A Family Impact Analysis on Online Articles on Family Policy

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Families are the backbone of this country. Families help this country sustain and thrive. Because families are such a critical component of society, they must be protected and encouraged to succeed. Legislators and policymakers can ensure that family life is safeguarded by guaranteeing the policies and laws they draft have families’ best interests in mind. With the 2012 presidential election came controversy and opposing viewpoints on several key policies that directly impact families. Current online articles, posted on *Real Clear Politics*, illustrate these contentious topics of foreign policy, health care, unemployment rates, taxes, and Medicaid. When analyzing policies and laws that affect families, it is critical to observe them through a family policy lens. By evaluating policies through a family policy lens, lawmakers see exactly how policies influence the well-being of families.

Laws that impact families can be declared as family policies or policies with a family perspective. As Karen Bogenschneider explains in *Family Policy Matters*, family policies are social policies involving families and the main functions of families (Bogenschneider, 2006). The key family functions family policy impacts include family creation, economic support, childrearing, and family caregiving (Bogenschneider, 2006). The family function of family creation incorporates marriage, divorce, childbirth, adoption, and foster care. The second family function of economic support describes providing for the family’s basic needs and sharing communal resources with members of the family (Family, n.d.). The family function of childrearing includes supporting, encouraging, and socializing children to develop into competent and active citizens of society. The last of the four major family functions of family caregiving comprises of providing care and support for each member of the family, particularly the young, old, sick, and disabled members (Family, n.d.). Bogenschneider (2006) also argues the definition of policies with a family perspective include “an examination of the consequences and impacts for families, their functioning, and their well-being of any and every public policy” (p. 31). Lawmakers should understand family policy and family perspective; therefore they are aware of their impact on families and can work to protect them.

Policies can be evaluated as family polices or consisting of a family perspective by using the family impact approach. Analyzing laws based on the family impact approach guarantees policies and programs help to promote and encourage families (Family, n.d.). The family impact approach offers a family impact checklist to ensure policies and laws strengthen families. The family impact checklist consists of five major principles for policies to adhere to when being created, implemented, and evaluated. The five fundamental principles laws should promote include family responsibility, family stability, family relationships, family diversity, and family engagement (Family, n.d.). Each broad principle involves a deeper understanding of the topic by containing further questioning of the principle. The family impact checklist proposes an extensive reflection and evaluation of laws and policies concerning families (Family, n.d.).

Multiple online articles, from *Real Clear Politics*, debate the impact of current and developing policies on families. These entries discuss a common theme of policies affecting a family’s responsibility to society. The first principle of the family impact checklist is family responsibility (Family, n.d.). It is crucial that policymakers keep families and families’ responsibilities to society at the heart of policies. Because families are such an integral component of society, policies and laws need to ensure their functions are encouraged and reinforced. Interrupting family functions and responsibilities should be the last resort lawmakers and policymakers take. Family policies interfere with families’ responsibilities when they undertake the family functions; impede families from caring for their dependent or ill members; ignore family concerns of child support, literacy rates, and unemployment; and inhibit families’ capabilities to balance both work and family (Family, n.d.).

The highly mediated presidential election was interwoven into several *Real Clear Politics* articles pertaining to family policy and a family perspective lens. The articles “If Obama Wins, What Changes for His Second Term” and “Has a Disillusioned Barack Obama Lost the Will to Win?” both analyze the 2012 presidential election and its candidates (Clift, 2012)(Porter, 2012). Both authors stress the importance of the election for the future of family policy and programs (Clift, 2012)(Porter, 2012). A growing concern of the safety of our country and its citizens living abroad or stationed in foreign countries worries the American people. As described in Paul Richter’s article, “Mideast Violence Offers Reminder of ‘Arab Spring’ Dangers,” the violence in foreign countries is creating turmoil back home in the States (Richter, 2012). President Obama and lawmakers must adopt a family perspective lens to evaluate foreign policy matters to ensure our citizens are protected overseas (Richter, 2012). The change and impact one person can have on families is immense, which is why the election results were critical.

The family impact checklist principle of family responsibility extends to policies and laws not prohibiting families the ability to provide adequate care for their young, old, ill, and disabled members. This concern is evident in David Gamage’s article, “ObamaCare’s Cost to the Working Class,” which illustrates the shortcomings of the United States’ current health care policy (Gamage, 2012). He emphasizes the importance of change and notes his support for ObamaCare, the new health care plan for America. Gamage argues that while President Obama’s plan is not exactly perfect, a new policy is in dire need now and is being implemented in 2014 (Gamage, 2012). The ObamaCare plan is controversial due to the clear divide it creates between the lower and upper socioeconomic classes. The new plan will encourage the working class to hold part-time jobs and the higher-income class to seek health care outside of their employment. Divorce rates are predicted to rise due to the implementation of ObamaCare, because the new plan benefits single-person families over two-person families (Gamage, 2012). The upcoming health care policy affects families and families’ responsibilities to care for their members sufficiently.

Family policy or family perspectives cannot allow unemployment rates to interfere with a family’s responsibility to provide the four basic family functions. The current online articles, posted on *Real Clear Politics*, illustrate these controversial topics pertaining to family policy. Michael Moroney, in “Obama Gave Young Americans the Shaft on Jobs,” explains the still-failing job market for young adult college graduates (Moroney, 2012). In the article, Moroney describes how neither presidential candidate offered a concrete solution to the high unemployment rate, and this worries college graduates as they seek employment. If young adults cannot find jobs after graduation, they will be forced to move back home with their parents. Having educated but unemployed young adults does not help stimulate our economy (Moroney, 2012). Rick Wilson, author of “Mitt’s Not Over Yet,” explains how policies have not changed the continuous ranking of the 8% unemployment rate and the mere 1% of growth in the economy (Wilson, 2012). The urgency for policymakers to take a family perspective on laws is critical for the support of our country’s families. Walter Russell Mead also expresses a sense of anxiety, due to the failing economy, in his article, “Whatever We Are Doing Isn’t Working” (Mead, 2012). Fulfilling the four key functions of a family becomes difficult if parents cannot find jobs in this extremely sluggish society. Parents, without a steady job or income, find providing simple necessities for their family challenging (Mead, 2012)(Wilson, 2012).

In addition, policymakers cannot allow the implementation of high taxes to interfere with a family’s responsibility to its members and society. Online articles from *Real Clear Politics* depict this debated topic. Steve Conover, author of “Top-down vs. Bottom-Up,” contrasts two different economic approaches used by politicians to help stimulate our economy (Conover, 2012). He explains the use of the top-down strategy increases taxes, which translates to a lower gross income for families. A lower gross income equates to a family’s difficulty in providing basic needs for its members (Conover, 2012). A contrasting online article argues higher taxes are beneficial to families and our country. James Kawak, writer of “Yes, We Can Afford Higher Taxes,” explains that cutting programs is not necessary; instead, if tax payers agree to pay higher taxes, then the unemployed will have more time to look for jobs, the poor can receive health care, and the elderly can retire and receive health care (Kawak, 2012). Kawak believes families can pay higher tax rates, because over the last thirty years taxes have remained constant while wages have increased. Therefore, families have more income and pay less in taxes than they once did (Kawak, 2012). By not cutting family programs for the unemployed, impoverished, and elderly, families could still fulfill their responsibilities to society (Kawak, 2012).

Finally, family policy needs to ensure families living in poverty are capable of fulfilling their family responsibilities too. As explained in online postings, Gary MacDougal, author of “The Wrong Way to Help the Poor,” illustrates the enormous issue of poverty in our country (MacDougal, 2012). With more than 46 million people living in poverty and almost $1 trillion spent each year to assist the poor, policymakers must keep these impoverished families at the center of family laws (MacDougal, 2012). Poor families cannot be responsible for accomplishing the four basic family functions. MacDougal argues that our tax dollars are not being allocated in the most efficient ways, because other people are benefitting from programs for the poor besides just the impoverished. Examples include Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor and disabled, which many elderly also take advantage of. In addition, Pell grants add financial ease for young adults to attend college, but it is argued these grants may be benefiting others besides just the poor (MacDougal, 2012). Because these programs directly affect families, the discussion of reallocation of funds for these programs pertains to family policy (MacDougal, 2012).

As seen in the numerous online articles from *Real Clear Politics*, several controversial topics exist regarding family policy. Because of the impact policies on foreign policy, health care, unemployment rates, taxes, and Medicaid have on families, it is imperative lawmakers act in the best interest of families. Families’ responsibilities to its members and to society need to be protected by policymakers, because families are critical components of society. To ensure policies do not interfere with the family functions of family creation, economic support, childrearing, and family caregiving, family policy can be evaluated based upon the family impact checklist. This basis of assessment guarantees policies act in the best interest of families. Now, this calls for policymakers to do their part in safeguarding families’ well-beings.

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