



## **Using Family-Focused, Policy Relevant Research to Build Better Public Policy for Families**

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# Can Researchers Apply the Lens of Family Impact?

“ . . . The relational is the “start” of social reality, both in theory and in practice. A relational perspective can be developed all along the continuum of science, stretching from the theoretical dimension to empirical facts and vice versa, in a continual process of reflexivity.”

(Pierpaoli Donati, 2011, p. 17).



# What Role Can Researchers Play in Policymaking?

- (1) What is the family impact lens and what can it contribute to policymaking?
- (2) How can researchers use the family impact lens to build better public policy for families?
- (3) How can researchers use the Family Impact Seminars to build better public policy for families?





# **1) What is the Family Impact Lens and What Can it Contribute to Policymaking?**



# The Family Impact Lens Encompasses Two Important Dimensions

- 1) Family-focused policies or programs  
*what* is enacted or established
- 2) Family-centered practices  
*how* policies or programs are  
implemented





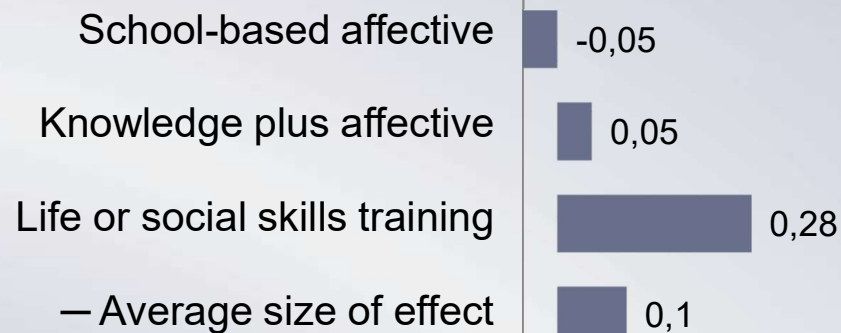
# The Role of the Family Impact Lens in *What* Policies are Enacted

- A meta-analysis to prevent youth substance use compared the effect sizes of “youth-only” to family-focused approaches.
- An effect size is a statistical test that shows how large or small differences are between groups.



## Which is More Effective for Preventing Youth Substance Use: Youth-Only or Family-Focused Approaches?

### Youth-Only Programs



### Family-Focused Programs



Note. Data obtained from "Family-based interventions for substance abuse prevention," by K. L. Kumpfer, R. Alvarado, & H. O. Whiteside, 2003, *Substance Use and Misuse*, 38, 1759-1789. Copyright 2003 by Informa Healthcare.



# Substance Abuse Prevention in Italy

The most interesting result in a study of LifeSkills Training in the Lombardy region of Italy (Bramanti, 2013):

Preventing substance abuse depends on developing the capacity of adults and pre-adolescents to listen and dialogue with each other as well as focusing on preadolescents' relationships with their peers.





# The Role of the Family Impact Lens in *How* Policies are Implemented

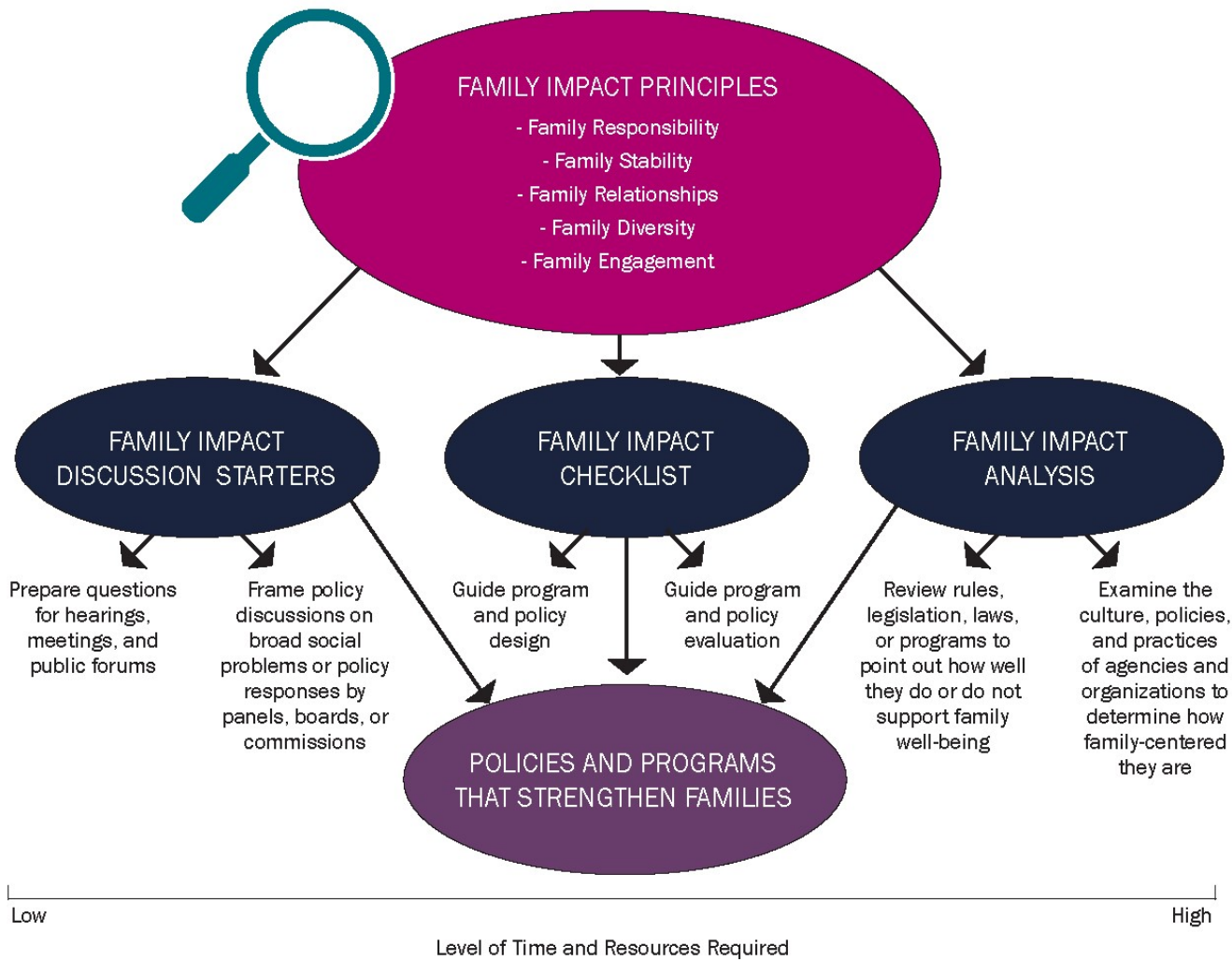
- A meta-analysis of 47 studies included 11,000 participants from 7 different countries.
- Implementing programs in ways that included both strong family *participation practices* and strong *relational practices*:
  - Improved effectiveness for all child, parent, and family outcomes, and
  - Improved participants' self-efficacy beliefs and family's capacity to assume responsibility.





## **2) How Can Researchers Use the Family Impact Lens to Build Better Public Policy for Families?**





# Family Impact Principles

- Family stability
- Family relationships
- Family responsibility
- Family diversity
- Family engagement

The five principles in the family impact checklist and the 33 accompanying questions are all drawn from research.



# The Three Family Impact Methods

## **(1) The Family Impact Discussion Starters**

This least time-intensive method is intended to be used by busy policymakers. Each of the five principles has been translated into a single question for use in testimony, hearings, or board meetings to raise awareness, frame the discussion, or generate policy responses.





# The Family Impact Discussion Starters

## How will the policy, program, or practice:

- 1) Support rather than substitute for family members' responsibilities to one another?
- 2) Reinforce family members' commitment to each other and to the stability of the family unit?
- 3) Recognize the power and persistence of family ties, and promote healthy couple, marital, and parental relationships?
- 4) Affect families that vary in race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic region, etc.
- 5) Engage and work in partnership with families?



# The Three Family Impact Methods

1) The Family Impact Discussion Starters

**2) The Family Impact Analysis Method**

This method uses the family principles and questions to conduct studies that identify the past, present, or probable future effects of a policy, program, agency, or organization on family stability, family relationships, and family members' capacity to carry out their responsibilities.



# Carra's Family-Focused Evaluation of Residential Care Facilities

- **Family responsibility** – support of birth families
- **Family Stability** – length of time in care
- **Family Relationships** – frequency of parent visits, existence of parent training, and formation of parent support groups
- **Family Diversity** – Demographic differences in who is placed in out-of-home care and how effective the treatment is for different populations
- **Family Engagement** – Involvement of residents and families in decisions about programming; the availability of rooms for visits by birth families



# The Three Family Impact Methods

(1) The Family Impact Discussion Starters

(2) The Family Impact Analysis Method

**(3) The Family Impact Checklist Method**

The family impact checklist can be used as a stand-alone tool for reviewing existing research to identify the consequences of a policy, program, agency, or organization on family stability, family relationships, and family members' capacity to carry out their responsibilities.





# Family Impact Analysis of Prisoner Reentry

- The family impact analysis revealed ripple effects on family earnings, family relationships, and parenting practices.
- To maintain family relationships during incarceration, correction agencies can improve visitation policies for parents.
- To support family relationships after incarceration, policies can assist with food, housing, education, and citizenship rights.





# Contributions of Family Impact Analysis

- 1) The family impact checklist can identify what data to collect, who to target, which family processes to measure, and what family outcomes are relevant
- 2) Each principle and question on the checklist is research-based
- 3) Family impact analysis is nonpartisan.
- 4) The analysis details impacts on specific family types and family functions.





### **(3) How Can Researchers Use the Family Impact Seminars to Build Better Public Policy for Families?**



# The Family Impact Seminars

- The Seminars—a series of presentations, discussion sessions, and briefing reports—that communicate high-quality, nonpartisan research to policymakers on topics they identify.
- The Seminars influence policy decisions.
- The Seminars influence policymakers' attitude about how practical research is and how approachable researchers are.



# Best Practices that Contribute to the Success of the Seminars

- 1) Provide information in the format that policymakers prefer.







**Peter Bock**  
Former Wisconsin State Representative





# The Evidence on Disseminating Research to Policymakers

“Seminars or workshops that enable some discussion of research findings with their potential users, or which adopt a more collaborative approach, seem to be the most effective method of dissemination for policymakers.”

(Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007, p. 135)



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- 1) Provide information in the format that policymakers prefer.
- 2) Provide research on timely topics identified by policymakers.
- 3) Provide objective, nonpartisan information without lobbying for a preferred policy.
- 4) **Build productive working relationships with policymakers.**





# Researchers Can Build Better Public Policy for Families

