas with few-to-no ratable programs (e.g., anger management, services for child or adolescent victims of commercial sexual exploitation, parent–child visitation programs; Rolls-Reutz, 2018). Complying with FFPSA will likely require rapid training of child welfare personnel in approved programming, as well as high levels of coordination to enhance services administration. State governments and child welfare administrators will potentially need to consider how to recruit and train service providers to meet the particular needs of child welfare-involved families (Thompson & Colvin, 2017). It may also be important to note that keeping youth out of foster care is important; however, child welfare administrators need to ensure that appropriate monitoring and supports are

in place if parents are unable to maintain children in the home.

The requirement to enhance programming to include empirically supported programs likely also has implications for collaboration and coordination between researchers and both levels of government (state and federal), as multiple questions will need to be addressed with regard to processes for administering or updating both service provision and the DHHS guidelines for empirically-supported programs. Despite the available 2-year FFPSA deferral period, how will states be affected if multiple programs currently being offered become ineligible for funding under FFPSA requirements? How can researchers and states test new, innovative programs or services (or establish evidence bases for extant programs) when federal reimbursement depends on using programs established by the DHHS registry? How will university–state partnerships be affected if the federal government implements strict guidelines on evidence-based programming (e.g., will states hesitate to assist with testing new services if doing so requires intensive administrative changes)? How often will the DHHS registry be updated to account for new programs and services?

### **Mesosystem and Microsystem Considerations**

Mesosystem and microsystem considerations include congregate-care homes, child welfare and family service professionals, children, and biological and foster families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The new FFPSA (2018) provisions will have substantial impacts on congregate-care settings—namely, drastic reductions in available funding to keep them operable, and tighter guidelines requiring centers to be treatment-oriented. Although this will likely produce benefits to children in the long run, many congregate-care settings will need to seamlessly implement changes that immediately affect direct services to youth, the functioning of employees and service providers, and the administration of multiple aspects of foster care programming

(FFPSA, 2018; Hughes, 2016). For youth, reduced congregate-care placements may result in poorer chances of sibling groups being placed together, as traditional family foster homes are often unable to take multiple children at once (Child Welfare Monitor, 2018). It is also uncertain whether structural changes, such as the hiring or firing of employees, will need to take place to address new requirements of congregate-care facilities. Another unintended consequence may be that foster families are asked to take youth with higher psychological or behavioral needs (i.e., youth traditionally placed in congregate-care facilities), as FFPSA may pressure child welfare administrators to place children in more family-like placements; however, youth with behavioral or psychological needs often suffer more placement instability in family-like placements (Oosterman, Schuengel, Slot, Bullens, & Doreleijers, 2007). Conversely, administrators may have to rely on more restrictive placements (e.g., residential or juvenile justice settings) if a young person was previously disrupted from a foster family home and community services are no longer available or suitable. It also seems reasonable to expect, soon after FFPSA implementation, a shortage of appropriate family foster homes to house youth previously placed in congregate care. There are currently more than 50,000 youth in residential or institutional placements (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2018), and reducing that number will require mass recruitment of foster parents who are willing and trained to take youth with special needs (e.g., foster parents who are willing to take sibling placements or youth with social, emotional, or behavioral needs).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Although the complete list of FFPSA consequences cannot be known until after states begin implementation over the next two years, the potential implications discussed here offer important considerations. If some of these issues can be addressed prior to implementation, the policy may prove particularly beneficial for children and families. In the meantime, practitioners can connect with universities

and researchers to develop partnerships for establishing an evidence base for clinical services offered to child welfare involved families, improve retention and training efforts for frontline stakeholders (i.e., foster parents, caseworkers, and service providers), as well as to investigate effective strategies for addressing the various concerns or needs raised within this brief. Practitioners might also collaborate with other agencies to share practical resources and strategies for how they are preparing for FFPSA implementation. Finally, practitioners can reach out to policymakers regarding their needs, questions, and concerns related to the FFPSA, before and during implementation. ✱

### **Selected References**

- Children's Home Society of America. (2018). *CHSA submits comments about FFPSA implementation*. Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved from [www.chsamerica.org/news/2018/7/21/chsa-submits-comments-about-ffpsa-implementation](http://www.chsamerica.org/news/2018/7/21/chsa-submits-comments-about-ffpsa-implementation)
- Child Welfare Monitor. (2018, October). *Sibling separation. An unintended consequence of the Family First Act?* Retrieved from <https://childwelfaremonitor.org/2018/10/09/sibling-separation-an-unintended-consequence-of-the-family-first-act/>
- Family First Prevention Services Act of 2017, 253 U.S.C. §§1-602.
- Hughes, S. (2016, June 22). The Family First Prevention Services Act: A mixed bag of reform. *Chronicle of Social Change*. Retrieved from <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/analysis/family-first-prevention-services-act-mixed-bag-reform>
- National Conference on State Legislatures. (2018). *Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/family-first-prevention-services-act-ffpsa.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/family-first-prevention-services-act-ffpsa.aspx)



# Overlooked: Minorities' Mental Health Gains From the ACA and the Consequences of Repeal

Natasha D. Williams, M.S., LMFT, graduate student, will22@terpmail.umd.edu; and Elaine A. Anderson, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Family Science, University of Maryland

## In Brief

- **Four major provisions in the Affordable Care Act (ACA)—dependent coverage, preexisting conditions, essential health benefits, and Medicaid expansion—have a significant impact on mental health access.**
- **People of color and LGBT individuals have unintentionally benefited from these provisions.**
- **Repeal of ACA would disproportionately affect these groups.**

For a couple of election cycles now, both major political parties have had their eyes on the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)—the most important piece of health care legislation since the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Millions of people gained health insurance coverage, but rates of coverage gains have not been uniform across demographic groups. From 2013 (when the major coverage provisions took effect) to 2016, coverage gains were largest for Hispanic people, with Black, Asian, and LGB\* individuals also seeing

significant increases in coverage (Artiga, Foutz, & Damico, 2018; Dawson, Kates, & Damico, 2018; \*LGBT is used throughout the document unless the reported research included only the LGB population).

While many rightfully highlight the gains in insurance coverage under the ACA, the implications of that coverage for mental health access also deserve note. Thomas, Shartzter, Kurth, and Hall (2018) estimated that the uninsured rate for people with mental health conditions fell from 13% in 2013 to 5% in 2016. The same study also noted the reduced impact of cost as a barrier after the ACA's passage. A handful of ACA provisions work in concert to achieve these gains in mental health coverage.

In the sections that follow, we explore the positive affects of each provision on access to mental health services and the results for people of color and LGBT people. In doing so, we hope to illustrate unintended repercussions of an ACA repeal and build an argument for the importance of their protection. Additionally, we briefly outline proposed ACA replacement legislation and the implications for the issue of mental



Natasha D. Williams Elaine A. Anderson

health for our populations of interest.

## Dependent Coverage Up to Age 26

A major change ushered in by the ACA, and perhaps the best known, was the allowance for dependents to remain on their parents' private health insurance plans until the age of 26. The intention was to extend coverage to a segment of the population who, while generally healthy, had relatively high rates of being uninsured compared to other age cohorts. While coverage gains certainly deserve recognition, an unintended benefit of this provision was this population's increased access to mental health and substance-abuse services. This benefit is key, given that about half of all people with a mental illness, including major depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse, will have experienced such illnesses by age 14 and three-fourths by age 25 (Beronio, Glied, & Frank, 2014).

In addition, young people are taking advantage of their coverage. Data from the 2008–2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) demonstrated that expanded coverage was associated with increases in monthly outpatient treatment, decreased unmet mental health needs due to cost for those with moderate to serious mental illness, and improved self-reported health among young adults with mental illness (Kozloff & Sommers, 2017). Additionally, there is evidence that this ACA



provision significantly reduced the out-of-pocket burden for young adults with a mental health or substance-use disorder, a reduction that was most prominent among young people of color (Ali, Chen, Mutter, Novak, & Mortensen, 2016).

The GOP American Health Care Act of 2017, as passed in the House, did not make any changes to this provision, and it would likely be politically unpopular for the GOP to do so. It is one of the ACA provisions that enjoys strong bipartisan support across the country (Kirzinger, Sugarman, & Brodie, 2016).

### Preexisting Conditions

Historically, mental health and substance-use disorders have been treated as preexisting conditions, and thus subject to barriers like denials of coverage or higher premiums (Beronio et al., 2014). Even if insurers persist in categorizing mental health and substance-use disorders as preexisting conditions, under the ACA they are no longer allowed to deny coverage, charge more, limit benefits, or refuse to cover treatment. This protection has particular relevance to the LGBT community and people of color. While it is unknown how many individuals had mental health diagnoses, 42 million people of color had a preexisting condition in 2014 (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2017). Additionally, preexisting conditions relevant to many in the LGBT community (e.g., HIV, mental illness, transgender medical history, gender dysphoria) must now be covered (Schlittler, Grey, & Popanz, 2017).

This is another ACA provision that is likely to remain intact. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents say it is “very important” to them that the ACA preexisting-condition protections remain law (Kirzinger, Wu, Muñana, & Brodie, 2018).

### Essential Health Benefits

In an attempt to move closer to a standardized national package of health insurance benefits, the ACA requires that most private insurance plans and Medicaid cover a set of 10 essential health benefits (EHBs). One of these EHBs involves mental health and substance-use disorder benefits,

including behavioral health treatment (Beronio, Po, Skopec, & Glied, 2013). Previous legislation sought to support coverage of mental health services, most notably the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) of 2008. Parity suggests that something is equal or equivalent. For example, if medical benefits are covered up to \$10,000 per lifetime, mental health services must be offered at least at the same level. Although the MHPAEA does not require coverage of mental health or substance-use disorder treatment, any plan that chooses to include these benefits must do so in a comparable manner to the medical and surgical benefits of the health plan. The EHB provision of the ACA gave the MHPAEA teeth: Because most insurance is now required to cover mental health, that coverage must also meet the requirements of parity.

American Health Care Act of 2017 would allow states to receive waivers from the ACA’s essential health benefits. It is not known how many states would attempt to eliminate mental health coverage, but insurance industry experts expect insurers to migrate back to the limited pre-ACA types of mental health coverage. Remember, MHPAEA requires parity only for those plans that offer mental health coverage. The fear is that insurers will simply eliminate coverage for mental health and substance use services altogether (Palanker, Volk, Lucia, & Thomas, 2018). Hence, populations with more limited financial means, including young people, and some persons of color and members of the LGBT community, who did not have access to this coverage prior to the passage of the ACA but were able to expand their usage of mental health and substance abuse services under the ACA, could be disproportionately negatively impacted.

### Medicaid Expansion

Arguably the most impactful provision of the ACA was the expansion of Medicaid to those up to 138% of the federal poverty line. After a Supreme Court decision, Medicaid expansion became a decision relegated to the individual states. Although the ACA’s crafters likely did not intend for Medicaid expansion to occur selectively at the state level, as of May 2018, 32 states and the District of Columbia had

adopted the expansion (the 2018 midterms saw four more states approve Medicaid expansion). In states without expanded Medicaid eligibility, more than 2 million poor adults fall into the coverage gap: Their household income is too high for Medicaid but not high enough to receive tax credits for Marketplace plans, which become available at 100% of the federal poverty line (Garfield, Damico, & Orgera, 2018).

Black people are more likely than White people to fall into this coverage gap, and the Asian and Hispanic population is less likely to be eligible because of high numbers of noncitizens among the population group (Artiga, Ubri, Foutz, & Damico, 2016). Additionally, Gonzales and Henning-Smith (2017) analyzed 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data and found that while 15.7% of LGB adults lack health insurance, the uninsured rate is lower among LGB adults in states with Medicaid expansion.

Repealing ACA or making changes to Medicaid expansion would widen coverage disparities. The American Health Care Act of 2017 essentially dissolves Medicaid expansion and slashes federal funding for Medicaid, leaving states to foot the bill or, more likely, cut costs by changing eligibility requirements, decreasing benefits, and reducing provider payment rates. Although this type of change would affect coverage and access to care across the board, the 15 million African Americans enrolled in Medicaid would be disproportionately harmed (Bailey, Damico, & Orgera, 2017). African Americans make up 13.3% of the U.S. population but 19% of Medicaid enrollees (Bailey, Broaddus, Gonzales, & Hayes, 2017).

In March 2017, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that it was willing to approve changes to Medicaid, including work requirements and drug testing. These barriers to Medicaid coverage would likely reduce enrollment numbers by either dropping people from coverage or deterring them from enrollment altogether (Bailey et al., 2017). Given that Medicaid expansion accounts for most of the coverage gains for people of color and LGBT individuals, as well as an increase in access

*continued on page F11*

# Reducing Unintended Consequences of Zero-Tolerance School Policies Through Family Life Education

Katrina Akande, Ph.D., Assistant Professor—Extension Specialist, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University, kakande@auburn.edu; Eman Tadros, M.S., IMFT, doctoral student, Department of Counselor Education & Supervision: Marriage and Family Counseling/Therapy, University of Akron; and Charlene Harris, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development, State University of New York at Oswego

## In Brief

- **Discipline based on zero-tolerance policies in U.S. schools disproportionately affects minority and special needs youth.**
- **Such policies are associated with students being pushed out of the classroom into suspension, juvenile justice, and criminal justice.**
- **The unintended outcomes of zero-tolerance policies could be redirected in many cases by focusing on the needs of students.**

Over the past two decades, school officials have implemented zero-tolerance policies in U.S. schools to address student discipline, resulting in an increase in suspensions and expulsions, which ultimately disproportionately affects minority youth (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014; U.S.

Department of Education, 2018). Despite the zero-tolerance approach to discipline in schools, student outcomes are heading in negative directions with unintended consequences, as students are being

pushed out of the classroom and into the juvenile courts. McGrew (2016) suggested that literature on the school-to-prison pipeline has shaped interests in the association of zero-tolerance policies, districts' use of school resource officers to manage discipline, school failure, and youth incarceration—but also cautions scholars about using the linear nature of pipeline thinking to assume that these policies caused all adverse student outcomes. The imagery of the school-to-



Katrina Akande



Eman Tadros



Charlene Harris

prison pipeline can narrowly focus our attention on the unintended consequences of zero-tolerance school policies, including expulsion disparities and school-related youth incarceration.

## Factors Influencing the School-to-Prison Pipeline

As McCarter (2017) noted, several factors influence students' trajectories from the educational system into the juvenile justice system. These may include expulsion, race/

*continued from page F10*

to mental health services, changes to limit Medicaid would have a drastic impact on these persons.

## Final Thoughts

Given the obvious positive impact that the ACA has had for the mental health access of people of color and LGBT individuals—whether the consequences were unintended—we suggest that the ACA must at the very least be protected, if not strengthened. Family Scientists, family therapists, advocates, and citizens must insist that elected officials protect the ACA,

as well as the specific provisions pertinent to these marginalized populations and mental health. ✨

## Selected References

- American Health Care Act of 2017, H.R. 1628, 115th Cong. (2017).
- Bailey, P., Broaddus, M., Gonzales, S., & Hayes, K. (2017). *African American uninsured rate dropped by more than a third under Affordable Care Act*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Retrieved from [www.cbpp.org/research/health/african-american-uninsured-rate-dropped-by-more-than-a-third-under-affordable-care](http://www.cbpp.org/research/health/african-american-uninsured-rate-dropped-by-more-than-a-third-under-affordable-care)

- Beronio, K., Glied, S., & Frank, R. (2014). How the Affordable Care Act and Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act greatly expand coverage of behavioral health care. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research, 41*(4), 410–428.
- Gonzales, G., & Henning-Smith, C. (2017). The Affordable Care Act and health insurance coverage for lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults: Analysis of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. *LGBT Health, 4*(1), 62–67.

ethnicity, sex, social economic status, disability and mental health, and school climate. Research indicates that school disciplinary actions such as suspension and arrest disproportionately affect minority youth, especially Black youth. According to the U.S. Department of Education's (2018) Office of Civil Rights, Black students represented 15% of the student population but accounted for 31% of students referred to law enforcement or arrested. Gregory et al. (2014) found that disparities in school suspension are also increasing. School suspensions are especially high for minority youth such as African Americans. Black males represent 8% of the student population but account for 25% of students who received an out-of-school suspension. In contrast, their White male peers represent 25% of the student population and account for 24% of students who received an out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Zero-tolerance policies may also have unintended consequences for children with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990, 2008) defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities for an individual such as tasks that are not limited to walking, speaking, learning, reading, concentrating, and thinking. Related to that definition, Emmons and Belangee (2018) emphasized that children who struggle with mental health issues are often viewed as having behavior problems or are unwilling to learn. The U.S. Department of Education (2018) reported that students with any disabilities represented 12% of the student population; they also accounted for 28% of those who are referred to law enforcement or arrested. Recent evidence suggests that youth who are diagnosed with special needs and are housed in juvenile facilities should receive individualized education support (Carter, 2018). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), public schools are required to create an Individualized Education Plan to ensure that students are successful in the K-12 system. However, many of these youth leave juvenile facilities with no transition plan to reenroll into school (Carter, 2018). As a result, many will reenter the

criminal justice system because of a lack of coordinated services between the juvenile and educational systems.

Zero-tolerance policies have increased the likelihood that minority students and those with disabilities are suspended, expelled, or arrested at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). School discipline is a central responsibility of individual schools and school districts. The commonly cited doctrine of *in loco parentis* grants schools the authority to discipline students when parents are not present (Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2009; Stuart, 2010). School officials need to choose how to employ their custodial power to manage students' disruptive behaviors. Professionals in many settings, including academics, counselors, social workers, attorneys, and court administrators, are examining how schools accomplish this task under zero-tolerance policies (Cavanagh, Vigil, & Garcia, 2014; Emmons & Belangee, 2018; McCarter, 2017; Noguera, 2003; Teske, 2011).

### The Importance of Meeting the Needs of Students

Zero-tolerance policies focus on managing problem behaviors in the classrooms rather than identifying students' needs (Noguera, 2003). Schools with high percentages of children from low-income families and ethnic minority communities may fail to respond to the needs of students because they are not equipped to handle family problems, mental health issues, adolescent behaviors, and other concerns that can intersect with school-based offenses (Teske, 2011). Several factors such as family expectations, relationships, and stress can influence a student's

educational outcome. Family dynamics are interwoven into students' personal and academic lives. In the Latino community, for example, some students may be expected to put family needs (e.g., caretaking of younger siblings; working to support family) over their academic needs such as completing afterschool assignments (Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016). Other ethnic-minority students from high-risk neighborhoods may also be at-risk for low school engagement or disruptive behaviors due to their parent's incarceration, substance abuse or other stressors.

It is imperative for educators to understand that students' problem behaviors may be rooted in adverse life experiences. Emmons and Belangee (2018) emphasized that the life experiences of teachers and school administrators can influence their perceptions of child behaviors and selection of disciplinary actions. School personnel who were not trained or did not have an opportunity to process their own cultural backgrounds and expectations may have preconceived ideas about student behaviors (Glock & Böhmer, 2018). This has implications for students who may exhibit problematic behaviors stemming from negative home or school experiences. Without proper training, teachers and administrators may misinterpret those behaviors and not recognize normal developmental behaviors or be prepared to make appropriate referrals to address mental health or other issues. Thus, students may be punished (e.g., suspended, expelled), rather than provided with simple interventions or assistance with developing effective coping and decision-making skills (Daily, Mann, Kristjansson, Smith, & Zullig, 2019).



Creating a positive school climate and improving approaches to school discipline are critical steps to supporting student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). School climate is the quality and character of school life, including interpersonal interactions and social relationships. It also implies a school environment that cultivates educators who work with students and families in a respectful and collaborative atmosphere (National School Climate Center, 2007). Another critical step is recruiting and training educators who believe that they can be advocates for students (Noguera, 2003).

### **A Call to Action: Implications for Family Professionals**

One method for reducing the unintended consequences of zero-tolerance policies is greater involvement of Family Scientists in public school systems at several levels. During the past 30 years, scholars have emphasized the need to strengthen school and family partnerships by preparing teachers to understand changing family structures and to sensitize them to diverse cultural settings that are embedded in the lives of their student's families (Broussard, 2000; Safran, 1974). School systems need an interdisciplinary approach to facilitate a culture of care (Cavanagh et al., 2014; Teske, 2011). Family scholars can provide a macro-level perspective to examine the intersection of family, school, and juvenile justice systems with cultural misunderstandings that can lead to intentional or unintentional biases. This is especially relevant for children who face academic challenges, come from homes with limited parental monitoring or ineffective discipline, or reside in communities with changing family demographics (Dryden-Peterson, 2018; Rodney & Mupier, 2004).

### **Integrating Family Life Education Courses Into Education Departments**

From an ecological perspective, teachers and administrators must understand that family life and the school environment are at times inseparable for many children. It is important for school personnel to take the time to get to know students, whether one who is written up or one who is sent to in-school suspension (ISS), in order to create a favorable school climate. Family professionals

can help with that process and build a more nuanced understanding, one that goes beyond zero tolerance. Children and their families often look to the school system for support with family-related issues (e.g., lack of food, child behaviors, family conflict). Although the fundamental goal of the school system is advancing public education, many districts must address the realities of families that experience adversities (National Education Association, 2018; Walter, 2018). Schools often play a vital role in the lives of students and their families.

The enhancement of school and family partnerships has been a fundamental concern of education reform organizations and scholars (Epstein et al., 2019). Teachers and administrators are often trained to be individual leaders of classrooms, schools, and districts and need support with collaborative efforts with families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; National Education Association, 2011). Family Life Education (FLE) courses can be included more often by degree granting postsecondary institutions and school systems in their efforts to prepare educators and administrators to work with families from a broad range of cultural and economic settings and to build stronger family-school relationships. The 10 FLE content areas can provide current and future educators and administrators with core Family Science knowledge (National Council on Family Relations, 2014). As family structures change in the United States and the world, school personnel have to understand family dynamics and family functioning, along with cultural norms that influence children. It is imperative that family professionals provide an interdisciplinary approach to support school systems with building vital family-school relationships. Family Scientists in higher education can start by meeting with academic units in education departments to discuss sharing their respective curriculum offerings.

Few states recognize Certified Family Life Education (CFLE) as a credential. We call on family professionals to advocate for that recognition of CFLE at the state level to ensure professional standards. The CFLE credential

should serve as a benchmark of competencies in FLE and should be recognized as a state credential in order to improve the lives of families and reduce the unintended consequences of zero-tolerance policies. It is essential that politicians are educated about the significance of FLE and how expertise in family research, practice, and education can strengthen family support within the education and juvenile justice systems. Schools must develop policies and practices that create a welcoming environment for all families, especially those who face barriers to academic success such as poverty, racism, and mental health. The aforementioned barriers make some families feel less able to help their children progress through educational systems (Fine, 1993; Knight, Roegman, & Edstrom, 2015). Integrating FLE into the academic curriculum and school initiatives can assist educators in developing positive family-school relationships as well as school climate and policies based on an understanding of families and children from all cultural settings. ✨

### **Selected References**

- Emmons, J. M., & Belangee, S. E. (2018). Understanding the discouraged child within the school system: An Adlerian view of the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of Individual Psychology* 74(1), 134–153.
- Glock, S., & Böhmer, I. (2018). Teachers' and preservice teachers' stereotypes, attitudes, and spontaneous judgement of male ethnic minority students. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 59, 244–255. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.09.001.
- McCarter, S. (2017). The school-to-prison pipeline: A primer for social workers. *Social Work*, 62(1), 53–61. doi:10.1093/sw/sww078
- Noguera, P. A. (2003). Schools, prisons, and social implications of punishment: Rethinking disciplinary practices. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(4), 341–350.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2018). *2015–2016 civil rights data collection: School climate and safety*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/school-climate-and-safety.pdf)

# Course Policies and Unintended Consequences: Issues of Indulgence, Barriers, and Family Science Principles

Jacki Fitzpatrick, Ph.D., CFLE, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development & Family Studies, Texas Tech University, Jacki.Fitzpatrick@ttu.edu

## In Brief

- Many instructors receive little training about course policies.
- Overly soft (indulgent) or hard (strict) policies can have unintended consequences.
- Strict policies can ignore sociological barriers frequently addressed in Family Science courses.
- Family Science teaching and ethical principles are relevant to course policies.

When instructors think about policy issues, their initial reaction might be to think of policy domains such as health care, justice, employment, and immigration, and they might feel that such vast policy issues are beyond their control. Even within an academic environment, instructors might not believe that they have upward influence on a university's educational policies. In this context, instructors might perceive themselves as having no role or involvement in policy issues. However, this would overlook course policies as a specific domain.

## Why Course Policies Matter

At first glance, course policies might appear to be a frivolous topic. However, they are worthy of consideration for several reasons. First, instructors can have a great degree of control over course policies. Second, the policies can express instructor values and attitudes. Transparency about such values should be consistent with teaching principles (Goen, 2015; Goldberg & Allen, 2018; Roy & Campbell, 2012). Third, students might extrapolate policy expectations across courses. If instructors use policies that are convenient for them (e.g., giving many A grades, not reporting cheating incidents), they should be mindful that students can

assume that other faculty will follow suit (Comer, 2016). Fourth, course structures and policies are considered a prelude to conditions in the post-college world (Anderson, Braun, & Walker, 2006; Koblinsky, Kuvalanka, & McClintock-Comeaux, 2006). To the extent that policies are part of preparation for future employment, faculty should consider the ways their choices enhance or undermine this preparation (Vatz, 2018). Several of these points illustrate the potential for unintended consequences of course policies.

## Lack of Instructor Preparation

Many instructors could reasonably claim that they received little or no mentorship on course policies. To the extent that graduate instructors and new faculty receive training, it is often focused on course content knowledge or communication skills (Buskist, 2013). Faculty might be given a list of general university policies to enforce, on topics such as civility and integrity, but this often leaves a broad range of policy issues at their discretion. Instructors might be expected to have course policies about topics such as attendance, compensatory or makeup assignments, extra credit, and grade-point distribution (e.g., 90–100 points = A). Yet there can be quite a diffusion of policy choices, including a choice to defy expectations.

This diffusion is evident in evaluative studies. For example, an analysis of 217 syllabi (Parkes, Fix, & Harris, 2003) revealed that 72% did not address compensatory (make-up) work at all, 12% did not allow such work, and 16% articulated acceptance conditions (e.g., emergency, prior arrangement with instructor). Similarly, 71% did not address late work, 8% noted that it was not an option, and 9% had acceptance conditions. The researchers speculated that instructors who lack clear course policies place themselves at risk for unbalanced treatment of students

(and subsequent grievance reports).

In the absence of guidance from other sources, faculty can rely on syllabi of prior instructors. However, this practice can be based on an assumption of high quality, depth of thought and relevance that may not be proven. One risk of the inherited-syllabus approach is that the documents “tend to be handed down from one generation to the next, rarely considered as part of the curriculum” (Eberly, Newton, & Wiggins, 2001, p. 56).

Given the lack of training and clarity, it is understandable that instructors are challenged to think about the policies they choose and implications of these choices. There is a dichotomy in instructor criticisms that they are either too indulgent and support or encourage students’ “snowflakery” or are too strict and ignore the legitimate barriers that students experience (Bonfiglio, 2017; Dykstra, Moen, & Davies, 2008). This essay briefly addresses some policy issues relevant to each criticism, as well as some possible unintended consequences.

## Indulgence

In recent years, there has been some description of undergraduates as immature, lazy and overly sensitive to unpleasant information (Medeiros, 2018; Reyna & Weiner, 2001). There is a legitimate discussion about trauma and academic trigger warnings (Leiter, 2016; Rosenberg, 2018), but the ‘unpleasant information’ also extends to issues such as grades that students do not wish to accept. When students are dissatisfied, they are prone to persistent



Jacki Fitzpatrick

and pervasive complaints. In public media, summative terms such as “snowflake” and “bubble-wrapped” have been used to describe such students (Bonfiglio, 2017, p. 29). Some discussion has focused on the extent to which instructors contribute (however unintentionally) to so-called snowflakery via indulgent policies.

Four domains of indulgence can be identified. The first refers to an overly high distribution of grades. At the outset of a course, faculty plan to give most or all students high grades. Some instructors have disclosed that they are motivated by a desire to avoid students’ negative comments or teaching evaluation scores (Glasser et al., 2005). However, this is not the only motivation. For example, Laderman (2018) argued that high grades reduce students’ focus on performance, which frees them to learn and engage more deeply with course content.

A second domain of indulgence includes student self-judgments. There can be some academic merits to having students engage in evaluation of their work, such as deepened insights. However, there are flaws to self-grading, such as students basing their proposed grade on time allocation rather than quality (Sinacore, Blaisure, Justin, Healy, & Brawer, 1999). Self-judgments are even more problematic when students are not required to justify their choices. For example, Watson (2017) listed a stress reduction policy on his syllabus. This policy allowed students [without explanation] to (a) receive a requested grade, (b) leave meetings about group assignments, and (c) stop working on group assignments. There were no negative course consequences for those actions.

The third indulgence domain is off-time activation. In this situation, instructors have course policies that they articulate from the outset of the course. However, faculty either choose to (a) ignore the policies for most of the semester and then enforce them during the last few weeks (Comer, 2016), or (b) enforce them early but reduce or cease enforcement at the end. The first approach demonstrates delayed activation, whereas the second approach demonstrates disrupted activation. It has been argued that

disrupted activation can be an appropriate response to extreme events, such as on-campus violence (Rosenberg, 2018). In the absence of such events, however, either approach creates undue confusion and inconsistency for students.

The fourth domain is hidden or withheld policies, or “secret sliders.” A study by Parkes et al. (2003) revealed that most syllabi did not list whether instructors had some rules or allowed rule exemptions to issues such as late work, compensatory work and attendance. However, an unknown number (due to secrecy among faculty, students and/or administrators) will either create new policies or give exemptions to existing policies upon request. Such exemptions often are exposed only as a result of investigations and/or external media reports (O’Brien, 2019; Pettit, 2018a). Some instructors explained that they view the requests as reflective of qualities rewarded in the workplace (Ganales, 2012; Hoisington, 2017) such as initiative and efficiency, which makes the indulgence consistent with career preparation. A study by Dykstra and colleagues (2008) found that, in comparison

to all other racial groups, White students were more likely to endorse instructors’ informational selectivity (e.g., giving job notifications to only a few students). A possible unintended consequence of this approach is that it can create a disadvantage for vulnerable populations. For example, research on first-generation students revealed a cultural disconnection in which some student populations were ignorant of unspoken academic options (Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins & Serrata, 2016). If the advantage is not extended to the entire class, then the imbalance can be available only to privileged students or even a solitary student.

### Barriers

The concern about indulgence is that instructors are too soft or flexible for students. In contrast, the concern about barriers is that other instructors can be too hard or strict. The debate often centers on whether strictness is reasonable or unreasonable in response to barriers. At their institutions, faculty might have the option of enacting their versions of zero-tolerance policies that would not allow any absences, late work or compensatory work.



In an analysis of sociology syllabi, Sulik and Keys (2014) reported that instructors' use of such policies emphasized the values of student accountability and responsibility as part of career preparation. The zero-tolerance approach can imply that there are no sociological conditions that apply to students, or that these influences are irrelevant to academic responsibility.

It can be argued that there is a discrepancy between the hard or strict approach and many aspects of Family Science course content. More specifically, Family Science courses often address the ways in which mitigating conditions such as work–family conflict, physical/mental illness, economic insecurity, child/elder care, prejudice, injustice/incarceration and transportation constraints have negative influences on families (Collins, Lee, & Wadsworth, 2017; Emory, 2018). The influences can be evident in daily routines as well as in overall quality of life. Thus, it is problematic to teach that society should make some adjustments in response to serious problems for families, but instructors should not do the same for students.

In reference to classrooms, these sociological conditions have been found to be relevant structural barriers for many students. For example, Broton and Goldrick-Rab's (2018) research revealed that approximately 50% of undergraduates were food insecure and 25% were housing insecure. In addition, Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) reported that first-generation students often had difficulty finding or maintaining reliable transportation to campus. Such barriers can interfere with students' ability to attend class and/or complete required tasks (Bonfiglio, 2017). In addition, students can be unduly disadvantaged if there are voluntary or mandatory course supplementals in which they cannot engage (e.g., if particular knowledge or extra credit is given to only those students who attend a night or weekend event).

In addition to broad structural barriers, there are barriers specific to the ecology of a university or college (Carlson, 2015;

Shang, Wenji, & Huang, 2007). For example, large campuses often have their own transportation system (e.g., buses, trams). Even though a university schedules classes to allow for travel time (10–15 minutes), this does not guarantee adequate access for everyone. Travel delays are problematic when instructors have tardiness policies such as locking the classroom door after 5 minutes, tying tardiness to point deductions, or considering a late student absent for the day.

Parallel to indulgence concerns, the negative outcomes of such course policies can be unintended consequences (McNee, 2013). Two common reasons for strict policies are inadequate student preparation and instructor ignorance. Some faculty have noted that they are aware of barriers, but simply expect students to work through them (McNee, 2013; Yakoboski, 2010). One rationale for using those policies is that students who go into service professions will often have to address client needs under very difficult conditions (Kelley, 2010). In contrast, there are academic professionals who noted that they were quite unaware of barriers. One tactic for increasing awareness and sensitivity is to have professionals (including instructors) directly experience relevant environments. For example, a university president recommended some policy changes after living in a dorm for 2 days (Pettit, 2018b).

### Implications for Family Professionals

In light of the unintended consequences from indulgent and overly strict course policies, several suggestions can be helpful. Instructors do not have to make a dichotomous choice between no rules or no exceptions to rules. There are many parameters that influence each individual's choices, such as university culture, course content and teaching style. For this reason, this essay concludes with some recommendations about policy development and implementation processes rather than policy content.

#### *Be Mindful*

Lang (2017) advised instructors to ask themselves what their course policies are and why they have those policies. There are

universities that distribute policy statements that they expect instructors to enforce. If instructors have questions about the ethical implications of such statements, then they should discuss the concerns with their supervisors or consult the resources of professional organizations (e.g., American Association of University Professors). If faculty write their own policies, but can't articulate why they use certain policies, then this is an indicator that they need be more thoughtful. In response, instructors should decide whether to keep or revise their policies.

#### *Be Clear*

If instructors lack or do not articulate their policies (Parkes et al., 2003), then they are responsible for the course consequences. Thus, faculty are advised to develop and communicate their course policies. This transparency is consistent with Family Science teaching principles. For example, some principles highlight that instructors should focus on issues that are relevant to students' course experiences (Fitzpatrick, 2012). In addition, instructors should be mindful that expansions and updates in Family Science curriculum require clear communication with students (Goen, 2015). Some colleagues have argued that Family Science instructors should share information about how their personal and/or professional experiences have influenced their pedagogical choices (Goldberg & Allen, 2018). This transparency is also recommended for active teaching techniques such as service-learning (Hamon & Way, 2001) or walking tours (Fitzpatrick, 2016) for Family Science students.

#### *Be Consistent*

If instructors choose their own policies, then they should make choices that they are willing to enforce (Comer, 2016). If they plan to allow some specific conditions (e.g., excused absences, late work submissions), then the conditions should apply equally to all students. The conditions should be conveyed to students in a transparent manner. If instructors don't provide notification in written form (such as the syllabus), then verbal announcements should be conducted on more than one occasion.



### Be (Realistically) Proactive

Instructors should learn about community and university resources to address barriers. They should convey information about resources to students (Supiano, 2018). This is consistent with humanistic values germane to Family Science. If faculty offer their personal assistance to students (Rosenberg, 2018), then they should be clear about the limits of this assistance. For example, Supiano (2018) reported that some instructors have syllabus statements which indicate that they will do whatever it takes to help students through their problems. These statements did not place any restrictions on the (a) nature of the problems or (b) degree of assistance. Such statements are fine if instructors are fully prepared to

make extraordinary efforts (adopt students' orphaned siblings, move students into their homes, pay attorney fees for students with legal issues). For example, some faculty have been living organ donors for their students (Taylor, 2015). Although an offer to do anything can be well-intentioned, a failure to fulfill this offer could be a devastating disappointment for students (and their families). In this context, honesty about the limits of instructor assistance is consistent with ethical recommendations (Hardy, 2002; Hogan & Kimmel, 1992; Kuther, 2003).

Following such guidelines should help to avoid unintended course consequences by building purposefully and carefully crafted policies consistent with the discipline of a Family Science. ✨

### Selected References

- Dykstra, D., Moen, D., & Davies, T. (2008). Student perceptions of appropriate classroom policies of college professors. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 5*, 13–21.
- Eberly, M., Newton, S., & Wiggins, R. (2001). The syllabus as a tool for student-centered learning. *Journal of General Education, 50*, 56–74.
- Parkes, J., Fix, T. & Harris, M. (2003). What syllabi communicate about assessment in college classrooms. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching, 13*, 61–83.
- Sulik, G., & Keys, J. (2014). "Many students really don't know how to behave": The syllabus as a tool for socialization. *Teaching Sociology, 42*, 151–160.

## NCFR Discussion Groups: An Online Gathering Place

NCFR's discussion groups are an online gathering place for NCFR members and CFLEs to join conversations with members of their section, focus group, CFLE community, and other member groups. Group members can ask questions, share resources, and more.

- **Use email OR log in online.** You can create discussion threads and reply to others from your email, and you can also log in to a web platform to see group activity and read and post from a web browser.
- **See the people you're talking to.** Each discussion group member is able to create a profile (including picture) that is connected to their posts. There's also a directory that shows who's in the group, and you can even send private messages to other individuals.
- **Browse and search past discussions and resources.** Log in on line, go to your

group, and search by keyword or browse through all past discussions in one place—no more going back through your entire email in box!

### How to Post

There are two ways you can participate in this and your other discussion groups:

1. **Log in at ncfrr.org.** Logging in to the web platform will show you all of the groups you are in; allow you to search the library of documents and resource that group members post; and, of course, create and respond to discussions in your groups. Your username is likely your preferred email address on file

with NCFR, and is the same username and password you use to log in at [my.ncfr.org](http://my.ncfr.org).

2. **Post directly from your email.** In this email and other discussion group emails, click "Post New Message" at the top of the email to create a new discussion. You'll also see links in the email that allow you to respond to existing discussion threads.

**Visit [groups.ncfr.org](http://groups.ncfr.org) to join the conversation.** ✨



# Sensitivity and Responsiveness and the Consequences in Policymaking: Editors' Reflections

Judith A. Myers-Walls, Ph.D., CFLE Emerita, Professor Emerita, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Purdue University, [jmyerswa@purdue.edu](mailto:jmyerswa@purdue.edu); and Karen Bogenschneider, Ph.D., Professor Emerita, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison

## In Brief

- **Identifying unintended consequences of policies is more than an academic exercise.**
- **There are patterns in the way that policies lead to unintended consequences.**
- **Careful attention to the possible causes of unintended consequences can help to build more sensitive, responsive, and effective family policies.**

Policy shapes the conditions in which families operate. Family policy aims to support the functions that families perform for the benefit of their members and the good of society. To build stronger parent-child attachment, parents strive to be sensitive to their children's needs and then respond to those needs. In a similar way, policymakers strive to be sensitive to the needs of their constituents, so that they can respond with policies that meet those needs. One of the first places that state legislators look for policy ideas is other states. National legislators may look at other countries. One of the questions they face is whether a policy that works in one state or country will work under diverse conditions with different constituents in another state or country. Moreover, if they tweak this policy for their constituents, will it still be as effective as they hope and for whom?

So, identifying unintended consequences is more than an academic exercise. Many policymakers are nagged by the prospect that the policies they sponsor or vote for will have uneven or unexpected consequences. Policymakers don't want to pass a bill and then have to repeal it or make a major overhaul because it is not sensitive or

responsive to their constituents' needs or is not as effective as they intended.

By looking at the articles in this collection we were able to identify some patterns in the situations associated with policies leading to unintended consequences. Those patterns fall into a few categories that include inadequate research and its application to the target population, inequitable or flawed program implementation, changing conditions, loss of focus on the needs of the target population, and inadequate policy preparation of family professionals.

### Inadequate or Unapplied Research Base

Unintended consequences can come from research that was not sufficiently detailed or not closely enough reviewed by those developing the policies. A related possibility is that researchers were not sensitive enough to discern whether the outcomes in the research reports were generally true across the population, but not true for specific subgroups within the population. One example of this issue was identified by Williamson related to marriage promotion programs. In spite of a careful attempt to use a strong research base, the marriage promotion interventions applying educational and economic interventions with new parents had opposite outcomes from what was expected and what had been found in other populations.

Part of the problem in these marriage-promotion programs was that the population in the program was not the same as the ones included in the research. At first, it seemed the same, but the timing and context were different. As Williamson emphasized, the interventions seem to work for single individuals, but not for new parents faced with the demands of caring for young children. What's more, trying to get a



Judith A. Myers-Walls



Karen Bogenschneider

particular individual to marry is different from trying to increase the future marriageability of an individual to any chosen partner. Important points like those need to be taken into account when applying research findings to programs. Policymakers need to look carefully at the details and context of the research used to inform any policies. It also can help to talk with people living in the situation, perhaps using qualitative research, to translate the findings into reality.

### Bias or Inequity of Policy Application

The concerns highlighted by Gourdine and Cross and by Akande, Tadros, and Harris both described situations in which policies may have been designed well on paper but were implemented imperfectly in practice due to bias and systemic maltreatment of participants. Cooley and Mihalec-Adkins also suggest that issues could be identified in proposed legislation. Due to underrepresentation among decisionmakers and those in power, children and youth of color and those living in poverty were found to suffer from maltreatment due to uneven application of the policies being examined.

In one case, the example was the child welfare system. Gourdine and Cross looked at the past application of child welfare

and foster care to determine whether any populations are over-represented in the system. In their analysis, people of color—most often Black children—were more apt to be placed in foster care. Cooley and Mihalec-Adkins anticipated what might happen with a major overhaul of that system and suggest that the changes may solve some problems but inadvertently introduce others. As the authors point out, these problems require either challenges from outside the system or a realignment inside the power structure. Either the people in power need to become aware of their bias or the personnel need to become more diverse—or both.

The article by Akande, Tadros, and Harris focuses on the systematic difficulties with the application of zero-tolerance policies. In this case, the primary problems with the policies seem to be concentrated in minority populations, and again, the negative outcomes are most noticeable in those populations as well. These policies are not openly designed to target minority groups, but their outcomes are more problematic for them, apparently due to a large extent to bias, inequities, or contextual differences such as poverty.

### **The Difference Between Models and Reality**

Another pattern in the articles in this edition includes policies that appear to be predicated on very controlled model studies or assumptions. If those models were accurate and if it was possible to replicate them, the policies would be ideal and very positive. Problems arise when those conditions are not existent in real-world situations. This concern was described by Cooley and Mihalec-Adkins when they talked about the application of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) soon to go into effect with the goal of reforming the problems in the child welfare and foster care programs. They listed several situations in which the assumptions of the legislation are likely to have unintended consequences because of a lack of readiness on the part of institutions to handle the expectations in the legislation. Policymakers need to recognize when the assumptions of policies are accurate and when they are not.

### **Failure to Establish and/or Maintain Focus on the Needs of the Target Population**

Several authors in this collection mentioned that unintended consequences were a result of policymakers losing sight of the primary needs of the students, children, or families who were the primary target of the programs or interventions—those who were meant to be served by or benefit from the policies. Williamson reported that the intervention she reviewed was intended to promote marriage by meeting the unmet economic needs of families, although as the evaluation of the program showed, it had the opposite unintended consequence. Gourdine and Cross mentioned that one reason for the overrepresentation of minority children in the foster care system is that their needs are not being met. Concerns about unmet needs were mentioned by Cooley and Mihalec-Adkins; they raised questions about whether personnel in responding to new requirements in the FFPSA would also be able to meet the needs of families. Akande et al. emphasized this point heavily in their article, stating that the schools' failure to meet the needs of students actually were responsible for the malfunctioning of the disciplinary systems that led to the unintended consequences they identified. Together, these authors suggest that keeping the needs of the target population front and center when designing and implementing policies is a valuable strategy for avoiding unintended consequences.

### **Moving Targets and Change**

Even when pilot tests and data gathering are completed, it is important to remember that conditions are not static and unchanging. Williams and Anderson pointed out ways in which the Affordable Care Act had different outcomes from what was expected, and those outcomes had implications for later policies and decision making. The analysis by Cooley and Mihalec-Adkins also suggested similar concerns as they discussed some of the changes that had and had not taken place in preparation for FFPSA. If policymakers do not know what the current (and fluid) situation is, it is very difficult to know the needs of the constituents. Fitzpatrick also encouraged professionals to remember to

design policies with an eye to the future, recognizing that time does not stand still.

### **Lack of Policy Guidance**

As Fitzpatrick pointed out, in some settings there are no policies in place at all in spite of the fact that they would serve an important purpose. As she noted, sometimes that occurs because professionals are not trained or prepared to create policies. Or it could be that other activities or materials are thought to be more important or take priority. The result is that default assumptions or decisions about guidelines are made on the fly, leading to inconsistency and flawed thinking about how policies fit with research, other program activities, and future needs.

Family professionals should take all of these concerns into consideration. In addition, to assess the intended and unintended consequences of policies, family impact toolkits are available. The theoretical and empirical rationale for assessing the family impacts of policies and programs was published in *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science* in 2012 (Bogenschneider et al., 2012). Family impact checklists, procedures, tips, and helpful tools are made available online by the Family Impact Institute at Purdue University at [www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/](http://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/). ✨

### **References**

- Bogenschneider, K., Little, O., Ooms, T., Benning, S., Cadigan, K., & Corbett, T. (2012). The family impact lens: A family-focused, evidence-informed approach to policy and practice. *Family Relations, 61*, 514-531.
- Family Impact Institute. (n.d.). *Family impact*. Retrieved from [www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/](http://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/).



## Family Sustainability: Contextualizing Relationships Within Evolving Systems

### Call for Submissions Fall 2019

The world around families continues to change, and families continue to adapt to the settings in which they live. Strong families exist in all settings.

The fall 2019 issue of Family Focus, like the 2019 NCFR Annual Conference, will explore some of the ways that strong families adjust and are sustained by the family relationships that maintain the well-being and resilience of the family unity across generations.

Submissions should focus on family strengths and how families use their relationships and existing community resources to respond to environmental and internal challenges. Of special interest are the what, how, and why of strong family relationships within their specific contexts and within evolving systems that were vital to their resilience. This is a chance to zero in on marriages and other committed intimate relationships, parent-child relationships, siblings, intergenerational partnerships, and any other ways that family members work together to make strong bonds and support strengths and growth. What empirical evidence have you seen of strong family relationships helping communities and individual families deal with economic stress, community violence, family disruption, and other challenges and opportunities? What implications does that research have for family professionals? We welcome your submissions!

Prospective authors should indicate intent to submit by May 1, 2019. Articles will be due May 15, 2019.

Contact the editor at [reporteditor@ncfr.org](mailto:reporteditor@ncfr.org) with questions or about your interest in submitting, and include one to two sentences summarizing what you wish to cover. Find complete author guidelines at [bit.ly/FFguidelines](http://bit.ly/FFguidelines) (PDF).

## Post Your Job Opening With NCFR

When you're searching for the best hire for a faculty position in your department or for a practitioner role at your agency, post your job opening with NCFR to **reach thousands of potential candidates** who have professional backgrounds in Family Science and other family-related disciplines.

Posting your opening online in the **NCFR Jobs Center** positions your job so the right audience of job seekers can find it easily by browsing or searching.

And the greatest benefit? Included with your purchase, NCFR **announces your job opening in our weekly email newsletter**, Zippy News, which goes out to more than 12,000 subscribers who have a specific interest in the family field. You'll also see your job opening posted on NCFR's social media accounts.

Find step-by-step details about how to post a job at [ncfr.org/post-a-job](http://ncfr.org/post-a-job)

You'll be able to submit the information about your job opening and make your payment entirely online.

We look forward to helping you fill your open positions!