



جامعة القدس
Al-Quds University

Health Policy- basic concepts

Motaseem Hamdan, PhD

School of Public Health, Al-Quds University

Jerusalem



Content

- Policy
- Politics
- Public policy
- Characteristics of public policy
- Policy problem
- Health policy
- Policy type and level
- Policy context



Policy

There is considerable dispute in the literature on what is *'policy'*. A variety of definitions are provided:

- Policies are starting point for action in organizations.
- Complex framework of attitudes, values and practices that frame organizational activity.
 - some written
 - some spoken
 - some unarticulated



Policy

- Policies can be guidelines, rules, regulations, laws, principles, or directions that guide decisions and actions.
- **Policy is a broad statement of goals, objectives and means that create the framework for activity.** Often take the form of explicit written documents, but may also be implicit or unwritten. (Buse et al, 2005)
- **Policy is** a general statement of intention, which guides decisions and actions/ inactions in an area, and expression of goals and ways to achieve them.



Key elements of a policy

(WHO, 2004)

- **Vision:** what is desirable, a general image of the future in the policy area.
- **Values and principles:** which form the base for the setting the objectives and goals and also for developing strategies and courses of action. Although not always explicitly formulated in policy documents, they nevertheless underlie all policy statements.
- **Objectives:** Health policy objectives are translated into areas for action (services, financing, HR, information, legislations, advocacy etc).

Box 6. Example of mental health policy for a country with a medium level of resources*

Mental health policy

(WHO, 2004)

Vision: Mental health of the population will be improved through mental health promotion in primary schools and ensuring the early treatment of mental disorders in primary care. Equity issues for people with severe mental disorders will be addressed throughout the health and social welfare systems.

Values and principles: In accordance with the vision, two lines of values and principles were agreed:

- *Psychological well-being:* Mental health promotion should be integrated into the actions of sectors other than health.
- *Indivisibility of mental health, general health and community care:* Mental health should be integrated into the general health system and community care should be developed with the participation of consumers and families.

Objectives: Each of the objectives selected had as a consideration the need to improve health, respond to people's expectations and provide financial protection

- To enhance life skills in school children, reduce the prevalence of depression and reduce complications of alcohol withdrawal.
- To improve consumers' satisfaction with mental health care.
- To achieve parity for mental health in social and private insurance.

The following **areas for action** were set as priorities:

- **Legislation and human rights:** Some mental health legislation has been developed. However, there is a need for social welfare support for people with mental disorders.
- **Financing:** Some funds were available for specialist mental health services. However, there was a need to improve funding for the integration of mental health services into primary care services.
- **Organization of services:** Screening and early treatment for depression, suicidal risk, psychosis and alcohol abuse needs to be implemented in primary care with the support of community mental health teams.
- **Essential drugs:** In order to develop these services in primary care centres the provision and use of essential psychotropic medicines needs to be ensured.
- **Intersectoral collaboration:** The need for a working alliance was discussed between the ministry of health and two other sectors:
 - *Social welfare:* In order to help people with schizophrenia to live in their communities;
 - *Education:* In order to implement mental health promotion activities in schools.
- **Advocacy:** The ministry of health has undertaken to achieve parity for mental health in public and private services and is discussing the need to involve consumers and families to participate in the planning and evaluation of mental health services.
- **Quality improvement:** The quality of treatment and care in primary health care needs to be improved drastically.

Drug and Alcohol Policy Statement

The objective of this Policy is to develop a drug and alcohol-free workplace which will help ensure a safe and productive workplace and to provide education and treatment to our employees. In order to further this objective, the following rules regarding alcohol and illegal drugs in the workplace have been established.

- The company shall implement a comprehensive drug and alcohol abuse education program. As part of that program, information will be provided on the availability of Employee Assistance Program services.
- The company reserves the right to perform urine drug screens and/or breath alcohol tests where there is reasonable cause to believe someone is under the influence.
- Alcoholism and other drug addictions are recognized as diseases responsive to proper treatment, and this will be an option as long as the employee cooperates. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will be made available to assist employees.
- Working or reporting to work, conducting company business or being on premises or in a company-owned, leased or rented vehicle while under the influence of an illegal drug, alcohol or in an impaired condition constitutes a violation of the Policy and may subject an employee to disciplinary action including immediate termination:
- Being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs on company property is prohibited. The unauthorized use or possession of prescription drugs or over-the-counter drugs on company property is prohibited.
- Using, selling, purchasing, transferring, possessing, manufacturing, or storing an illegal drug or drug paraphernalia, or attempting or assisting



Policies involves web of decisions and actions

- Policies may not arise from a single decision but could consist of bundles of decisions that lead to a broad course of action over time.
- Example: the government's school health programme includes:
 - immunization against the major vaccine-preventable childhood diseases,
 - providing medical inspections/ screening,
 - subsidized school meals,
 - health education in the school curriculum.
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“Policy” and “Politics”

- The word ‘policy’ does not always translate well in different languages:
 - In English a distinction is often made between policy and politics
 - In other languages the word for policy is the same as the word for politics:
 - **In Arabic:** سياسات ، سياسة
 - **In Turkish:** politika, politikalar



Politics, power

- Politics is a process by which decisions are made within groups. The exercise of power to influence decisions.
- Harold Lasswell (1958) put it best when he said:
Politics is about “who gets what, when, and how.”
- Power is the ability to influence others. The ability to make other do what you want them to do.



What is Public Policy?

- ***Public policy*** : the policy made on the name of public by government. Public policy refers to government policy.
- **Public policy** is the actions/ inactions taken by government to address a particular public issue/s, public problem/s [Pal, 2005].
- A government also has the option of not responding, public policy is “what government does and what government chooses to ignore” [Dye, 1998].
- ***Public policy*** is commonly embodied/ expressed in the body of laws, regulations, decisions and actions of government.



Public policy: characteristics

- Policy **animates from public authorities**; comes from persons who have the legitimate authority to impose normative guidelines for actions (Pal, 1997).
- However, a policy **should has three elements**;
 - a **definition of the problem** the policy is to address,
 - the **goals** that are to be achieved,
 - and **the instruments and means** whereby the **problem is to be addressed and the goal to be achieved** (Pal, 1997).



Public Policy “Problem”, policy issue

- **Public Policy “Problem”** is a condition or situation that produces needs or dissatisfaction among people and for which relief or redress through government is sought.
- **Characteristics of public policy problem/ issue:**
 - identified as a troubling conditions
 - those that affect a large number of people
 - those that have broad effects
 - involve consequences for those not directly involved
 - judged as appropriate/ legitimate for government action
 - defined and articulated as such by someone, media, evidence, research,
 - it is deemed possible to remedy the situation, a solution is perceived to exist.



Public Policy “Problem”, policy issue

- Name some public problems
- Examples:
 - Health: Disease control (CD and NCDs
 - Environment: Air pollution, waste,...
 - Substance abuse: Alcoholism, Drugs, Tobacco etc
 - Disaster preparedness
 - Domestic violence and child abuse
 - Disability
 - Security, defence
 - Education,
 - Employment, Poverty, ...
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Public Policy: sum up

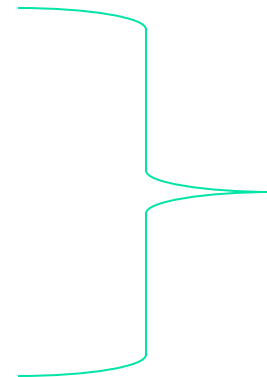
Some characteristics, or elements common to all definitions of public policy:

- generally developed by some form of government body, has an authoritative, legally coercive quality
- directed toward some goal
- emerges in response to policy demands (public problems/ needs)
- made in the name of the "public"
- policy is interpreted and implemented by public and private actors.
- involves some actions over time
- Policy is what the government intends to do or chooses not to do: may be positive (involve action) or negative (decisions to do nothing).

Types of public policies



- Energy policy
- Foreign policy
- Domestic policy
- National defense policy
- Environment policy
- Education policy
- Labor policy
- Crime policy
- **Health policy**
-



Social policy



Health policy

- *Health policy* as part of the public policy deals with the issue of health.
- Health policy is a sub area of the social policy, which is particularly concerned with health services.
- **Health policy** course of actions (and inactions) that affect the set of institutions, organizations, services and funding arrangements of the health system (both public and private) (Buse et al, 2005)



Health policy: decisions, choices

- Health policy guides choices about
 - How to organize health services, delivery models
 - How to finance health services, public, private finance
 - Which health technologies to develop and use,
 - What drugs will be available, free, prescription
 - How to produce, manage health workforce
 - How to ensure evidence-based decisions and practice
 -



Content/ scope of public health policy

Wide

- Health policy is concerned with improving the overall health status of the population (Walt, 1994).
- It goes beyond healthcare, and considers all that have an impact on health, '**inter-sectoral health policy**' [WHO, 2000], **healthy public policy**", "**Health in all Policies**".

Narrow

- The focus is health care, health policy is that related to health care delivery and funding activities '**healthcare policy**' (Walt, 1994).
- Deals with the components of health care system



“healthy public policy”

- Government responsibility to ensure that the ‘total’ environment, which is beyond the control of individuals and groups, is conducive to health.
- The “Healthy public policy”, health is mainstreamed in all public policies, by an accountability for health impact.
- The main aim of “healthy public policy” is to create a supportive environment to enable people to lead healthy lives. It goes beyond healthcare, and considers all sectors that have an impact on health.



Examples: “healthy public policy” area

- **Supporting the health of women:** Women are the primary health promoters.
- Women's healthy public policy includes:
 - birthing practices based on women's preferences and needs;
 - parental leave, and dependent health-care leave
 - supportive mechanisms for caring work, such as support for mothers with children,



Examples: “healthy public policy” areas

- **Food and nutrition:** The elimination of hunger and malnutrition is a fundamental objective of healthy public policy. Food support, micronutrients supplementation, breast feeding policies, etc.
- **Tobacco and alcohol:** The use of tobacco and the abuse of alcohol are two major health hazards. Healthy public policy, to reduce tobacco growing/ cultivation, alcohol production, marketing and consumption.
- **Creating supportive environments, occupation safety:** Many people live and work in conditions that are hazardous to their health and are exposed to potentially hazardous products.
- More examples.....!!

The policy types and levels

	<i>High politics</i>	<i>Low politics</i>
Policy type	Macro policy Systemic policy (Deals with main features that shape the whole health system)	Micro policy Sectoral/ Programatic policy (Organisational, localised, day to day issues) <i>(low opposition)</i>
Policy level	National government State government Regional authority	Local health authority Institution e.g. clinic, hospital
Example	Regulation of private sector, Reform of civil service Establish national insurance	Introduction of breast screening Change in vaccine policy Introduce a drug, service tariff , .. (Walt, 1994)

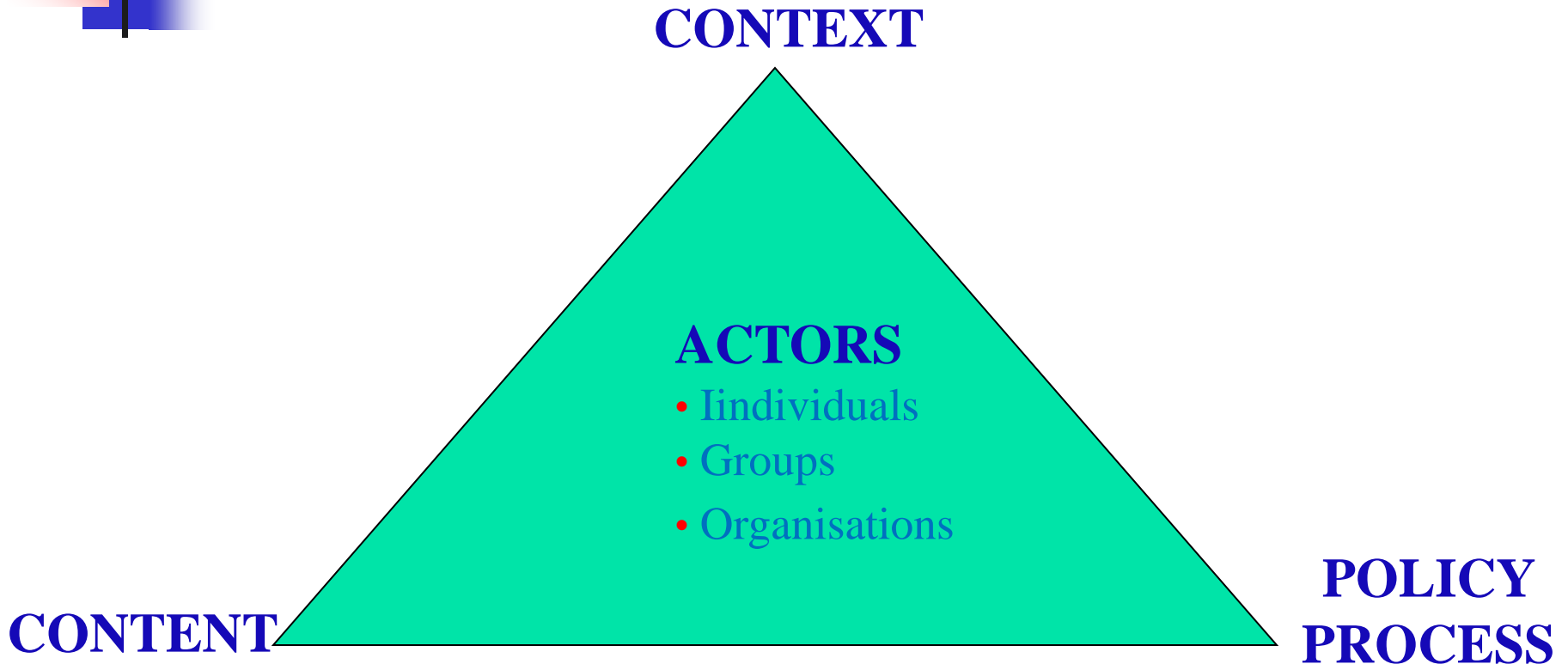


Understanding health policy: “Policy” and “politics”

- Policy ‘what’ questions (the content) of health policy.
- Politics the ‘who’ and ‘how’ questions (context, process, actors): who makes the decisions? Who and how implements them? Under what conditions will they be introduced and executed, or ignored?

A model for health policy analysis

(Walt & Gilson, 1994).*





Health policy, the what, who, how, context

Example: user charges in Uganda

- In Uganda, when the President saw evidence that utilization of health services had fallen dramatically after the introduction of charges for health services, he inverted the earlier policy of his Ministry of Health.
- To understand how he made that decision, you need to know something about the political context (an election coming up, and the desire to win votes); the power of the President to introduce change; and the role of evidence in influencing the decision, among other things. (Buse et al, 2005).



Policy Context:

factors that affect health policy

- Context refers to the systematic factors- economic, political, and social, both national and international- which may have an effect on health policy.
 1. **Situational/ temporary factors:** temporary, impermanent conditions such as war, earthquake, draught, natural disasters.
 2. **Structural factors:** permanent unchanging elements of the society.
 - **Political system**, the opportunity for civil society to participate in policy process.
 - **Economy and development** e.g. wage levels, inflation, income resources to health.
 - **Demographic**, population growth, fertility, mortality, age, gender etc.
 - **Technology** : changes in technology e.g. drugs, diagnostics, treatment etc.



Contextual factors that affect health policy

3. **Cultural factors:** cultural values and norms that may influence health policy
 - Religion, believes e.g. reproductive health.
 - Stigma about disease (HIV, TB).

4. **International and exogenous factors:** leading to more interdependence between states, influencing sovereignty of states.
 - international agencies, World Bank, UN- WHO, example vaccinations.
 - international cooperation, bilateral projects and donors.



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