

The Emerging of a Policy for Preventive Services to the at-Risk Families in Taiwan

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Child protective services (CPS) mandated for governments have started about three decades ago in Taiwan on 1973 but did not implemented until after the 1993 amendment that wrote in specific responsibilities' carriers and procedures of CPS. Various modules and programs been inaugurated through levels of governments that appeared gaps in service delivery. The amendments of the Child and Youth Welfare Act in 2003 did include new measures of the provision of preventive services to families within the domain of child protective services. But nothing had happened until 2004 when an advocacy campaign was enacted by NGO. As a consequence, the "Action plan for intervention to the high-risk families", a nationwide preventive family service program with governmental appropriation and entrusting professional NGO for services, was announced and put to work at the end of 2004, that was regarded a record-breaking fast implementation of the legislation in Taiwan's history of social welfare developments. It is the aim of this paper to share the experience of this rapid policy implementation in the context of Taiwan's social phenomenon.

I. Responses to the child abuse and neglect

The Child Welfare Act was introduced in 1973 as a start of the social welfare policy in Taiwan. Thirty articles in the Act proclaimed the governmental responsibilities in protecting children's well being without proper allocation and appropriations, which resulted in not much real reaction to the law until the NGO movements in promoting social welfare started in the 1980's.

There have been some social changes relating to the well being of children in Taiwan since the 1980's, such as: 1.the awareness of aging society led to reallocation of social welfare resources more to elderly whereas less to children due to the change of population sizes; 2. the growth of

nuclear families that face the shortage of childcare human resources at home; 3. higher rate of women's labor market participation induced increasing needs for daycare services outside homes ; 4. rising divorce rates led to the growth of single parent families, among others (Wang, 2001). Moreover, cases of children (by definition at law refers to people under 12) and teenagers been abused or neglected by their parents showed the facts that not all families took full responsibilities of providing healthy environments for children's growth in a rapidly changing society like Taiwan, thus, to make raising children the social responsibility rather than "a major parental responsibility" was one of the major aims in the 1993 amendments of the Act.

The edition of 1993 Amendment of Child Welfare Act was actually referenced on the responses from the practitioners and service delivery system that requested clear mandates and division of labors for Child Protective Services (CPS) provision. It expanded into 54 articles written into six chapters of the Act; a chapter delegated fully to the ordinances and procedures of CPS. The mandated CPS was implemented in each local government by various means and different models. Some did not provide these services due to the lack of service delivery sources, particularly, short of experienced social workers. The lack of, and inconsistency of CPS in many ways caught attention by professionals and the academia per se (Feng, 2007), which launched a second movement of amending the Child Welfare Act in Taiwan starting 1997.

Moynihan (1986) claimed that the social welfare for the elderly is a good indicator of civilization; the social protection of children is indicator to the future development of the society. In fact, "children are the future of our country" is a well-known statement among people in Taiwan, though it had been only in its face value rather than in any policy implementation. Therefore, guidelines to the second time amendment of Child Welfare Act included three ways of institutionalizing child welfare policies and services: appropriate strategies, consistent contents, affective and sustaining model of implementation (Feng, 1997):

1. Policy objectives should be including both the protection of children's basic rights

of living, and making the environment good for children's healthy developments.

2. It is the family rather than individual the target of service delivery; all families with children under 18 years of age should be included in one service system rather than dividing them into 0-12 as children and 12-18 as youth, due to the common service needs of them all.
3. Evidence based studies should be referenced upon the making of the policy in order to have a full understanding of background information.
4. Preventive measures must be designed and offered to progressively protect the human rights of young people.
5. Rule of "to the best interests of children/youth" must be applied whenever conflicts of rights occurred.

Furthermore, some specific administrative requests were afford to the governments in order to enhance the feasibility of the policy implementation.

1. Merging the 1993 Child Welfare Act and the Youth Welfare Act (1977) into a comprehensive legislation for young people under 18.
2. Examining related policies and regulations to ensure the responsibilities would be carried out without barriers, and principles such as: to the best interests of children/youth, State's ultimate responsibility of protecting children/youth rights, hazards prevention is the best protection strategy, would be obeyed.
3. Central government should be able to offer comprehensive service plan, and responsible for the communication among separate responding authorities in the policy implementation.
4. Proper resource allocation must be aligned to allow the policy implementation; balanced allocation of funds, especially the provision of social workers in front line should be at top priority.
5. The professional services offered by NGO could be utilized in service delivery; though

their sustainability should be preserved.

6. Public hearing should be held regularly to communicate within and outside the system to guarantee the feedback channels.

At 2003, the Child and Youth Welfare Act was passed by the Legislative Yuan. Not all principles and requests from the advocates were adopted in the new law, but at least the major concepts of merging the child/youth social welfare system, and institutionalization of CPS systems, most of all, the preventive orientation of protection services were clearly stated in the law.

II. The new orientation of child protection

Highlights of the 2003 amendment/merge of the Child and Youth Welfare Act can be concluded as: 1. a brand new chapter for the protection of children's identity is added; 2. governmental responsibilities in supporting families with children/youth and offering preventive services were enhanced; 3. CPS measures were emphasized in more details; and 4. varieties in welfare facilities and quality of social workers were increased (Lai, 2003).

The rationale behind the improvements of the CPS system in the new law is adopted from the conceptualization of the three tiers of prevention (Feng, 2004; Lai, 2003): primary prevention indicates the services offered before any violence or breakdown happen to the family, secondary prevention is all services offered to stop the harmful situation when crises occur, tertiary prevention is offered after the family crises in order to prevent any further harm for the family members.

In the Article 19, a good number of family supports and preventive service provision by governments were clearly expressed in writing in addition to the traditional residual measure of family welfare for children/youth: local government's responsibility in offering childcare outside

homes, in family counseling services, in parenthood education, and other services to families' needs. Though, it is the urgent suggestion from social workers in the fieldwork that offer supportive services to families with high risk of breaking down or violence the strongest expectation by all child welfare workers toward the new law. To local governments' surprise that the "Action plan for intervention to the high-risk families", a nationwide preventive family service program with governmental appropriation and entrusting professional NGO for services, was announced and put to work at the end of 2004, only one year after the passage of the new mandates. It was regarded a very rapid innovation of a large scale service plan sponsored by Central Government in Taiwan.

III The rise of the preventive measure for at-risk families

The preventive program is a community-based case management service with a community reporting/referral system funded by Central Government without requesting matching fund from the local governments. Community involvements are encouraged to report the at-risk families with children under 18 to the designated system for an at least 6 month service program if it meets the standard criteria for case opening. The objectives of the program are to improve the family stability and to empower the parent(s). Referrals to other social welfare resources during or after 6 month are options to social workers. Almost all local authorities contract local NGOs for the service delivery. Central Government appropriate 1.1million U.S. dollars yearly for the program. The program is a large-scale social service program launched within a short period of time, more evaluation and improvements are needed to guarantee its effectiveness, whereas it is indeed a big advancement of CPS in Taiwan.

Generally speaking, the fast making of the nationwide program for services to high-risk families within one year after the passage of the Child and Youth Welfare Act was resulted from three keys: 1. a service plan with a set of feasible implementing criteria made out of an

evidence based study, 2. severe child abuse cases reported by the media, and 3. efficacy in the intergrowth operating state of Taiwan's politics and media in election season. The impact of these three measures led to the rapid and effective implementation of a nationwide preventive program for services to high-risk families. The following content is to explain each one of the 3 keys.

III.1. Proposal made out of an Evidence Based Study— research on the assessment indicators for crisis families

A case study was conducted under the auspice of the Child Welfare Bureau entitled "Research on the Assessment Indicators for Crisis Families" in 2003 (Feng, 2004). It utilized various research methods, including content analysis of case records, survey questionnaires, focus group of related personnel, and in depth interviews with knowledgeable experts. The purpose of the study was to use these empirical data from direct services as the evidence base in defining the concept of "crisis families" and to formulate a set of assessment indicators of family in crisis for practitioners' use. The study adopted the module of an empirical based qualitative research (See Chart 1) to ensure its quality. It then became a reference for future service initiatives.

With an ecological perspective (Feng, 1997; Lair & Hartman, 1985), the research adopted family systems theories (Klein & White, 1996) with an ABC-X model of family stress (Hill, 1949) as a theory background, referenced on related literature (Augiler & Messick, 1989; Boss, 2002; Dornbusch & Gray, 1988; Huang, 2002; Lan, 1996; Zhuang, 2003) to devise several family situation assessments, including areas of: protection and care, economy, socialization and education, family member relationships and outburst crisis events. Aside from these, the evaluation of family resilience also is a focal point (Ganong & Coleman, 2002; Patterson, 2002; Seccombe, 2002) used as the protection factor of the family. Seventy case records of "in crisis families" chosen by social work supervisors from public and private social service agencies in different arrears of Taiwan were coded and analyzed to form a draft description of family crises.

Direct-service social workers in charge of those cases were asked to fill out the questionnaire stating their interpretation of the “crisis family definition”. Content analysis was conducted to determine common categories, and then referred to previously stated theory structures. This process led to the development of a “Crisis Family Evaluation Target Draft (1)”. Focus groups were held, inviting senior social workers who filled out questionnaires to provide their cases to discuss the Draft (1) in person. All aided in reinsuring clarification and then resulted in a revision of Draft (1) into Draft (2). More focus group with scholars experienced in the fieldwork and administrators were intended but failed to summit due to their time constraints. Thus, in-depth interview methods were utilized instead to gather advices from five scholars and five social work administrative managers/directors in regards to the rationality and feasibility of the given Draft (2). This composite reaction is in the “family risk assessment indicators” as results of the study.

The study was collaborating with the Child Welfare League Foundation (CWLF), an NGO advocates for children’s well being and also offers direct services to children and families. It lasted a little over a year; the research report was completed in the beginning of 2004. Within that period of time, the research team became fully aware of the arduousness of offering service to families in crisis. Lacks of supporting resources and short of experienced social workers in local agencies were major barriers in such services, which also resulted in burnouts of the remaining social workers and poor quality of services. Case contents shown in the data revealed cost of a family fell into crisis were not merely born by the adults, but children/youth hurt the most. The physical and psychological harm brought upon the children/youth in crisis families might need time longer than their age to heal. Thus, the true meaning of “prevention is the best policy of child protection” was fully unfolded before our eyes. It was then the determinations made by CWLF to strongly advocate a preventive service system to assist families before their difficulties burst into crises.

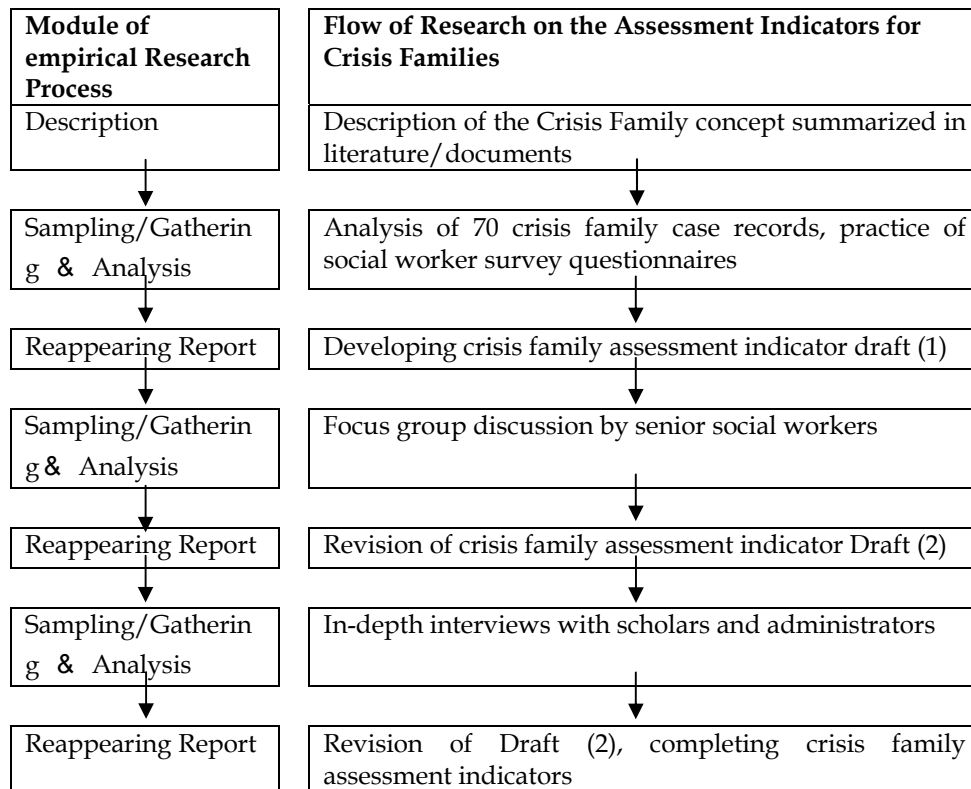


Chart 1: Process of Developing Research Evaluation Targets for Crisis Families

In the entire research process, special emphasis is on the “Evidence Based Study” concept. Besides the first stage of inviting social work directors from various areas to provide rigorous case records, in carrying out content analysis and the answers in the open-ended questionnaires, researchers also required participants to make sure to base on real cases (under privacy protection rules) as evidential support of one’s viewpoint in all discussion and interviews. The facts all participants offered in this study did win enormous trust and support for the resulted documentation in the communication and discussion afterward.

III.2 The influence of advocacy in tragic social events

In the first half of 2004, there was an occurrence of 17 caretaker negligence or child abuse cases in different parts of Taiwan, all happened in “non-crisis” , “not within the scope of social service

population”, or assessed as “normal” families. In total, these cases resulted in 22 children’s death. A case of a mother brought her 3 children along while she burn charcoal to commit suicide , and a mentally unstable mother tossed her baby girl from upper floor and found she had an elder son died mysteriously earlier, among others, caught the full attention of the general public. The public opinions strongly demanded the governments to derive methods for preventing these kinds of family tragedy from hurting children so bad.

In line with it’s children’s rights advocacy and the mission on monitoring the implementation of the newly amended Child and Youth Welfare Act, the Child Welfare League Foundation held a press conference on April 4 of 2004, the Children’s Day in Taiwan, to report the danger of children living in dysfunctional families with statistical analysis, and offered the alternative as providing preventive services to high-risk families. The social discussion about this issue was long enough and strong enough to win the attention of the governing authority and other decision makers so that got into the social policy agenda in the government administration.

III.3 Taiwan’s unique political operating system - the election phenomena

The make of a specific legislative bill often needs a particular timing, the experience of NGO advocating for a nationwide program of service to high-risk families in Taiwan happened within the campaign season of the congressmen reelection that all candidates were searching for social issues to exert their power of influence on the administration. When the child and family protection issue caught the public attention, election candidates did help create pressures to the administrative system, causing the preventive service policy to take form.

The media in Taiwan, up until now, has still enjoyed a lot of social prestige. Media reports have always had an influence on the impressions of the public. Therefore, politicians and election candidates need to expose in the media to give the public an impression of being people’s voice; the media also needs celebrities providing news materials to satisfy the demands of their viewers.

Consequently, Taiwanese politicians are frequently interactive with the media, try very hard to create social topics and attract media reports to increase their importance in the arena. It is thus shaped a unique intergrowth structure by the media, the politicians, and the social advocates.

The intergrowth system between the media and the politicians is even more evident nearing the voting day. Toward the 6th Legislator election on December 2004, politicians would use all opportunities to guarantee their voice for the public welfare; demanding the government offer solutions to society issues. When several candidates competed in voicing for the high-risk families and their children, media followed those cases in concern closer in details to reveal even more negligence of the public service system. Stronger request from press conference by legislators were built day by day, NGO service providers were heavily consulted by legislators and the media that assigned new values to proposals afford to governments by NGO before (see Chart 2).

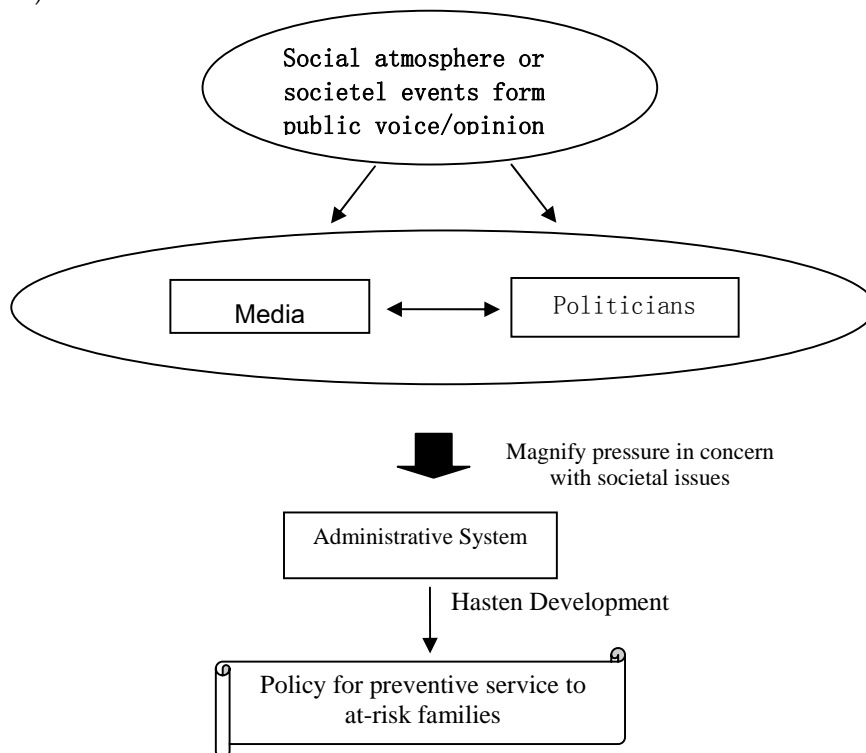


Chart 2: The influential process of Taiwan's politicians and media on the administrative system in policy making.

IV. Conclusion

The new preventive family support service program is a good start for children and families in Taiwan to enjoy the social welfare resources when they first in need. It is an answer to professional's request in protecting children progressively from been harmed at home. One of the important elements to its success is sufficient supports to the program, the human resource and service network are critical factors. It needs some time to mature for the preventive service program, before a valid program evaluation can be offered, the policy making process is one experience can be shared so far. Two lessons can be drawn from the experience of Taiwan's initiation of preventive family services to high-risk families in the process of policy advocacy: the evidence based research, and the multiple uses of advocate strategies in the social contexts.

IV.1 Importance of Evidence Based Research Study in policy making

It is an important step in planning a large scale service program to have empirical data on needs assessment and that of the feasible scheme of the operation. In planning the preventive family support service, the case screening criteria is critical to implement the program, and also key to estimate the magnitude of service needs, too. Evidence based policy draft could avoid misinformation and biased proposals to reduce conflicts between decision-makers and executors, thus shorten the communication process. A realistic proposal based on evidence from the fieldwork would encourage implementers accepting the challenge to take on new service measures even though they failed to face those problems before.

Therefore, as results of the "Research on the Assessment Indicators for Crisis Families", the proposal of preventive service system with the handy case assessment indicators derived from an open research process involved a good number of direct service units/personnel served as a solid base for the governmental initiatives of the "Action plan for intervention to the high-risk families" in responding to the quests of a solution to family problems concerned by the public,

and politicians who exercised political pressures. The internal communication among social administrations went on smoothly since most of them had been somewhat in the process of forming the definition of family crisis and the assessment indicators beforehand. The repetitive validation and change along the way, gave the results a high level of reliability, enabled accurate and effective guidance in the direction of program contents, and ensured the service to be beneficial. That relieved the tension of social workers in the fields to reduce the resistance in the service system usually would happen when new measures were introduced. What are more important lies in the effects of social education while a firm proposal with a persuasive delineation of solutions to a social problem, which would enhance the social efficacy of the service delivery.

IV.2 Multiple measures should be utilized in policy advocacy

In the process of promoting policy for service to high-risk families, the efforts of NGO organizations, strategically integrating the following three measures, enabled the social consensus, and then resulted in the rapid implementation of the mandates in the law.

1. The results from evidence based research: good use of high reliability evidence based results, served as the foundation for policy proposals, enhancing the preciseness of content, and to a great extent, reducing resistance to policy endorsement.
2. Aligning with related social events in compiling a social consensus: public awareness could be instigated by the occurrence of specific social events, and then adding pressure onto governmental administrative system toward societal needs. The impact of these social pressures created through media would enhance the pace of advocacy.
3. Combining the political culture of election in Taiwan and its intergrowth operating system with the media to give rise to the issue of concern: real pressures toward the policy makers in legislation and in the governments comes from the power of mass media, which is always hungry for controversial debates. One of the best strategy for

NGO movement is to create public awareness collaborating public opinion with policy issues concerning politicians in election campaign that afford the policy issue into policy agenda. If the pressure builds on, the advocated policy issues would be adopted by the formal institutions.

The implementation of the mandates by law ought to be the obligation of the governing authority in the governments; NGOs mission usually is to monitor the realization of mandates for the protection to the disadvantaged. Substantial policy initiatives usually come in very late even after the passage of related laws in Taiwan due to various reasons. The nationwide preventive family support service program in 2004, only one year after the passage of bylaw, set a record of rapid policy implementation, but it came along 30 years after the initial action toward the child/youth abuse and neglect in Taiwan. Lessons should be well taken for future policy advocate endeavors. It sets an example of adopting various strategies in policy advocacy; it also shows what an evidence based research can offer to create direct social services. The other side of the coin is to delineate aims of empirical study could be more than knowledge or theory building, it could also be the initiation of social services.

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