Introduction

Families matter, and so do economic, social, cultural, and political matters concerning families. After decades of neglect, today there is resurgent interest in families (Boyden, 1993; United Nations, 1992c). Some of this interest derives from publications produced by the academic community (e.g., Burggraf, 1997; Halpern, 1998), including research on the role of families in preventing social problems and filling individual needs (e.g., Kamerman & Kahn, 1978; Kumpfer, 1998).

A second source of interest stems from political mobilizations regarding families, family rights, and gender rights (e.g., Berheide & Chow, 1994). In some cases, historically marginalized, oppressed, and disfranchised groups are helping to foster these movements (e.g., Mah, 1997; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991).


The United Nations 1994 International Year of the Family (IYF) was a pivotal event in promoting interest in, and concern for, families (e.g., United Nations, 1991a, 1995a, 1995e). This celebratory year advanced critical perspectives about families, especially their strengths, needs, challenges, and resilience. Local, national, and regional meetings, conducted
in conjunction with IYF, convened policy makers, helping professionals, representatives from nongovernmental organizations, and family advocates. Proclamations were offered about the importance of families and new commitments to them. Ultimately, some 140 member nations joined in the work to celebrate and advocate for families.

This resurgent interest is timely, and already its benefits are evident. New frames of reference, policy agendas, and action systems are evolving. Sometimes these new frames of reference produce conflicts because their differences are not reconciled. For example, some advocates speak about reclaiming “traditional values,” oftentimes calling them “family values.” Others speak about the need to support women and children. Still other persons speak about families as self-appointed groups of interdependent adults who provide unconditional emotional and social support to one another. Some are critical of dominant family-related discourses. They criticize patriarchy and violence within the families and take issue with gender roles and expectations that dominant discourses convey.

Fortunately, the new frames, agendas, and action systems are more inclusive. They promote more consensus and coherence. For example, these new frames and action systems avoid dichotomies, such as nuclear families versus family systems; individuals versus families; and individual rights versus family rights. Proponents of these new frames recognize that dichotomies like these, along with the binary logic that supports them, have impaired understanding of families, hampered policy development, and limited family-supportive action strategies.

This book is intended to serve as an example of such an inclusive approach to families. It offers new frames, agendas, and action systems. It emphasizes policies, practices, and advocacy in support of families. It promotes family-centered policies and practices.

INTRODUCING FAMILY-CENTERED APPROACHES AS A CHANGE STRATEGY

In this book we introduce a very basic idea. When families and their well-being provide the focus for governmental policies and helping professionals’ practices, citizens, advocates, helping professionals, policy makers, families and their members, and others will all be better off. We base our pro-family arguments on a growing body of the research literature, which spans many disciplines, about the importance of families.
This literature also demonstrates the folly and dangers of ignoring and neglecting families. So many priorities, so many social institutions, and every helping profession share one important feature: they all depend on families.

Family-centered thinking, policies, and practices promote more integrative conceptualizations and approaches to human needs and rights. Families are integrative units, which provide individual and group identities and promote social cohesion. They defy mechanistic models and industrial-age machine metaphors that have often dominated modern-day thinking and analysis. Above all, families transcend categorical approaches to human needs such as health, housing, employment, and the fragmented professions and policies that have emerged from these categorical frames of reference.

In other words, families do not do only health care; or counseling; or education. Families have to address them all, often at the same time. Families are comprehensive social welfare institutions. They are like miniature social welfare states (Waring, 1988).

Because families are comprehensive, integrated entities, which defy the categorical, specialized perspectives inherited by the professional disciplines and governmental service sectors, they compel new models of analysis and new kinds of collaborative practices. The long-standing dichotomy between individuals and families simply doesn’t stand up under inspection.

Families also call into question the false dichotomy of policy work versus practice. It questions other dichotomies, especially the one between expert (professional) knowledge and “client” (individual and family) ignorance.

A key premise for this book is that families and people from all walks of life have expertise. They know, to some extent at least, what helps and hurts. Families need to become partners with policy makers, helping professionals, and advocates. When families are viewed as experts and treated as partners, policies and practices are more family centered. And when they are family centered, the dichotomy between policy and practice is no longer useful. In fact, this dichotomy may cause problems, not the least of which is catching helping professionals and families in “double binds” involving what policies require and permit and what families and the professionals who serve them really need.

This book thus promotes an integrative approach to policies and practices. Mindful of tensions between them, it sees benefits in these tensions.
Family-centered policies can stimulate like kinds of practices. Or, family-centered practices can promote like kinds of policies. It is not a question of family-centered policies or practices; it is both. This integrative approach to policy practice includes multimodal service, support, and resource strategies, and multilevel systems and cross-systems changes in support of them. Segregated, categorical policies and practices will appear to be homeless in this family-centered, integrative, and comprehensive perspective.

PROMOTING FAMILIES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR WELL-BEING

Families vary across nations and cultures, and they have evolved over time. Despite their apparent universality today, families are not inevitable in structure or function (Collier, Rosaldo, & Yanagisako, 1992). There is no evidence in support of claims that one variety of family arrangement is superior to others. There is evidence in support of claims that families and family arrangements vary through time and in different places and cultures.

Sometimes families have represented choices people continue to make about how they wish to live; about how they garner and give support; and about the social, political, cultural, and economic arrangements they find most suitable. Sometimes these decisions have been made by governments and powerful authorities. Here, coercion has outweighed free choice. Even under coercion, families have demonstrated their capacities to resist and subvert decisions that are not in their best interests. Individuals and families are usually active agents in co-determining their own lives.

Despite diversity in their composition and organization, families across cultures typically share similar duties and challenges. For example, families provide economic resources; create and consume products and services; address the health and emotional needs of their members; provide shelter, food, and other essentials for survival; enforce moral codes and norms of behavior; and promote local, regional, national, and international economic growth and social development.

Families constitute the largest social welfare institution in the world. This is not to suggest that all groups considered as families serve as optimal units of a social welfare system. Nor does it imply that families want and need to perform all these social welfare–related functions. When all
of the facets of social welfare are weighed—e.g., health, education, social supports, etc.—and when families are viewed as the largest social welfare institution in the world—their centrality and multidimensionality become apparent. Families gain new meaning and significance within and across nation-states. Nonetheless, families are not inevitable. Nor are they indestructible.

Preserving and strengthening families requires consistent attention to their needs and aspirations. It requires close monitoring of their well-being. This monitoring involves governments, both individually and collectively, as well as families, policy makers, professionals, and advocates.

Families are points of convergence for grand issues involving politics, economics, and social-moral philosophy. Using families as a lens, evaluative questions can be addressed about power and its distribution (politics); about the allocation of resources and rewards (economics); about the contributions of government to the good, just society and to individual and family well-being (social-moral philosophy); and especially about the relations among families, governments, economics, morals, and ethics.

We will raise some of these questions in this book. The questions we ask may be as important as the answers and implications we provide. Our work is grounded in shared concern about the present and future well-being of the world’s families.

FROM DANGERS AND CRISSES TO OPPORTUNITIES

Most of the nations in the world have economic development agendas, social development agendas, or some combination of them. Development has tended to be uneven because nations have not been equal players or beneficiaries. Development also has been competitive. Some nations and their families are like winners, while others are losers. When an economic calculus reigns, the human costs and some stark realities may be lost from the public eye.

We authors take as our point of departure four basic assumptions:

1. Many of the world’s families are experiencing crises, and others are in danger.
2. Crises and endangerment erode individual and family well-being.
3. It is possible and desirable to prevent these crises, dangers, and declining well-being.
4. Crises, dangers, and declining well-being are opportunities to act strategically, especially to invent innovative, more effective, family-centered policies and practices.

RECURRENT THEMES

These four assumptions have framed our examination of the world’s families. Despite international diversity, recurrent, pervasive themes are evident. For example, families are experiencing transformation.

Transformation

The twentieth century has witnessed the transformation of over 95 percent of the world’s families (Henderson, 1996). For some families, such as those in high-income nations, this transformation has been occurring over a century or more. For others, such as those in low-income nations, this transformation is accelerating. For example, long-settled families and extended family systems have been fragmented.

Once sustainable agriculture has been eroded along with the arable land. Rural families, faced with survival challenges, have had more children to survive, and many have moved to cities to find minimum and low-wage employment in the informal sector of the economy. Rural to urban flows challenge nations, as they transform families.

Families and Work

Waged jobs are in decline in many parts of the world, owing in part to technology development and in part to the deindustrialization caused by the mobility of transnational corporations. Once vibrant indigenous agriculture, crafts, and microenterprises have been undercut by requirements associated with structural adjustment and economic development policies. As discussed earlier, inequalities are growing, both within and among nations (e.g., Bradshaw & Wallace, 1996).

There are now more than 800 million workers out of work or underemployed worldwide. This pervasive unemployment involves many more workers than were affected by the world depression of the 1930s (Rifkin, 1995). As millions of workers and families fall victim to the predictable human costs of joblessness and the fracturing of their families, irreversible family scarring takes place. Cycles of addictions, abuse, depression
and mental illness, and related health problems rise. Even genetic changes may occur as a result of the pollutants and industrial hazards or deteriorating health habits in the home and community.

Despite aggressive policies to shore up “human capital” in support of competitive advantages in the luring of transnational corporations (TNCs), the fact of the matter is that formal sector jobs, which provide good wages and benefit programs, are in short supply in many nations (International Labour Office, 1998). Although official unemployment figures may be low, they are low because a growing number of people are employed in informal sector jobs, ones that do not provide employment security, appropriate wages, and benefit programs.

**Children’s Aspirations and Schooling**

Awareness is growing among children and youth that staying in school and completing a degree will not automatically translate into a good job, let alone a permanent one. This loss of hope and aspiration is itself a cause of declining well-being, especially for vulnerable and marginalized families, especially in the high-income nations (e.g., Wilson, 1997; Fine & Weis, 1998).

**Poverty, Inequality, and Families**

World poverty is rising in some nations, despite some impressive gains in a small group of nations (Ghai, 1997; Woodward, 1996). Poverty is a cause of migration. It is not just poor families who have been hard hit. The 1980s ushered in a world phenomenon of decline in developed economies such that many families have seen their incomes plummet as income redistribution and inequity have grown (Reich, 1993).

Patriarchy is a persistent problem in families. It looms beneath the surface, often concealing gender violence as well as child abuse and neglect. It plagues social and economic development. And, it denies to girls and women their rights and fundamental freedoms.

**National Debt and Corporate Profits**

At this time, every nation except one is in debt. Only Norway reports a surplus, and its unemployment rate is growing (Jordan, 1998). These debts are one small measure of the level of decline that many nations
experience. In the midst of such declines, super profits are being realized by an identifiable minority of people and corporations. New forms of investments involve paper profits, with few if any new jobs being created (International Labour Office, 1998; Thurow, 1996). Many TNCs are wealthier than entire nations (Bradshaw & Wallace, 1996).

Rising Perils

As the perils for many of the world’s families grow, challenges to sustainable living and health-enhancing environments grow. The governmental planning and decision-making infrastructures and action mechanisms families require are not in place. The nation-state is too small for some matters, too big for others (Giddens, 1990). The United Nations lacks the supports and mandates to do all that it might.

Welfare states are certainly a key part of the solution. However, they need to be reinvented to keep up with the new challenges. Otherwise, they, like many families, may experience more crises and dangers. Above all, governmental leadership is needed, the kind of collaborative, strategic, imaginative, democratic leadership that serves families locally while keeping a firm international perspective. Serving families means assessing their strengths, meeting their needs, and seeing families as worthy social investments.

NEEDS FOR AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT FOR FAMILIES

The International Year of the Family (IYF) demonstrated that worldwide advocacy on behalf of families is feasible and potentially powerful. It is just one example of how leaders of nations, individually and collectively, can make families important focal points for investments and how they can advance policies and practices that honor, promote, and support families. The International Year of the Family marked a beginning of work that must continue.

The International Year of the Family illustrated the ways that supports and policies for families have the potential to transcend the cultural and national diversity of the world community. Against wide diversity, there are important points of convergence and agreements. Above all, IYF called attention to the meaning and significance of families. And, once the significance of families is understood, one hopes that they will no longer be taken for granted, ignored, and neglected.
There are many signs of need. Each day individuals and their families come into harm’s way. Chapter 1 provides a compelling list of challenges to their well-being.

To reiterate, many of these needs can be met. Many of these harms can be prevented. When families experience harm and need, there are ways to respond to, and help them. Knowledge, skills, and intervention-improvement strategies are not the primary problem. The real problem involves the political will of governmental leaders, especially their commitments to individual and family well-being. Rhetoric in support of families is nice, but it is not enough.

In both national and international contexts, policy leaders, helping professionals, and family advocates face identical challenges:

1. Reaffirming the importance of families
2. Finding common grounds amid political, economic, and socio-cultural diversity
3. Designing, implementing, and evaluating pro-family policies and practices
4. Integrating concerns for families with agendas for sustainable living and economic development.

This book attempts to respond to these related challenges. It is but one contribution to an emergent international movement in support of the world’s families.

FAMILY-CENTERED VISIONS

The imagined tomorrow is today’s idea (Polak, 1973). In this time of postmodern criticism of utopian schemes and themes (e.g., Lyotard, 1984), visions of the possible are more important than ever before. These family-centered visions need not become locked up in the grand ideological and political struggles of the past, ones that pitted capitalism against socialism, and both against communism. Family-centered visions help chart the course into a more desirable future. “Better than before” is an apt slogan for citizens in a democracy (e.g., Rorty, 1998). It signals that some improvements may occur at glacial speed, but also that there are no predetermined destinations beyond improving individual and family well-being.

This book is not an agenda for cultural imperialism and colonialism. Its title signals its orientations. It calls for policies and practices, indicat-
ing plural needs for a diverse and complex world. It emphasizes implications, not “one size fits all” prescriptions and broad-sweeping generalizations. This book is structured to encourage family-centered visions.

What visions do you have for families? In other words, what do you want families to be, experience, and do (after Collier, Rosaldo, & Yanagisako, 1992, p. 46)? Ask yourself these two questions, just as the authors did. Then ask this one: How can family-centered policies and practices help make these visions materialize? This book presents our collective exploration of these questions.

Imagine a world united in its commitments to and investments in families. Imagine a family well-being index that shows steady worldwide gains, nation by nation, year after year. Imagine semiannual local, regional, and international meetings that are devoted to monitoring progress and sharing lessons learned about family-centered policies and practices. Imagine integrated social and economic development policies and practices in which families are viewed as cornerstones, and in which they are provided tailored services, social supports, and economic-occupational resources. Imagine, in short, an international social movement that makes every year “an international year of families.”

**Olympism as an Exemplar**

Despite their limitations, the Olympic Games are an example of the ways in which the world community can rally around shared visions. Most world leaders have demonstrated their abilities to put aside their other differences and agree upon shared norms and values that make up Olympism. Nation-specific policies and practices in support of it have followed. If the world community can initiate and sustain a social movement in support of competitive play, then why can’t it mobilize a world movement for families?

As in the Olympic Games, some competition is involved. All pro-family advocates are joined in a race against time because individuals and families are dying for attention. Informed advocacy and policy on behalf of families can help unite the world community. Local communities, states, provinces, and nations can reap benefits. Investments in families bring dividends.

Like athletes competing in a relay race, the authors of this book have benefited from other pro-family advocates. We accept their torch of knowledge and understanding about families, together with examples of important policies and practices. The race on behalf of families will
continue after we finish our leg. In other words, this book represents another torch that can be accepted and improved upon by others.

We authors have not always agreed. Some differences have been reconciled, while others remain. We “see” the world differently, and our gazes may reflect our disciplinary orientations. We represent health, education, family studies, and social work, and each of us is attracted to interdisciplinary perspectives. In the end, we decided to identify the authors for each chapter. This was one way to reconcile our differences and honor academic ethical imperatives.

On the other hand, the book has conceptual integrity and overall value coherence. It is not merely an edited book with separate chapters in search of common themes and shared assumptions. Our differences notwithstanding, we authors are united with others in the global village by a firm advocacy for families and deep commitments to improving their well-being.

Value Orientations

One of the most important challenges for policy and practice leaders is to gain more understanding of why some families are not able to meet their own expectations, achieve their own goals, and discharge all of their duties—despite their desires to do so. New, pro-family investment strategies require family-centered and responsive frames of reference. It is time to discard language and practices that are deficit and problem oriented, ones that label and stigmatize families in need as “dysfunctional” and “pathological.” The authors promote in this book an orientation that emphasizes family aspirations, strengths, and resilience. This orientation can be approached by asking and addressing several key questions.

For example, if families are asked what they want and need, are their answers dramatically different from what policy leaders expect? Similarly, do families receive the services, supports, and resources they need to meet their own expectations and achieve their own goals? Are families, in essence, blamed for their needs and challenges, or are their problems and stress viewed as the absence of sufficient investments in them? Are individual nations and their leaders being blamed and held responsible for declining individual and family well-being indices when some of the root causes are, in fact, outside of their control?

Are helping professionals doing for families what families could be doing for themselves if they had the requisite services, supports, and resources? Do families develop a strong sense of collective efficacy, or do
professionals foster in them patterns of learned helplessness and dependency? Are families seen as having expertise? Since they are the persons closest to the problem or goal, have they been recruited to be part of the solution? Are “natural helping systems” promoted, whereby individuals and families are supported and strengthened to help themselves and each other?

Exploring Dimensions of Family-Centered Policies and Practices

The authors are committed to policies and strategies that facilitate responsiveness to what families say they want and need. This means working with, and for, families. It entails giving voice to all of their members, especially to girls and women. It means granting them effective jurisdiction over their own lives and honoring their expertise, especially with regard to what helps and harms them. It also means shifting away from top-down, one-size-fits-all policy edicts. Good intentions notwithstanding, family-centered policies and practices must be co-designed, implemented, and evaluated with the families they are intended to help. Only then will these policies and practices become appropriately tailored; only then will they respond to family, contextual, and cultural uniqueness. It is time to build upon good intentions and seek pathways to family-centered and family-supportive policies and practices.

This book explores these and related dimensions of family-centered policies and practices. The intent is to help policy makers and family advocates develop new understanding, allowing them to work more strategically. Ideally, they will gain knowledge, values, skills, and abilities needed to help develop better policies and improved practices because the choices they make are more strategic.

For example, categorical (also called “sectoral”), single-system, and single-profession approaches make it likely that both policy leaders and professionals will focus on just one area of human need and family well-being. Binary logic resides underneath categorical policies, and oppositional thinking dominates. Hence, health priorities are pitted against education; education and health against criminal justice; and so on. By contrast, when families and family well-being are the focus, and when families are involved in policy designs, single-sector, categorical thinking, planning, and programming are problematic. Individual and family well-being help integrate policies in a more coherent and cohesive fashion. Counterproductive policy and practice competitions are prevented.
Theoretical Orientations

No single theoretical frame dominates this analysis. The subject of families and family-centered policies in the international community is simply too broad, complex, and innovative. Our subject outstrips the descriptive, explanatory, and predictive powers of any one theory, or theoretical frame. World systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974), while compelling, does not meet our needs.

Just as these policy leaders, helping professionals, and advocates must reach compromises—sometimes uneasy ones at that—so, too, have the authors worked to develop compromises. The result is a theoretical hybrid, together with all the benefits and limitations associated with it.

The authors have tried to blend and integrate relevant aspects of systems theory; social ecological theory; critical theory; postmodern theory; economic resource dependency theory; democratic political theory; globalization theory; and emergent kinds of “family theory.” The language, constructs, and concepts the authors employ reflect this hybrid theoretical framework. Theoretical purists may find fault with this. The authors understand and accept whatever criticism follows from this decision to mix theoretical perspectives.

THE UNDERLYING LOGIC FOR THE CHAPTER PROGRESSION

Several key questions have been asked of the authors; and, in turn, the authors have asked them of others. The International Year of the Family also raised and addressed some of these same questions—for example:

- What exactly is a family? Is there a definition that encompasses diversity worldwide?
- How and why should society’s leaders invest in families? What are the benefits? What are the consequences of ignoring, neglecting, harming, eroding, and destroying families?
- What indices exist for family well-being and for the development of pro-family policy practices?
- How do investments in families double as investments in democracy and, at the same time, in integrated, equitable, sustainable, and culturally responsive social and economic development?
- What unmet needs do families experience, and how much say should families have in determining how these needs are met?
Can family-support agendas also enhance the well-being of individuals and groups such as children, elders, women, and men?

How best can family-centered policies and practices be designed, implemented, and evaluated?

How much gender balance is necessary to truly “hear” what families and all their members need?

To what extent can the concept of “family” help integrate now-separate policies and practices for individuals, such as those for children, women, and persons with disabilities?

To what extent can families become enfranchised as partners and joint authors of these policy practices?

What future directions and challenges for families should leaders and advocates consider and promote?

These and other practical, important questions have helped the authors plan the chapter progression.

CHAPTER PROGRESSION

Chapter 1 introduces the meanings and significance of families in the world community. The authors address the challenges of defining “family.” They also emphasize the importance of family systems—their functions, duties, and significance. The concept of family well-being is introduced, along with indices to assess it.

Value-laden issues surrounding the definition of families are addressed. Here, the authors, like this book’s readers, face important ethical-moral issues. The authors decided that they could not impose personal definitions of families upon readers. This decision stemmed from collective commitments to honor and respect cultural and national diversity in policies and practices on behalf of families.

On the other hand, the authors are not committed to the dictum that “anything goes.” Respect for cultural and national diversity must be weighed against nonnegotiable human rights and protections, which transcend any one cultural system or nation-state. These human rights, promulgated by the United Nations and adopted by many nations, are inseparable from a concern for families. Practices that honor these rights must be enacted in families, and national as well as international indices of family well-being must incorporate them. These individual and family rights include equitable and just treatment, regardless of gender, age, and developmental status; freedom from violence, abuse, and involun-
tary exploitation; freedom from oppressive, discriminatory, and repres-
sive practices; religious, political, and economic freedoms; and protec-
tions from individual and family harms. The problems that patriarchy
brings are of paramount concern.

Why invest in families? Chapter 2 begins a book-long response to this
question. This chapter sets the stage by identifying and defining key ideas
and concepts. Here, and elsewhere in this book, families are identified
as comprehensive social welfare institutions. They are also the “engines”
for economic development. Family work, especially women’s work, goes
unrecognized and unremunerated. This chapter focuses on the work that
families do and the need for social accounting and resources, supports,
and services to aid them in their critical roles. Unfortunately, a key point
is often forgotten, if it is understood at all. Most large companies and
businesses once started out as small family businesses (Burggraf, 1997;
Fukuyama, 1995). Advocacy for families, especially in the political
arena, must attend to these realities. Effective advocacy also means ad-
dressing implicit images that politicians and other leaders may have, im-
ages that act as obstacles to family-centered policies and practices.

Families are presented as part of a social investment strategy, rather
than a narrow, categorical, economic development strategy. For, at the
same time that families enhance economic development, they promote
democratic government and civic participation. National health, educa-
tion, and crime-related agendas all benefit when families are supported
and strengthened.

In chapter 3, the idea of gender-equitable, meaningful employment is
emphasized. Related economic concepts are introduced, including un-
employment and underemployment. Three different economic sectors
for family work are identified. The argument is that conventional social
and health services have not addressed employment needs and economic
development. And, because they have not, families have not been served
effectively. The various people- and family-serving helping professions
have key roles to play in this work, especially if they build capacity in
families by creating mutual aid societies and neighborhood or village
support networks. This entails building from families’ needs and wants
tailored services and resources that are supportive of them, rather than
having professionals dictate to families without asking them. Barter sys-
tems and support networks also are important.

If families are to continue their key roles in economic systems, espe-
cially their roles as economic incubators, they need to receive their fair
share of economic investment dollars. In addition, they must receive tai-
lored, appropriate services, supports, and resources. Nowhere are these needs more apparent than with families’ caregiving, social support, and mutual assistance functions. As leaders at the 1995 World Summit in Copenhagen concluded (UNDP for Sustainable Human Development, 1998) this means working to eliminate poverty, providing full employment, and increasing income equity for women, especially in relation to their caregiving roles.

It also means understanding the economic costs and social consequences associated with poverty, unemployment, and “runaway economic development policies” that are structured without reference to individual and family well-being. Based upon due recognition of the harms and costs associated with poverty, this agenda signals needs for the fair distribution, and redistribution, of the investment dollars associated with economic development.

Chapter 4 introduces questions and issues about governmental responsibilities for families and their well-being. Are families and their well-being key foci in the agendas that leaders establish? How are family needs and issues framed and named? Drawing on responses to these questions, a family-centered policy continuum is identified and described. In addition, a frame of reference is provided in which the rights and entitlements of individuals are no longer viewed as competing with pro-family agendas. To the contrary, the needs of individuals and the needs of families can and should be aligned with each other. The chapter also calls attention to needed congruence and cohesiveness across often-separate policy domains (e.g., education, health, environment, economic development). Pivotal questions are raised about the democratization of policy making—the extent to which families are enfranchised and empowered as partners in design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of policies and practices aimed at them.

The authors try to walk the fine line between sensitizing readers to the issues and possible solutions, and offering prescriptions that are insensitive to national and cultural diversity. Mindful that national context and cultures always must be taken into account, the authors explore some of the predictable factors that most powerfully affect policy making on the behalf of individuals and families. We authors are action oriented. Like Putnam (1993), “We want government to do things, not just decide things” (p. 8). Examples of policy proclamations from IYF are provided to indicate how some governments decided to frame and name family needs, issues, and concerns, and perhaps to do things.
Readers are reminded in chapter 4 that familiar frames of reference bring yesterday’s language; and that tomorrow’s new practices may require a new language to help structure new frames for thought and action. Moreover, it emphasizes agenda setting, reminding readers that policies and practices are effective to the extent that they are based upon accurate and ecologically valid assessments of what’s right that needs strengthening and what’s wrong that needs fixing.

Chapter 5 picks up where chapter 4 leaves off. It emphasizes the importance of strategic decision-making and actions amid political inertia and multiple choices. The important roles of research and intervention logic in policy development and practice improvement are emphasized. Approaches to policy borrowing are described, together with some cautions and recommendations. Innovations involving service integration and interprofessional collaboration are sketched. A family impact assessment inventory is introduced to facilitate policy analysis, implementation, evaluation, and learning systems that accompany them.

Chapter 6 promotes family-centered collaboration and, in turn, broad-based collaboration among all stakeholders in the community. Key features of family-centered collaboration, policy, and practice are identified. For example, families are viewed as experts, treated as partners, and no one, especially helping professionals, depersonalizes them by calling them “clients.” A family-centered policy and practice planning framework is identified, including its key phases (e.g., forming a vision, establishing missions, determining accountabilities, framing action plans). Examples derived from family-centered work in Florida provide concrete examples of the products this framework may yield.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 are skills-based contributions. Chapter 7 focuses on how to structure a policy dialogue. Using four key examples, it illustrates how a family-centered perspective can be fostered by means of dialogue. Chapters 8 and 9 combine policies and practices. They describe policy-practice skills and abilities for developing family-centered agendas, developing working alliances, promoting widespread support, and engendering advocacy.

Chapters 10 and 11 take the analysis to an international scale. The focus is globalization and its companion processes, correlates, and consequences. These two chapters are, in fact, several chapters condensed into two. Chapter 11 introduces globalization and focuses on economic globalization. It explores challenges, changes, and opportunities associated with economic globalization. The effects on the welfare state are
emphasized, especially the unfortunate tendency of the economy and its free markets to gain supremacy over government (the polity) and the needs of the people.

Chapter 11 picks up where chapter 10 leaves off. It addresses some of the psychological, social, cultural, and social-geographic correlates and consequences of globalization. It describes and explains the significance of people migrations and cultural flows. These twin flows produce a new polyculturalism and are responsible for the growing number of divided family systems and their long-distance neighborhood communities. Intercultural contact zones, called “scapes,” are introduced, along with their new possibilities for grassroots social action. The chapter concludes with two frameworks for policy in the global world and key development principles that derive from chapters 10 and 11.

Finally, chapter 12 presents a summary call to action. It presents key propositions, or change theories, for family-centered policies and practices. Together these propositions signal future possibilities for a family-centered theory of action. Such a theory of action requires a new world ethic. Key transitions that will make up this ethic are identified briefly. This chapter and the book conclude with the call for a worldwide Family-watch, along with attendant commitments to action.

A FINAL NOTE: THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL DIVERSITY

Human cultures are inventive, resilient, and adaptable. It is possible in theory to conceive of surrogate social institutions other than the family. Such a theoretical possibility does not, however, square with the present-day priorities in the majority of nations and cultures. Nearly without exception, the family as an institution is assigned the same, exalted levels of importance. Certainly families’ duties and responsibilities vary, just as their memberships do, but perceptions about their social, economic, and political significance are shared among nations.

The title for this book indicates the authors’ intent to respond to international diversity, while building from successful exemplars and lessons learned. Our narrative is sometimes strong and forceful because the authors also are family advocates with clear, firm, pro-family value commitments.

On the other hand, the authors’ suggestions and recommendations should not be interpreted as rigid prescriptions. For cultural diversity and culturally responsive practices are consistent themes in the narrative, and
these twin themes signal needs to tailor and accommodate key ideas to local cultures and contexts.

Similarly, the authors’ approach to family-centered policies and practices is process oriented. In fact, the chief contribution of this book may lie in its sensitizing perspectives (i.e., analytical frameworks). This is especially likely if these sensitizing perspectives and analytical frameworks facilitate critical assessments of past/present policies and practices; and if they help leaders and advocates to think, talk, act, and interact more effectively and appropriately.

In today’s turbulent and rapidly changing world, basic values are being called into question. Are families important? Do they need to be supported and strengthened? Will they have food, decent housing, jobs, and related supports for their well-being? Will they be safe from the harms of patriarchy in their family and society? The answers seem so obvious, the need so important, that it seems redundant to raise these questions.

We authors, like you, want to live in a world in which these kinds of questions no longer need to be raised. The authors hope that this book reinforces new-century dialogue, action planning, and successful policy and practice innovations that prioritize and address family needs and wants. We aim to make a contribution to an international social movement, one that will result in a family-centered and family-supportive world community.

Katharine Briar-Lawson
Hal A. Lawson
Charles B. Hennon
Alan R. Jones
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