

Sociological Analysis of Family Policy:

What explains the emergence, popularity and decline of policy ideas and initiatives?

The formation of groups around policy interests

Mobilization and counter-mobilization:

“Family-friendly” policy advocates vs. the
“childfree.”

Putting how we think about subsidizing the costs of children in historical context:

The public school system (including public higher education)

c. 1900: compulsory school attendance laws

1960s: Expansion of mass higher education

Poor children: ADFC (1947-1996)

Cherlin: certain policies defined as entitlements;
others defined as assistance (not guaranteed)

Why, by 1996, the “sweeping reversal of six decades of social policy toward poor families?” (Cherlin, p. 184).

1. Changing ideas about gender, work and family:

Three competing “packages” of ideas:

A. Separate spheres: women in the “private” sphere raising children; men in the public sphere of paid work. Family roles and obligations are ignored in the workplace by employers and employees alike.

“Protective” labor policies; anti-nepotism bills; limitations on the performance of paid work within the home.

B. Equal opportunity: Calls for women to have the same job opportunities as men. But does not challenge the traditional separation between family and work, or formally address the division of labor within the household.

Policies maintaining equal pay for men and women

C. Work-family accommodation: Employers are required to accommodate family needs (e.g., by providing dependent care leave or childcare).

Policies requiring employers to provide leave to employees; bills subsidizing employer-provided childcare; bills prohibiting employers from penalizing employees who take time off when children are born or sick.

Original AFDC legislation was an attempt to extend to poor, single mothers the same role that nonpoor mothers were supposed to play. 1990s: Encouraging self-reliance among poor mothers seemed consistent with emerging values for poor mothers.

2. Characteristics of AFDC recipients:

1930s: most were widowed

1990s: most were either separated, divorced or never married

The “deserving” vs. the “undeserving” poor

3. Concern about “dependency”:

Guaranteed public assistance for the poor removes the incentive to find work.

Effects on children: Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to be poor themselves.