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families commission
kōmihana ā **whānau**

methodologies for analysing the impact of public policy on families

A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

A REPORT FOR THE FAMILIES COMMISSION

The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and commenced operations on 1 July 2004. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the Commission is designated as an autonomous Crown entity.

Our main role is to act as an advocate for the interests of families generally (rather than individual families).

Our specific functions under the Families Commission Act 2003 are to:

- > encourage and facilitate informed debate about families
- > increase public awareness and promote better understanding of matters affecting families
- > encourage and facilitate the development and provision of government policies that promote and serve the interests of families
- > consider any matter relating to the interests of families referred to us by any Minister of the Crown
- > stimulate and promote research into families, for example by funding and undertaking research
- > consult with, or refer matters to, other official bodies or statutory agencies.

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Te reo o te whānau

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PREFACE

A wide range of government policies and practices have direct and indirect impacts on families. In turn, family circumstances and functioning shape the ways in which individuals engage with policies and services, affect the ability of policies and services to meet their goals, and influence outcomes for individual family members. The Families Commission's work shows that individuals also place a high value on having a strong and supportive family life.¹

The Families Commission aims to place families at the centre of policy development and implementation. To do so we need better tools to assist policy-makers to anticipate and understand the impacts of policies and services on diverse families. This report is a first step towards this objective. The development of family-centred policy analysis is however at an early stage. Attempts to analyse policy impacts on *families* as opposed to individuals or households are still relatively new. In addition, unlike some analytical approaches such as health impact assessment, which has an extensive evidence base to draw on, knowledge of the determinants of family outcomes and understanding of causal pathways through which families influence individual outcomes remains limited.

There is a range of initiatives across government to improve the evidence-base relating to families. Amongst others, this includes moves to enhance family statistics (led by Statistics New Zealand) and the development of a new longitudinal study (led by the Ministry of Social Development). The Families Commission will continue to fund and conduct research, and to work with other agencies to address data and research gaps in order to improve our understanding of family matters. Better information about family structures, dynamics and support patterns within and across households remains critical.

The report is intended to be read as an issues paper — it provides guidance, but does not attempt to supply policy-makers or others with a single, ready-to-apply policy assessment tool. Instead it provides an analysis of four approaches to assessing policy impacts that may be adapted for application to New Zealand families.

Each of the approaches has particular strengths. *Microeconomic analysis* has a strong track record in analysing a wide range of policy problems. *Gender analysis* is particularly useful for considering issues relating to family functioning and the distribution of policy impacts within families. *Impact assessment* has an emphasis on the use of empirical evidence and input from stakeholders, and provides a broad focus on potential costs, benefits and distribution of policy impacts. *Family impact assessment* is a family-specific policy analysis approach developed and used in other comparable countries.

The approaches considered in the report are necessarily selective; while widely used they are clearly not the *only* methods that could inform family-centred policy analysis. The report also focuses on methods to anticipate or predict policy impacts, as opposed to methods designed to measure or evaluate policy impacts. There is however a direct link between an improved evidence from research and evaluation and the development of better, more accurate methods of prediction.

¹ Stevens, K., Dickson, M., Poland, M. with Prasad R. (2005) *Focus on Families: Reinforcing the Importance of Family*. Families Commission: Wellington.

The report concludes with guidance to policy analysts on the circumstances in which these approaches are best applied in order to assess different types of policy impact across families with different structures and at different points in the lifecycle. The report does not advocate a single approach but a toolkit of approaches tailored to answer specific policy questions.

The Families Commission will continue to build the case for policy analysis which recognises the importance of families to the lives of individuals and wider society. In coming months we will be working with other agencies to illustrate the benefits of policy development and implementation which takes potential impacts on families into account.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rajen Prasad". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rajen Prasad
Chief Commissioner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RATIONALE FOR FAMILY-CENTRED POLICY ANALYSIS IN NEW ZEALAND

The family is an institution that is widely valued by New Zealanders even while it takes many forms in today's society. The New Zealand government recognises the foundational role of the family in many areas of public policy.

There is now growing appreciation of the influence of families in relation to outcomes for individual members. Individuals, it is clear, typically do *not* make decisions or choices in isolation from their wider family context. In turn, families affect the implementation of policies and services and mediate their impact on individual members.

Whether intended or not, government policy development and implementation can and does have an enormous impact on family life. Family-centred policy analysis increases our awareness of direct and indirect policy impacts on diverse types of families. It strives to strengthen the positive impacts of government policy on families and to avoid unintended negative consequences.

By taking families into account throughout the policy process, family-centred analysis aims to ensure that policies and services are well placed to meet their objectives in order to achieve good outcomes for individuals, families and society.

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES IN ANALYSING PUBLIC POLICIES AND FAMILIES

The New Zealand family is a moving target for policy. The boundaries of the family are constantly changing and there is increasing diversity of family types (eg with or without children, single, separated or two-parent families, step or blended families). Families also have different needs at times of transition, or at specific life-stages.

Regardless of their form or life-stage, families are commonly understood to share a number of common functions (see Chapters One and Six). To be effective, family-centred policy analysis needs to consider whether, and the extent to which, policies affect the capacity of diverse families to fulfil these core functions. An equally important goal is to understand any differential policy impacts on families according to their form, life-stage or circumstances.

Public policy needs to be responsive to the diversity of arrangements that define families and to assess impacts on family functioning, structure and living standards. A family focus also requires attention to inequalities and power dynamics that affect decision-making and resource distribution within families.

Improving our ability to assess policy impacts on families requires improvements in statistical collection and efforts to address existing research and evaluation gaps. For example, the concept of *whānau* is also different and wider than “family” — and even more difficult to capture in official statistics.

Most existing statistical measures struggle to reflect the complexity of modern family life. For example, the majority of New Zealand's official statistics make insufficient distinction between families and households. It is common however for families to extend across

households, as in the cases of shared parenting arrangements. The assumption that families are co-resident households fails to reflect the reality of practical, material and emotional support arrangements within and across households.

Family-centred analysis addresses the need for good evidence-based policy analysis. As an approach it builds on existing tools in New Zealand government, particularly those developed to analyse differential policy impacts on sub-population groups. It follows significant New Zealand experience with social, environmental and health impact assessment.

Family-centred analysis differs from these existing approaches by focusing on and using empirical evidence and causal theory about families, the influence of families on individual outcomes and the determinants of family outcomes, to guide policy development, implementation and evaluation.

METHODS FOR ANALYSING POLICY IMPACTS ON FAMILIES

This report recommends methods of family impact analysis that can be readily applied to policies focused on families and those that are non-family-specific. Ideally these methods should be applied as early as possible in the policy process, preferably at the policy-development stage.

screening policies using a family impact assessment checklist

Family Impact Assessment (FIA), as it has developed in the United States and Canada, promotes a specific checklist approach to analysing policies on families. This approach is distinct from the more detailed impact assessment methods applied in the social and health policy areas.

This report recommends a FIA checklist for New Zealand. The FIA checklist is useful as a first stage of assessment for screening both family-specific and non-family-specific policies followed by one or more of the in-depth methods, where appropriate. The checklist questions are intended as examples only and are not exhaustive. Not all questions will be relevant or useful for screening all policies and policy areas. Rather the checklist is intended to identify the potential impacts of both family-specific and non-family-specific policies, including those positive and negative impacts, direct and indirect impacts, and intended and unintended consequences of policies.

The FIA checklist is recommended for screening policies to assess whether they are likely to have family impacts; to identify what those impacts might be; to reveal what gaps or inaccuracies exist in our knowledge or data about impacts; and to decide whether further analysis is needed, and if so, what kind.

economic analysis, gender analysis and impact assessment

Economic analysis, gender analysis and impact assessment methods can be used as more in-depth methods for predicting family impacts. One strength of economic analysis is in helping make the trade-offs between different policies for families explicit. It is most useful as a method for predicting direct and indirect impacts on family living standards but it can also be used for predicting impacts on family functioning and structure.

Gender analysis stresses the power differentials and bargaining dynamics within diverse families. It is most useful for predicting the distribution of policy impacts within families.

Together with economic analysis, gender analysis shows how outcomes for family functioning and structure affect family living standards.

Depending on the quality of the existing evidence base, impact assessment is useful for assessing policy impacts on family functioning and the interaction of impacts on family functioning, structure and living standards. It may also be used to highlight the relative impacts of policies on different types of families.

Each of these methods has insights and limitations for assessing policy impacts on families. Some methods will be more relevant to particular policy areas and family outcomes than others. The choice of method or combination of methods will depend on the strengths of the method as discussed, as well as cost considerations, the timeframe and scope of the policy, the availability of good research evidence and the degree of accuracy of prediction required.

Applied to various policies, preferably at the earliest stage of policy development, these methods for predicting impacts on families can generate successful cases of how taking families into account improves policy effectiveness and outcomes. In so doing, they can help to build a culture of good evidence-based family-centred policy analysis in central and local government.

CHAPTER ONE

introduction to policy analysis and New Zealand families

This chapter provides a rationale for assessing the ex ante impact of policies on families. It also reviews the conceptual issues associated with using families and whānau — rather than individuals or households — as the units of analysis. It situates attempts to predict (and evaluate) the impacts of policies on families as part of the development of good evidence-based policy advice. This accords with international precedents and New Zealand practices — for example, the State Services Commission’s guidelines on intervention and evaluation logics. Finally, it makes reference to existing specific tools focused on population subgroups used in the New Zealand context and suggests that these tools could be built upon in devising methodologies for family-centred policy development and implementation.

RATIONALE FOR ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF POLICY ON FAMILIES

The New Zealand family is an institution that provides for the caring needs of individuals and the reproduction of the national community and labour force. The New Zealand government recognises the foundational role of the family in many areas of public policy. The work of the Families Commission is guided by the following high-level family outcome:

Families and whānau have the capacity to care for and nurture their members, and to participate in social, economic and cultural life. They are valued and supported by communities, government and society.²

Within this outcomes framework, the Families Commission has set out three interrelated outcomes for families that provide a benchmark for assessing the impacts of government policy on New Zealand families. They are: 1) families and whānau provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment; 2) families and whānau are resilient and adaptive to change; and 3) families and whānau play an active role in the economy and society. Achieving these three outcomes means paying close attention to impacts on family living standards, family functioning and family formation and dissolution.

Whether or not they are intended to, many public policies have impacts on families. Government can and does have an enormous impact on family outcomes, most directly on family living standards and less directly on family formation, dissolution and functioning. The Working for Families package is an example of a government policy that provides income support to low- and middle-income families. Among the intended effects of this targeted redistribution is to alleviate poverty and financial stress within many families with dependent children while also providing incentives for family members to participate in the paid workforce. The recent revision to the Holidays Act that increased annual leave for all employees from three to four weeks from 2007, although not solely designed to benefit families, was intended to increase the time available for working parents to spend with children.

Conversely, families can significantly affect the implementation of policies and the delivery of government services. As well, changes in family circumstances and functioning can affect the success of policy interventions. Families have a major influence on the life chances of individuals. They typically mediate the impact of policies and services on individual family members. As a result, taking families into account in policy development broadens the potential solutions to policy problems. Moreover, policy interventions that take families into account in the implementation stage are more likely to be able to meet their objectives. By taking an explicit family perspective in policy analysis governments can become partners to families in their core caring and reproductive roles for the benefit of all citizens.

The Ministry of Social Development's report, *New Zealand Families Today* (2004a), illustrates the breadth and depth of government involvement in families' lives. Using Harding's (1996) typology, it describes the different ways government policy directly intervenes in the family including both responses to existing family patterns and more pro-active efforts to influence or control family behaviour:

> **Responding to family needs and demands**

Government responds to family needs by providing benefits and services, such as universal, free primary health care for children under six and subsidising early childhood education and childcare.

² Families Commission (2005) *Statement of Intent 2005-2006*, p. 17.

> **Supporting and substituting for families**

Government directly supports families sometimes substituting for them when they cannot fulfil their usual functions, for instance, by providing foster care for children, refuges for battered women and children, and aged care for the elderly.

> **Incentivising family behaviour**

Government gives incentives to encourage certain types of family behaviour, for instance, it rewards workforce participation by low- and middle-income families with financial payments.

> **Enforcing family responsibilities**

Government enforces family responsibilities especially with respect to family safety, for example, it holds parents responsible for their children's well-being and aims to prevent and address family violence, child abuse and neglect through the justice system, legislation and social services.

> **Defining family relationships**

In addition, and fundamentally, government defines family relationships and establishes the boundaries of the family through key legislation, such as the Civil Unions, Recognition of Relationship and Care of Children Acts, and through the statistical categorisation and collection that informs various policies.³

Families and public policies interact in dynamic ways. Policies in areas seemingly unrelated to families such as tertiary education, employment law or tax rules may have indirect effects on family formation, family functioning and family living standards (see Jacobsen et al. 2004:78-9). The tertiary student loan scheme is one example of a public policy that does not explicitly take the family into account but nonetheless may have indirect impact on family formation. This loan scheme encourages individuals to take out loans to fund the tertiary study that is considered vital to building a knowledge-based economy. However, this scheme may inadvertently create disincentives for family formation if former students delay childbearing, which is associated with financial costs, in order to pay off their loans. Moreover, the student loan scheme has been shown to have a gendered impact on the family, since women will take considerably longer than men to pay back their loans if they take time out of the paid labour force to have children (see Ehrhardt 2002). In contrast to the student loan scheme, the student allowance benefit, which affects loan levels,⁴ expressly takes families into account by assuming that young people are financially reliant on their parents until age 25.⁵

Government policies have both positive and negative impacts on New Zealand families. The challenge for policy-makers is to be able to anticipate and understand the potential impacts of policies on families in order to make informed policy decisions. Crucially, to avoid any negative impacts of policies, policy analysts need to be aware that policies can have *different* impacts on *different* families. New Zealand families are increasingly diverse with respect to family form, and relationships within the family. Based on the Christchurch Health and Development longitudinal study it is expected that at least a third of all children will experience three family forms by the age of nine: typically a two biological parent family, a single-parent family and a re-partnered or step/blended family (Fergusson et al. 1984). Moreover, Statistics New Zealand projects that single-parent families will constitute approximately 35 percent of families with dependent children by 2021.⁶

³ This latter form of government intervention in families was not part of Harding's original typology but is consistent with its purpose of outlining the ways government directly influences families.

⁴ Individuals are only eligible for a student loan to cover living expenses when they are not simultaneously receiving a student allowance.

⁵ Other benefits, such as the Domestic Purposes Benefit, consider the age of dependent children to be 18 years and under.

⁶ See the June 2005 statistical projection, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/info-releases/nat-fam-hh-proj-info-releases.htm>.

The roles and responsibilities of families are also undergoing change as the state reduces its support in some areas and due to increases in the paid working time of many families. Yet not all families offer the same degree of nurturing and economic support to individual members. Further, even when policies do address family issues they may be designed with one type of family in mind — a traditional male breadwinner family, a sole-parent family or a dual-earner family — rather than appreciating the diversity of families. As a result, policies may not deliver on all of their intended outcomes.

Sometimes public policies may have unintended consequences for families. For example, until 2005 the policy on residential care for older people provided government assistance to cover the costs of this care only to those who had income and assets below a minimal threshold.⁷ Effectively the policy required individuals over the age of 65 to draw down their assets, including their home, before receiving any financial assistance. This policy resulted in some adverse impacts on family members. It required partners to contribute their income from paid employment towards the cost of their partner's care, thus creating a disincentive for them to be employed. In addition, it created pressures on and incentives for family members, mostly daughters, to continue caring for parents to preserve family assets, despite their physical need to be in residential care. To the extent that the policy threatened family inheritances and the intergenerational transfer of assets, it resulted in perverse behaviour by some families to protect these assets and maximise the receipt of government assistance — for instance by setting up family trusts. The negative consequences of this policy could have been avoided from the outset had families and individuals as family members been explicitly considered in the policy development process.

Scholars and practitioners point out that the family impacts of policy need to be analysed just as the impacts of public policies on the economy and the environment are systematically considered. There are already mechanisms within New Zealand government intended to address policy from the perspective of gender equity, child and youth well-being, ethnic diversity and Māori. However, while these approaches may improve policy outcomes for those population-specific groups they are not necessarily family-centred in their focus. Indeed, a whole-child approach to policy intended to produce better outcomes for children is an important part of a family-centred perspective. However, a family-centred perspective demands that all family members as well as the relationships and potential conflicts between them are taken into account when considering the best possible policy options.

In sum, the core task of family-centred policy analysis is to predict and assess the ongoing impacts of public policies on families. Done well, this analysis can highlight the role of families in the effective implementation of policy. It can also suggest options for ensuring positive outcomes are achieved across family living standards, family functioning and family formation. However, policy impacts on families are typically not anticipated or well understood by policy-makers whose focus is for the most part on individual citizens, clients, workers or homogeneous household economic units. Methodologies for family-centred policy analysis need to be employed in a general policy environment where outcomes for families rather than individuals are more central to decision-making processes. I turn now to a discussion of the conceptual issues associated with defining New Zealand families and using the family rather than the individual or household as the basis of policy analysis.

⁷ The threshold was \$15,000 for a single person and \$30,000 for a couple. This policy was revised by the Social Security (Long-term Residential Care) Amendment Act 2004, which came into effect on 1 July 2005.

CONCEPTUALISING THE FAMILY

The New Zealand family is a dynamic social institution continually subject to change. It has no historic or universal meaning. However, the universality of the family is widely accepted by New Zealanders even while it takes many forms in today's society. In the past the family was as much an economic unit cemented by formal, objective blood or marriage ties as an emotional unit based on intimate relations. But, increasingly, the family is constituted by subjective ties that bind "together people who live in separate households for part or all of the time, people who have legal links or people who choose to belong together" (Silva and Smart 1999:7). Consequently, Silva and Smart suggest that we conceive of families in terms of *what they do* — sharing resources, caring, responsibilities and obligations — not the particular organisational form they take.

New Zealand law seeks to be "relatively neutral" with respect to the kinds of social relationships that constitute a family (Ministry of Social Development 2004a:77). It recognises de facto and de jure relationships by cohabitation and marriage, relationships between same sex and opposite sex couples, biological and adopted children, single, two-parent and extended families. The family in the *Families Commission Act 2003* includes "a group of people related by marriage, blood or adoption, an extended family, two or more persons living together as a family, and a whānau or other culturally recognised family group". In some but not all cases, government policies take into consideration extended families, typically in the case of Māori whānau.

Whānau is a wider concept than the traditional nuclear family. Belonging to a Māori whānau often involves living in a multi-generational household where, for example, several whānau members may share the parental responsibility for raising children. Whānau provides for the caring needs of individuals but it also gives Māori a sense of identity and belonging (Ministry of Social Development 2004a:105). For Māori, the physical, social and spiritual well-being of a child is inextricably related to the sense of belonging to a wider whānau group.⁸ In the New Zealand policy-making context, the concept of whānau poses a number of challenges, including which groups the concept covers, just Māori or non-Māori as well.⁹ Supporting Māori cultural identity and self-determination may require a distinctive approach to achieving social and economic outcomes. Taking whānau into account may mean government has to recognise that a collective group rather than just individual parents has responsibility for and claims on dependent children. This has implications for who is eligible for family-based government benefits and who can participate in legal processes concerning families.

Legal and government definitions of family relationships are continually evolving in New Zealand in order to take account of changing social and cultural norms and subjective definitions of the family. The new legislation recognising non-marital, civil unions of same sex and opposite sex couples is a recent example of the normative evolution in our conception of the family. Yet without careful, family-centred analysis, public policy will be less able to identify and respond to many of the new relationships that define families, such as shared parenting arrangements across households, families of choice, step- or blended families.

⁸ Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare (1998).

⁹ Statistics New Zealand used to use whānau rather than household as a unit for measuring the Māori population. For a discussion, see Callister (2004).

The New Zealand Census and the Survey of Family, Income and Employment (SoFIE)¹⁰ are two sources of statistics on New Zealand families.¹¹ Both surveys use standard classifications that assume the family is household-based or co-resident at the time of the survey and do not provide an indication of family connections that extend beyond households.¹² Measures of poverty are also based on households rather than on families. This classification nominally distinguishes between households and families, for example, by reporting where there is more than one family in a household and by excluding single or unrelated persons in a household from the family category. But it cannot take into account actual family processes and functions such as the distribution of resources within and across households.¹³ It also does not measure whānau care arrangements, where a family nucleus may not be present (exemplifying what the Ministry of Social Development (2004a:105-7) states is a “lack of commitment in the way whānau issues are treated across government”).¹⁴ Further, the surveys do not distinguish between biological, step-, adopted or foster relationships between “parents” and “children”.¹⁵ This gap between the realities of family life and the statistics designed to capture them raises problems for the accuracy of the data and the effectiveness of policy targeting based upon them.

In addition to the assumption that the family unit is based on co-residence, statistical descriptions of the New Zealand family define it primarily as an economic unit rather than a pattern of care arrangements (involving both financial and time commitments). For example, the Economic Living Standards Index (ELSI) developed by the Ministry of Social Development measures living standards using an individual unit of analysis (and individual responses) to assess the living standards of the “economic family unit”. In the ELSI definition a family is “a person who is financially independent or a group of people who usually reside together and are financially interdependent according to current social norms” (Krishnan et al. 2002:13). This definition assumes that the members of the economic family unit “have a broadly common standard of living” (2002:18). Yet it is possible that the living standards of individuals, children and adults, within an “economic family unit” could differ depending on family type and on the distribution

¹⁰ The Survey of Family, Income and Employment (SoFIE) is an eight-year longitudinal study designed to track the changes in the composition, income and employment of families and to provide data that can explain the factors influencing those changes. The survey began in October 2002 and the results from the first year to September 2003 have been published.

¹¹ The sampling design of the survey data raises issues of the reliability and validity of the data. Typically the household is the sampling unit and one adult in each household is selected as the survey respondent to represent all members in the household or family unit taken together. It is possible that the data could vary if individuals in the household responded to the survey independently and/or if another adult, for instance of a different gender, was selected as the survey respondent.

¹² The statistical definition of the family is based on the family nucleus: “a couple, with or without child(ren), or one parent and their child(ren), all of whom have usual residence together in the same household. The children do not have partners or children of their own living in the household.” (Statistics New Zealand 1999:9). Thus, in both the Census and the SoFIE, children are dependents only if they live in the same household as the parent.

The statistical definition of the household for Census purposes is “one or more people usually resident in the same dwelling... It can contain one or more families or no families at all, [for example], a person living alone.”

There is no one-to-one relationship between households and families. In the 2002-2003 SoFIE there were more families (1,651,000) than households (1,377,000) recorded. This means that some families are living in multi-family households although the nature of the relationship between those families in the same household is not clear. For a discussion of the rationale and acknowledgement of the limitations of measuring families in the 2006 Census see the section on families and households in *2006 Census: Preliminary Views on Content*, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2006-census/content-development.htm>.

¹³ SoFie records the type and amount of “other income” received by a family but it does not record the income source, which may be, for instance, a family member in another household. The Household Economic Survey is consistent with SoFIE and collects type and amount of income but does not identify whether or not a family member in another household made the income transfer.

¹⁴ A household comprising an elderly woman, her adult nephew and niece who are members of her whānau, would not be included in family statistics (Statistics New Zealand *nd*, Issues Paper: Families and collection of family data).

¹⁵ The Australian equivalent to SoFIE — HILDA — does contain information on the nature of relationships within households and is therefore able to distinguish between step/blended families and biological families.

of resources within the family.¹⁶ At the very least, sensitivity to family diversity should lead analysts to want to test out this assumption. Understanding inequalities within and across families is essential for measuring policy impacts, though it requires better information than is currently collected by government (Mayoux 2004).

A number of gaps in the existing household-based data on New Zealand families have been identified.¹⁷ Comprehensive cross-sectional and longitudinal data on families are crucial for predicting the impacts of public policies on families. New data are needed to develop informed public policies that recognise the changing dimensions and diversity of families. For instance, existing household surveys do not identify the wide range of contemporary family structures. But these data are needed in order to determine the factors that influence family functioning and outcomes for family members. Family dynamics, transitions and arrangements for the care of children are currently not well captured in existing data although they have significant implications for policy need and targeting. For example, the situation of a sole parent with no financial support from her ex partner is very different from one who receives significant support with care and resources — yet both are currently treated as single-parent households. There is evidence that outcomes for children of biological parents differ from those of step/blended families — yet our statistical collections make no distinctions in the relationships between parents and children. Similarly, the prevalence of cross-household care arrangements of children/older family members will have an impact on demands on health and welfare services. Accurate family-based statistics are needed to be able to anticipate those demands and develop appropriate policy responses.¹⁸

Some of the gaps in our data and information about New Zealand families will be addressed by the new families survey to be conducted by Statistics New Zealand in 2008 and the new longitudinal study on children in their families led by the Ministry of Social Development. However, there are other, existing forms of data that could be redesigned and analysed from a family perspective. For example, Statistics New Zealand and the Ministry of Women's Affairs' 1999 Time Use Survey was intended to provide better information about how people spend their time. Another Time Use Survey is planned as part of the Programme of Official Statistics that Statistics New Zealand is undertaking. One objective of the Time Use Survey was to assess the relative paid and unpaid work contribution of women compared with men. Although the survey uses a household-based definition of families,¹⁹ with the addition of some family-specific descriptive questions and a sample size large enough to make subgroup analysis robust, it could provide information that helps analysts better understand the contemporary diversity of care arrangements across family types. Such new data would strengthen the evidence base for family-centred policy-making.

THE FAMILY AS A UNIT OF ANALYSIS IN PUBLIC POLICY

The changing boundaries and increasing diversity of New Zealand families makes them a moving target for public policy; difficult to adequately or comprehensively address

¹⁶ International research in developing countries reveals strong correlation and causation between increases in a mother's standard of living and child(ren)'s well-being. This finding is gender-specific and does not imply the same for a father's standard of living (Sen 1999; World Bank 1995). Greater gender equality within families in developed countries may limit the generalisability of this research. However, it does shed doubt on the plausibility of treating the family as a homogeneous economic unit and all family members as economic equals.

¹⁷ See the Statistics New Zealand (2004) review of social statistics that recognises the gaps in family statistics and suggests strategies for filling these gaps in the short to medium term.

¹⁸ Statistics New Zealand acknowledges the limitations in family data and is undertaking a review to gain a better understanding of policy need and the policy implications of current data gaps.

¹⁹ Family types within households recorded are couple only, two-parent with children under and over 18, single-parent with children under and over 18.

given existing methodologies, especially those that use the conventional, individual unit of analysis. Theories that may be appropriate for describing and explaining individual behaviour may not be applicable to groups (Small 2005:331).²⁰ Thus, there are conceptual gains to be made as well as challenges associated with using families rather than individuals as the basis of policy analysis.

Families as well as individuals make decisions that interact with public policies (Jacobsen et al. 2004:81). Given this, it is crucial to understand how families make decisions and how these choices shape individual behaviour. For example, research starting from a family-centred perspective could inform public policy about education. Families provide a primary learning environment for young children. The socialisation that occurs around learning in families provides the foundation for children's learning at school and beyond. Further, families make decisions about the education of individual children and influence the education decisions of family members. New Zealand educational research reveals family characteristics to be strongly correlated with a child's educational outcomes (Biddulph et al. 2003). Although this research does not provide causal arguments, it points to the significance of the family in achieving a key outcome of government policy and, therefore, the need for research on family — not merely individual — behaviour with respect to education.

Conventional policy analysis based on the assumption of the rational choice-making individual provides much insight into human behaviour. However, when we move to the family level of analysis, it becomes apparent that this assumption is less useful since it cannot always account for decisions that are made in the relational, not unitary, context of the family. For example, family members' decisions are conditioned not only by a rational calculation of the financial costs and benefits, they are shaped by "affective moral rationalities", that is, their connections to others and the prevailing norms, identities and information networks within the family, community and society. For example, a mother's decision whether or not to return to paid work following the birth of a child depends on several factors. These factors include her identity as a mother and worker, job opportunities, her individual and family income, the costs of childcare as well as her partner's preferences and the division of unpaid work within the (extended) family. To take another example, an unemployed person's prospects of securing employment may be more affected by the degree of support and encouragement in their family environment than by financial disincentives such as a reduction of benefit income. When the family rather than the individual is the unit of analysis the social norms and moral responsibilities that condition human behaviour come into view. As such, a family-centred analysis is likely to produce richer, albeit less parsimonious, explanations for social and economic outcomes.

Focusing on the average individual masks the diversity of family experiences and family structures as they interact with various public policies. An example taken from the international research on work/life/family balance illustrates this point. Gerson and Jacobs (2001, 2004) investigated the working time of employees in the United States over 30 years. They found that while the average number of hours in the working week had not increased for the average individual worker, when analysed in terms of households with married couples (with or without children) and single parents, the "average family" work hours had increased greatly. This is a consequence of the expansion in the overall proportion of households that fit the dual-parent, dual-earner or single-parent, single-earner pattern (compared with the proportion of households fitting the traditional male breadwinner, nuclear family pattern) (2004:43). The study

²⁰ In social science, attributing aggregate group characteristics to individual members of the group is referred to as an "ecological fallacy" since it involves slippage in the level of analysis used.

revealed remarkable diversity among families, however. Male breadwinner families registered 45 hours of paid work per week whereas dual-earner couples worked around 80 hours for pay per week.²¹ But the individual unit of analysis masked these important differences among families with respect to paid working time (those who are “work-rich” and “work-poor” (cf. Callister 2005). The upshot of this research is that many families have less non-working time even if the working time of individuals has remained relatively unchanged. This finding suggests that there could be similar gains from measuring other types of resources as well as time on a family level, such as financial, parenting and human capital resources.

On a practical level, the inconsistent use of individual, household and family units of analysis across government policies can send conflicting signals to citizens and may affect the take-up and outcomes of policies.²² One of the key challenges to policy analysis from a family perspective is to respond to the increasing diversity of families while also ensuring coherence in the treatment of families across policy settings (cf. Ministry of Social Development 2004a:114). For example, developing a whānau approach to family violence will differ from conventional approaches but it will nonetheless be assessed in terms of whether it generates positive outcomes for families, children, women and men.

FAMILY-CENTRED POLICY ANALYSIS AS BETTER POLICY ANALYSIS

Proponents of benefit-cost analysis consider it a theoretically sound technique for assessing the relative merits of alternative policy proposals (Broadman et al. 2000). Likewise, proponents of programme evaluation employing quasi-experimental research designs consider their approach to be better than other approaches that might be used to determine programme effectiveness (Cook and Campbell 1979). The common application of both benefit-cost analysis and quantitative evaluation techniques speaks to their perceived value for generating usable, policy-relevant knowledge. However, these approaches have some limitations from a family perspective. In the case of benefit-cost analysis, features of the technique that make it so appealing — such as the reduction of all policy impacts to a common metric and the calculation of aggregate social benefits — are at odds with the purpose of analysing the differential impact of policy on diverse types of families. From a methodological perspective, the evaluation of outcomes for individual living standards cannot be generalised to outcomes for family living standards, including specific types of families, for instance.

This report considers family-centred policy analysis to be one way of addressing the omissions and limits of conventional policy analysis and evaluation informed by an individual-based microeconomic approach. As Jacobsen et al. (2004:82) argue, a multidisciplinary approach to policy “is likely to show less variance in its outcome than one that relies on a single approach”. Family-centred policy analysis aims to improve a government’s capacity to respond to diverse families and so to improve social and economic outcomes for families. Considerable benefits can be gained from

²¹ Most international studies find that the rise in maternal employment has not significantly reduced maternal time in unpaid care activities, but seems to be associated with small increases in married fathers’ time in such activities (Budig and Folbre 2004). That is to say, when mothers engage in paid work their overall paid and unpaid working time increases and is not compensated for by childcare or contracting out housework. Evidence from time diaries between 1965 and 1998 suggests that as mothers increase their paid employment, contributing to increases in family paid working time, they reduce the time spent sleeping and doing housework rather than in activities with children (Bianchi 2000).

²² For example, the inconsistency between the New Zealand taxation system based on individual income and the income support system based on family income.

taking a family-centred approach throughout the policy process, in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies. In the implementation process for instance, feedback from families on how policies affect them and networks of relationships with service providers working with families help to achieve policy objectives.

Making families central to the policy process increases the demand for good empirical research on families. Although it is not possible to control for all extenuating factors in a complex social environment, with appropriate caution, research evidence on families can help to eliminate ineffective policy options and identify “best practice” policies. In this way, family-centred policy analysis can be seen as integral to the development of high-quality, evidence-based policy analysis across New Zealand government. The State Services Commission (2003) and leading policy analysts have identified a need for the specific policy outputs of government agencies to be logically connected through empirical evidence (and causal theory) to the strategic objectives or outcomes sought by government (Chapman 1995:17).

The effort to develop methods of family policy analysis is consistent with the State Services Commission’s “Managing for Outcomes” (2005) and “Pathfinder” (2003) programmes that seek to improve the capacity of government agencies to identify and deliver the policy interventions that best contribute to desired government outcomes and objectives. Methods of family policy analysis developed by the Families Commission could assist initiatives to manage for “shared outcomes” within the central government as “agencies share responsibility for and actively collaborate towards a common outcome” (Managing for Shared Outcomes Development Group, 2004:3). A family perspective on policy contributes to addressing the need for good evidence-based policy analysis by strengthening the conceptual and the empirical bases of policy analysis.

As well as contributing to efforts to improve the evidence base, causal logics and evaluative culture of policy interventions, the movement toward family-centred policy analysis is a response to international trends. Comparable institutions to the New Zealand Families Commission such as the Vanier Institute in Canada and the National Family and Parenting Institute in the United Kingdom have played a leading role in spearheading the analysis of public policies and their impacts from the perspective of families. In the American states there have also been concerted efforts for three decades to implement family-centred policy analysis through the use of family impact assessment seminars. (See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of this method.)

BUILDING ON EXISTING METHODS

In response to the limitations of conventional policy analysis, alternative methods for assessing the impacts of new policies have been developed. In New Zealand, methods that have gained currency include gender analysis, environmental impact assessment, social impact assessment and health impact assessment (Ministry of Women’s Affairs nd, 1996; Public Advisory Health Committee 2004). These methods are discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four.

There is also a range of tools designed for sub-population groups in New Zealand that offer precedents and lessons for family-centred policy analysis insofar as they move beyond the aggregate individual unit of analysis. For example, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs developed a gender analysis framework in the mid-1990s (nd, 1996, 2001). Similarly, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs has developed the Pacific analysis framework (1998). More recently, the Ministry of Social Development has offered

a whole-child approach (2002, 2004b) and youth development approach to policy (2002).²³ Like a family-centred perspective, these two approaches stress the importance of analysing the individual and policy impacts within multiple institutional environments.

Building on these approaches, the Office of Ethnic Affairs developed ethnic perspectives guidelines for agencies interacting with ethnic groups and on issues relevant to ethnic communities. Commonly, these frameworks developed for sub-population groups suggest key questions to be asked at each stage of policy analysis in order to overcome any bias in policy development and to ensure that any differential impacts of policies on specific groups are anticipated or observed, and rectified. Like family-centred analysis they encourage policy analysts to make explicit the assumptions behind the rationale for policies and to assess a wide range of impacts including those that are not easily economically quantifiable. These frameworks also set out the strategic policy outcomes for each group to serve as benchmarks against which policies can be evaluated. They also include various general guidelines for policy, guidelines for consultation with stakeholder communities and responsiveness guidelines for ongoing self-evaluation of policy effectiveness.

The subsequent chapters in this report review four sets of methodological tools for analysing public policy impacts relevant to family policy analysis. Chapter Two considers the contribution of microeconomic analysis and concepts. Chapter Three explores gendered approaches to policy analysis. Chapter Four reviews non-family-specific impact assessment approaches, including social impact assessment and health impact assessment. Chapter Five examines family impact assessment, a family-specific tool of analysis used to assess the impact of policy on families in some peer countries. Chapter Six draws out what can be gained from these four methodologies in building a methodological approach specifically focused on predicting, rather than measuring, the impact of government policies on New Zealand families. It suggests how these tools for predicting policy impacts can be adapted for the New Zealand context, their limitations and circumstances of applicability.

²³ The whole-child approach is outlined in the New Zealand Agenda for Children (2002). This report recommends conducting child-impact analysis of public policies.

CHAPTER TWO

microeconomic analysis

This chapter explores how basic models from microeconomics can inform the analysis of families and policies impacting on families. The model of choice will be used to explore how the concepts of budget constraint, marginalism, opportunity-cost and trade-offs can be usefully applied to the analysis of family economics. The chapter considers how far and in what ways microeconomic analysis based on the individual unit of analysis can advance our understanding of the family. This analysis helps to review the relationship between market processes and family decision-making. The chapter also reviews the ways that benefit-cost analysis and the equity/efficiency trade-off framework can usefully inform policy analysis of families.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Microeconomic analysis consists of both theoretical concepts and methodological tools that can be used to predict and assess the impact of policy on families. Neoclassical economic models make simplifying theoretical assumptions about human behaviour in order to facilitate analysis and guide the choice of policy interventions. Crucially, economists usually consider individuals, including individual family members, to be rational choice-making actors who engage in implicit analysis of the costs and benefits of any particular course of action. Through this rational calculation, individuals become aware of the trade-offs between different choices and respond to them in predictable ways. The implication of this theory is that all policies generate benefits and costs to which people respond rationally.

By assuming that all behaviour is rational behaviour, economists are able to predict the impact of policies on individuals. But can the impact of policies on families be predicted using the individual as the unit of analysis? And can family behaviour also be assumed to be rational? Economic theory typically treats the family as a self-maximising unit that makes rational choices just like an individual does (Becker 1981). These choices result in the efficient allocation of time and pooling of resources among family members. More sophisticated game-theoretic economic models treat the family as a bargaining unit. These models distinguish the inputs, investment and consumption of different family members. Like gender analysis reviewed in the next chapter, they do not assume the outcomes of family decision-making to be always efficient. However, this chapter explores the benefits of the simpler economic model of choice for analysing the family impacts of public policies since that is the model most commonly used to inform policy analysis.

Economic analysis models the relationship between income, price and utility and can be appropriately used for understanding impacts of public policies on family decision-making about income, expenditure and the allocation of time. Families seek to maximise their (single) utility subject to a *budget constraint*, which is dependent on the time and income available to the adult family members. Thus, families make rational decisions about their income and expenditure, their labour supply and time allocation and their human capital accumulation in parents and children (Persson and Jonung 1997). For example, a couple may implicitly weigh up the marginal benefits of having a child based not only on the direct costs of bearing and raising a child but also on the costs of opportunities foregone, such as the loss of income and human capital accumulation when parents are required to give up some degree of paid work in order to care for their children.

Families often face a direct trade-off between time spent caring for a family member and time spent earning income in the labour market. Persson and Jonung (1997:18) argue that, due to increasing involvement of both men and women in both paid market work and unpaid care work, “changes in wages, relative prices, taxes, social security programmes etc are likely to have more direct and immediate effects on the time allocation and household production of households”. Government policy interventions can have an impact on families in two ways. They can alter the direct costs for families, for instance by lowering the price of health and education services. But they can also reduce (or increase) the *opportunity costs* and alter the *trade-offs* associated with raising children by providing policies that allow parents to combine work and family caregiving. These policies might include the provision of subsidised childcare, after-school programmes, and support for flexible employment policies (see Folbre and Bittman 2004). In addition, such policies can also change the relative incentives for different family members with respect to paid employment and/or raising children.

Economic theory interprets public policy in terms of its incentive effects. By changing the costs and benefits that accrue to a given behaviour, government policies can affect the incentives and disincentives for engaging in that behaviour. Government policies can alter incentives through subsidies and taxes that change the price of the good or service or by supplying goods and services through non-market mechanisms. For example, the New Zealand government's policy of subsidising general practitioners to provide free health care to under-6-year-old children lowers the price to families of that service and aims to affect the uptake of primary healthcare. More generally, through altering relative prices for a variety of goods and services, government policies can expand or restrict choices available to families. In so doing, it creates incentives for families to adjust their purchasing behaviour. Individual family members can be expected to respond to such policy incentives. Over time their behaviour is predicted to result in changes to the well-being of families. The policy effects can be profound, and can affect the structure, functioning and livelihoods of families. For example, considerable research evidence comparing policies across countries suggests that family policy and economic incentives play a distinct role in family decisions about the organisation of care for small children (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Gustafsson and Stafford 1997; Illmakunnas 1997).

Microeconomic analysis as a theoretical framework has broad implications for understanding the impact of public policy on families. First, it suggests that government policies can directly affect individual and family behaviour if they are designed to create *explicit* incentives or disincentives. The Norwegian "use it or lose it" parental leave policy is an example of such incentive-based policy. The policy has been designed to promote the uptake of paid parental leave on the part of both mothers and fathers. Offering an additional month of paid leave to a family so long as it is the father who takes that leave is the incentive for achieving the policy objective. This policy has been designed to promote greater family stability and well-being as well as to promote greater equality across society in terms of outcomes for men and women.²⁴

Second, economic analysis suggests that even if government policy is not explicitly designed to incentivise behaviour, it may nonetheless have *unintended* incentive effects on individual and family decision-making. For example, the introduction of a law mandating joint custody of children following divorce in Sweden was found to have a negative impact on family stability. Unintentionally, the law removed the incentive for individuals to stay in a marriage in order to maintain contact with their children. The result of the policy was an unintended increase in family dissolution (Olah 2001). Some economists and others argue that government provision of income support for sole parents with dependents, such as New Zealand's Domestic Purposes Benefit, creates incentives for family breakdown and the formation of sole-parent families (see Sanderson and Jacobsen 2003). Economists have also predicted that the introduction of a no-fault divorce law increases family breakdown and dissolution.²⁵ However, the research evidence supporting these incentive effects is contested.

Third, the economic concept of marginalism can be helpful in assessing the relative benefits of alternative policies for families. Thinking in marginalist terms encourages the policy analyst to consider where an incremental fixed investment of resources might have the greatest positive social impact. For instance, would funding a national alcohol prevention programme to combat alcohol abuse be the best allocation of an additional \$10 million budget dollars given that teenage binge alcoholism causes many tragic,

²⁴ Swedish research finds that in all families except those where couples have not cohabited before marriage, the uptake of paid parental leave by fathers results in a lower incidence of family dissolution (Olah 2001).

²⁵ Economists argue that by making it costly and difficult to abandon one's partner, the social and legal institution of marriage encourages investment in marriage and children. When divorce is easy and costless we can expect to see an increase in divorce and a decrease in marriage, as well as higher rates of employment and lower fertility among women (see Becker 1981).

highly publicised deaths each year? Or would it be better to target that extra government expenditure for an early childhood intervention programme for under-3-year-olds in a low socio-economic area that may improve social outcomes over the long term? The choice should be based on a calculation of the marginal utility of the different policy interventions for achieving stated family outcomes.

In sum, economic concepts such as budget constraint, opportunity costs, trade-offs, and marginalism help us to understand how individual family members make decisions and how government interventions can impact on family behaviour.

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

Microeconomic analysis involves some well-honed tools of analysis that are useful in conducting family-centred analyses of public policies. Other economic-related tools such as micro-simulation and future scenario modelling may also be useful but are outside the scope of this report.

benefit-cost analysis

Governments routinely use benefit-cost calculations within a formal analysis framework to guide their decisions. Individuals also use benefit-cost analysis although in much more informal ways. Government analysts explicitly consider whether benefits of a policy outweigh the costs over a given timeframe and if this will result in better outcomes than alternative or existing policies. They take into account short- versus long-term benefits and the relative certainty or risk of particular costs and benefits. Moreover, using benefit-cost analysis they design policies to make the costs of some actions higher and/or the benefits of other actions more attractive. For instance, in order to achieve the government outcome of a lower teenage pregnancy rate, policy-makers seek to provide greater educational and work opportunities to girls, particularly those from target groups, in order to increase the opportunity costs of becoming pregnant (see Zimmerman 1988).

At the same time, individuals implicitly consider which course of action to take based on an assessment of their relative costs and benefits. For example, a sole parent and recipient of the Domestic Purposes Benefit may consider whether and to what extent to participate in the paid labour force based on the costs and benefits of this engagement to his or her family livelihood and functioning. Governments often seek to lower the direct costs of the transition to paid work, such as transport and childcare, for such individuals. But depending on the benefit abatement regime the income from paid work may or may not increase family income in the short term. In the long term, human capital accumulation through labour force participation or further education and training will likely increase the sole parent's income or potential income. However, individuals do not have full information and not all costs and benefits can be easily calculated. Individuals make their decisions based on a range of factors including identity and relationship considerations as well as more instrumental motivations such as income. In this sense, benefit-cost analysis has some limitations as a framework for understanding individual and family choices.

efficiency/equity trade-off exercise

As well as using benefit-cost analysis, policy analysts can assess the efficiency and equity trade-offs of alternative policies to calculate their actual and potential family impacts. Economic analysis has been criticised for privileging efficiency concerns, however this need not be the case. Gustafsson and Stafford (1997) recommend

analysing resource allocations in any given policy area affecting families from the perspective of whether there is a trade-off between the equity and efficiency goals of the policy. Some policies are motivated primarily by equity considerations, ie more equal income distribution and promoting gender equity, whereas other policies are designed mainly to address efficiency in the economy, ie labour market supply and human capital accumulation.

The trade-off exercise considers the efficiency effects of policies designed for equity reasons and conversely the equity effects of policies based on an efficiency rationale. It maps out the potential trade-offs of resource allocation by parents within the family (“intra-family”) and the potential trade-offs of redistributions made by government (“inter-family”). These trade-offs tend to affect relative outcomes between sibling children, between children and parents and between parents (typically between men and women). Analysts can use this exercise to help them choose between alternative policies, taking into account their efficiency and equity impacts within families and between families.

Gustafsson and Stafford (1997) use the example of childcare policies to demonstrate the efficiency/equity trade-off exercise. Here I discuss one dimension of this exercise, the resource allocation from parent to child, specifically from the mother to the child given mothers’ historic greater time investment in their children. There is a direct trade-off between the time used by mothers in the care of children and the time used by mothers participating in the labour force. As human capital becomes more important in economic development, and in determining living standards, the productivity-enhancing arguments for women’s labour market participation become more salient. If trained caregivers in early childhood centres are shown to be as — if not more — effective than many stay-at-home mothers in nurturing child development, then a crucial question arises. That is, “What mix of the mother’s time and an expert’s time is most efficient at different ages of the child?” (p. 145). If both child development and current GNP would rise by “the substitution of specialist’s time for mother’s time, then there is a case for subsidised childcare” (p. 146). Under these conditions, publicly provided early childhood education could create a living standards transfer to the parents of such children. Such an intervention would free up parental time for gaining more education or devoting more time to careers. Over the long term, this could increase family income, create a more equitable income distribution between mothers and fathers, and also affect the income patterns of families with dependent children compared with other households (p. 151).

More broadly, these efficiency arguments need to be considered alongside arguments concerning the pursuit of equity. Consider, for example, the pursuit of equity between mothers and their children, and between men and women within the family and in the labour market. A mother who sacrifices her own human capital development may end up in a disadvantaged position relative to her children and relative to the father of her children over her life course. This disadvantage is likely to be exacerbated if the parents separate. The mother’s transfer of her time resources to her children also results in gender inequity. Women often receive lower wages than men of equivalent education and background due to the interruption in their careers after a period outside of the workforce caring for children. This is thought to be due not only to women’s smaller lifetime investment in workplace human capital but also to the lack of recognition of women’s transferable skills acquired through motherhood and household management, and in the gender discrimination that results when employers anticipate women’s interruptions to productivity.

APPLICABILITY FOR FAMILY-CENTRED ANALYSIS

Economic analysis provides a clear theoretical framework for predicting and testing out the potential impacts of government policies on families. Analysts can readily use concepts of opportunity cost, trade-offs, incentives and marginalism to assess the direct impacts of policies on family income and expenditure. They can also use economic analysis to reveal indirect policy impacts on family functioning, family formation and living standards. For example, a reduction in a direct cost to families such as childcare can improve family living standards. In turn, improved access to quality early childhood education may affect family functioning and the longer-term outcomes of children, since early childhood educators support parents in their efforts to bring up children and help them reach their potential. Similarly, economic analysis can estimate the effects of non-family-specific policies such as employment, housing and education policies on the opportunity costs of partnering and having children.

In addition, marginal utility calculations help analysts to decide how a policy might be targeted to ensure the greatest positive impact given a fixed investment of resources. Finally, economic models take account of the unintended consequences of government interventions on individual and family behaviour due to the changes they effect in incentive structures. For instance, an economic analysis implies that a policy targeted at a subgroup of families, depending on its size, may have unintended effects on other types of families. An economic approach makes explicit the potential trade-offs of government policies, especially policies that redistribute resources, for different types of families.

Some of the assumptions of microeconomic analysis need to be adapted if it is to be most useful for analysing the interaction between families and public policy. I suggest three adaptations in particular. First, benefit-cost analysis, while a very useful tool, may not consider all the possible costs and benefits of a given policy since many of these costs and benefits are not easily measured, observed or foreseen. Thus, for the purpose of family impact analysis government benefit-cost analyses need to factor in the provision of unpaid care work outside of the market economy. This could be done by giving family provision of care a dollar value based on the opportunity cost of labour supply and by drawing on data from the New Zealand Time Use Survey to estimate the quantity of care.

There are other invisible family costs and benefits of policies. Economic models assume that families are contained within single households. As a result, economic analysis neglects the extent of family support and parenting across households. This analysis is not helped by the lack of data and research knowledge on the level of support individuals receive from their families and extended families. However, this support matters a great deal for family living standards and functioning, specifically for the capacity of families to provide material support for their dependents and advance their economic position. Intra- and inter-family transfers across households could be estimated by revising the “other income” category in Statistics New Zealand’s Survey of Family, Income and Employment. Currently the “other income” category captures type and amount of income but does not identify whether or not a family member in another household made the income transfer.

Second, microeconomic analysis privileges instrumental motivations over altruistic or socially embedded motivations for behaviour. As such, it cannot fully explain the nature and dynamics of decision-making in families where values other than efficiency, such as norms of solidarity and fairness, are important. Power and inequality also typically abide in families. Household bargaining models address some of these dynamics through their

analysis of intra-household resource allocation. However, economic analysis provides only a limited explanation of why an educated, high-income-earning woman might stay in a marriage when her partner beats her and her children. The opportunity costs for this behaviour given the information likely available to such a woman seem to be excessively high from a rational choice perspective. Similarly, neoclassical economists are puzzled by the United States' research finding that women file for divorce more often than men despite bearing greater economic costs as a result of separation (Jacobsen et al. 2004:54). This example underscores the limitations of the neoclassical form of economic analysis when confronted with a complex array of motivations, social norms and cultural differences shaping behaviour within and across families. Thus, economic modelling that uses a single family utility and budget constraint is more useful for predicting impacts on family living standards than on family formation and family functioning.²⁶

Third, due to its assumption of a single family utility, microeconomic analysis can underestimate the relative impacts of public policies on individual living standards depending on their position in the family. For example, a New Zealand study identified significant inequalities in individual family members' access to family income depending on gender, ethnicity, income level and whether the family included children with absent parents (Easting and Fleming 1994). Further, more sophisticated economic analysis in which individuals have separate utility functions suggests that the distribution of earnings within the family determines the distribution of expenditure (Lommerud 1997; Lundberg and Pollack 1997; Jacobsen et al. 2004:53). One of the implications of this finding is that outcomes for children may depend not merely on aggregate family resources but rather on who controls that income and expenditure. In the United Kingdom, the shift in the payment of child benefits from a tax rebate that generally accrued to the higher income-earning father to a direct payment to the mother was correlated with a substantial increase in the consumption of children's and women's items with a likely impact on child poverty (Lundberg, Pollack and Wales 1997; Ward-Batts 2000).

Conventional microeconomic analysis aggregates and holds family preferences constant across a life course, discounting the often, unequal distribution of resources among individual family members that shapes family outcomes. For the purpose of family impact analysis, this assumption needs to be revised. Game theoretic economic models are beginning to explore these intra-family bargaining issues. However, gender analysis reviewed in the next chapter provides more accessible methods and addresses the limitations of neoclassical economic models with respect to analysing the differential policy impacts on individuals depending on their family position.

²⁶ Household bargaining models in which individuals have separate utility functions that are interrelated due to the sharing of resources and desires for family outcomes may be useful in analysing family formation and functioning (see Lundberg and Pollak 1994).

CHAPTER THREE

gender policy analysis

This chapter explores gendered approaches to policy analysis and the specific policy tools developed to implement gender analysis in government. Gender policy analysis takes a relational approach to social and economic organisation and begins by disaggregating population, household and individual units of analysis by gender. Gender analysis prompts policy-makers to ask questions about how the differences between women and men as well as other relevant socio-cultural differences affect the design, take-up and outcomes of policies. Its analysis of power differentials and bargaining dynamics within families is particularly relevant to family-centred policy analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Gender policy analysis examines the differential impact of public policies on women and men due to existing gender divisions of labour, resources and power. It also considers how the nature of the relationships between women and men shape policy outcomes in both positive and negative ways. The goal of gender policy analysis is to improve gender equality by addressing and rectifying current and potential future disparities between men and women. Gender policy analysis is used cross-nationally and within New Zealand government to scrutinise and reinvent processes of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation across a range of policy issue areas (see Ministry of Women's Affairs 1996, 2001; True 2003).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender policy analysis is based on a theory of gendered social relations that includes four unique features relevant to family-based policy analysis:

- 1) it analyses the impacts of policy on both paid market and unpaid care economies;
- 2) it is based on a relational analysis of individuals embedded in significant relationships to others;
- 3) it highlights the practical needs and the strategic interests of women in the context of societal gender inequality; and
- 4) it evaluates policy outcomes from efficiency and equity perspectives. Each of these features is discussed in turn.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of gender analysis to policy is the attention it brings to the economic activities within families and households that typically do not involve monetary exchange or contracts but nonetheless provide the foundation for production in the market economy. These activities include childcare and care for the elderly and sick family members, meal preparation, housework and household management, emotional support for individuals, community work and so on. They have historically been carried out by women — rather than men — in their family roles as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. Over the life course the time men devote to this care work is estimated by researchers to be half that spent by women (Bittman 2004:225).²⁷ Conventional economic analysis has largely ignored this unpaid care work in calculating national income in part due to its implicit male bias.

Moreover, most economists have hardly been concerned with the potential double burden of paid and unpaid work on women. It has often been assumed that women can easily respond to demands for labour in the market by increasing or decreasing their paid labour while continuing to do most of the unpaid work in the family and household. Consequently, policies have been designed and implemented without an appreciation for the provision of care in households, families and communities (Bakker 1994). Yet analysing the impacts of policy on this care provision is crucially important for family-centred analysis, since individuals are largely resourced in families, and to a lesser extent in schools and workplaces.²⁸

²⁷ Fathers' weekly hours of paid and unpaid work are a fixed quantity and similar to non-fathers'. By contrast, women's allocation of time to paid and unpaid work depends greatly on whether they become mothers or not, with the greatest number of unpaid work hours associated with mothers' care of young children (Folbre and Bittman 2004).

²⁸ Bargaining between men and women within family over the distribution of care responsibilities mirrors the power dynamics of bargaining in the national polity over policies that affect the relative supply of market and non-market labour. For example, in Australia male-dominated unions typically bargain with their employers for more vacation time whereas most women workers who are also often primary caregivers report that they would prefer a shorter work week with more flexible hours (Bittman 2004:231). Parents' use of childcare accompanies increases in time both mothers and fathers spend in face-to-face activities with children (Bianchi 2000).

As well as broadening the analysis of policy impacts to include the unpaid care economy, gender analysis starts from the assumption that individuals are embedded in social relationships. Thus, gender analysis considers how individuals as members of families and communities relate to one another, and how these relationships shape individual decision-making. It does not assume that families are homogeneous or unitary in their responses to government or market interventions. The relationship between men and women is of particular salience given the historical gendered division of labour in household and market spheres and the dominance of men as heads of households. To the extent that the relative bargaining power of men and women influences the production and distribution of resources in the family (see Easting and Fleming 1994), it is crucial for understanding the impact of policy and for improving social outcomes for individual family members.

Another key dimension of gender analysis is its focus on both the practical, short-term and the strategic, long-term interests of disadvantaged women. This analysis informs policy interventions so that the immediate needs of women within unequal institutional arrangements (in the family or labour market for example) are addressed through legal rights, pay equity, reproductive choice and protection from domestic violence. But it also informs policy interventions such as educational and work/family balance initiatives that address the longer-horizon strategic interests of women in the transformation of their inequality within gender divisions of labour, resources and power. This approach could be usefully applied to inform studies of dynamic policy impacts on different types of families across different timeframes.

Finally, equity considerations are foregrounded in gender analysis since it was devised to help redress the gender inequality pervasive in society and in our public policies. However, gender specialists have frequently advanced their case for greater gender equity based on efficiency grounds. This is not merely a matter of strategy. Gender inequality creates costs for government and to society through the under-utilisation of female potential for instance. Thus, by analysing costs and benefits of policies from a gender perspective, gender analysis provides guidance on which policy options are both more equitable and more efficient, a goal that should be highly relevant to family-centred analysis also.

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

A range of specific gender analysis tools has been developed to assess the differential effects of policies on women and men. Gender analysis tools have been used to investigate direct impacts of *gender-specific public policies*, such as where a policy explicitly targeting either men or women has an indirect impact on the other group. For example, gender analysis of the New Zealand Modern Apprenticeship policy shows that it implicitly targets young men and male-dominated courses and occupations. Because the policy does not include mechanisms to increase the uptake of apprenticeships by women, it may have a potentially negative impact on equal employment opportunities and gender equality (McGregor and Gray 2003).²⁹ Similarly, analysis of the Paid Parental Leave policy reveals that it primarily targets mothers and does not encourage fathers as well as mothers to take leave (Gravitas Research and Strategy Limited 2003).³⁰ Further, by targeting women, paid parental leave reinforces the association between women workers and parental responsibility. This may in turn have indirect, adverse effects

²⁹ The Modern Apprenticeship scheme targets young people who are potential recruits. Taking a family-centred approach could improve the uptake of the scheme by targeting parents, who have a major influence on the career choices of their children, as well as young people.

³⁰ Working mothers are in the first instance eligible for paid parental leave. They may transfer their leave to the father of the child. However, both parents are not simultaneously eligible for the leave.

on fathers in the workplace seeking to balance family responsibilities (and on gender inequality in the family).

Gender analysis has also been used to investigate indirect impacts of ostensibly *gender-neutral public policies*. For example, gender analysis was conducted of policy options for retirement income developed for the New Zealand taskforce on private provision for retirement in the early 1990s. This analysis showed how private schemes tend to privilege men since they are based on employee and employer contributions and have a negative impact on most women who spend years outside the paid workforce raising children (Ministry of Women's Affairs 1996). It contributed to the retention of the New Zealand Superannuation Scheme as the preferred mode of government provision.

Three basic tools of gender analysis have been used in New Zealand to assess the differential impacts of policies on women and men; checklists, case studies and gender statements on Cabinet papers. The *checklist approach* involves prompting policy analysts to ask themselves a series of gender-specific questions at each stage of the policy process. As developed by the New Zealand Ministry of Women's Affairs (1996) and Status of Women-Canada (1996) the gender policy analysis consists of six stages:

- 1) problem identification;
- 2) defining outcomes;
- 3) developing options;
- 4) analysing options and making recommendations;
- 5) implementing decisions; and
- 6) monitoring and evaluating policies.

At each stage, analysts are prompted to consider the impact of the proposed or actual policy on women compared with men and on different groups of women according to race, ethnicity, age, disability and/or other salient within-group differences. This mainly descriptive approach to policy analysis has some limitations, however.

Despite the intention to integrate gender throughout the policy process, checklists have often been added on at the end of the process rather than used early on during the policy development stage possibly due to the lack of substantive knowledge on gender differences in non-gender-specific policy areas. In practice, this has meant the checklist questions have had little influence over predetermined policies and policy proposals. Moreover, the generic questions downplay the complexity of gender analysis and the policy process as well as the expertise in gender analysis required to effectively conduct gender policy analyses (Saulnier et al. 1999:7). To be more useful, Saulnier et al. (1999) argue that certain stages of the policy process must be targeted (for example, the problem definition and policy development stages). Effectiveness of the checklist tool for gender or family policy analysis greatly depends on the information or research evidence used to answer the questions at each of the policy process stages. If analysts do not have the information base to answer questions, they may rely solely on their own untested assumptions about men's and women's lives and this will affect the quality of the policy advice and decisions (Lawrence 2000). However, gender-sensitive research data are not always readily available and take time to gather. Consequently, policy decisions are often not based on evidence, let alone based on gender-disaggregated research evidence.

Gender policy analysis is also conducted through case studies that show how existing policies have achieved their intended outcomes because they applied a gender perspective or how such policies could better achieve their outcomes by adopting a gender perspective. Case studies such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs' analysis

of public and private options for retirement support have been used as evidence and incentives for further gender analysis. Gender analysis of the tertiary student loan scheme and its particularly harsh impact on women, especially Māori and Pacific women, has also been effective in raising public awareness, though not in altering the policy. Gender analysis of the predicted positive impact of pay equity initiatives to reduce discrimination in remuneration on the wages of women workers relative to men workers is another example of the case study approach.

Another tool for analysing the gender impacts of public policies is the *gender implications statement* assessing the impact of proposed and existing policies and programmes on women and men. In New Zealand, since 2002 such statements have been mandatory for all papers submitted to the Cabinet Social Development Committee. The gender implications statement reports on whether gender analysis has been undertaken, and if it has not, why not. Reasons for not doing so include the lack of gender disaggregated data or gender expertise. When the gender implications of the policy proposal are significant, those findings and implications are to be incorporated throughout the body of the proposal (Cabinet Office Circular 2002).

Several criticisms have however been levelled at the statement tool in the New Zealand context as well as in Canada (see Teightsoonian 2004). They include concerns that the statement documents are secret and that the lack of transparency affects the quality of the discussion of gender issues; that the statements are too brief to identify underlying problems and causes; that they are a “demand-driven” strategy that often encourages under-resourced agencies in particular to comply with Cabinet rather than to engage with gender analysis in terms of their own mission and goals; and that the quality of the statements depends greatly on the political clout, interest and expertise of individual analysts, managers and ministries. Moreover, without effective understanding of gender issues throughout the policy ranks, formal requirements like Cabinet submission guidelines can lead to greater marginalisation of gender analysis in government (Saulnier and Skinner 1999: 9). Government officials may become cynical adopters rather than effective analysts of the gender impacts of policy.

As well as these three basic tools of gender analysis used here in New Zealand, there are some quite sophisticated tools that have been used in other countries to analyse often complex and indirect gendered impacts of policy. Here I review three methods that could potentially also be used to analyse policy impacts on different types of families.

The *gender lenses* tool is used in British Columbia. It involves two distinct lenses: a *factor gender lens* that explains the underlying systemic legal and economic causes of gender inequality and an *analytical gender lens* that asks policy analysts questions about the values they bring to their work, the sources of data and information they draw on and the diverse audiences and groups they are addressing. This tool is focused on conceptual thinking about gender differences and is designed to generate the in-depth knowledge in order to conduct effective gender analyses. These gender lenses are usually process-oriented and are used in the evaluation of policies and policy outcomes. Such a tool could be adapted to help policy analysts think conceptually about families in the problem definition and policy development stages.

Gender budget and gender revenue analyses are complicated and resource-intensive tools designed to identify differential impacts of government income and expenditures on women and men and options for addressing these impacts. Government fiscal policy has been shown to affect women and men differently since women earn less on average than men (and thus pay less tax) and are more likely to be sole parents. As a result, women tend to benefit more from government income support and less from tax cuts than men.

Budget trade-off exercises consider the gender impact of reducing budget deficits versus supporting human reproduction by analysing the impact of the welfare outcomes that result from budget cuts on economic growth. Such exercises are designed to include aspects of human development neglected by benefit-cost analysis, such as childcare, parental support and environmental quality (see Sen 1999; Barnett and Grown 2004). They explore complex feedback effects of the gendered social outcomes that result from reductions in government spending and services on rates and patterns of economic growth. Gender budget and revenue analyses usually start with hypothesised interactions and test these with data collected from aggregate economics statistics. Where there are gaps in the data or the analysis they use their incomplete findings to suggest avenues for further research. Although complex, such analyses could be useful for evaluating impacts of public expenditures on different types of families, and the impact of assumptions underlying budgetary appropriations on patterns of family formation and functioning.

The *gender analysis matrix* sets out the two-way interactions between different dimensions of gender difference and the work of a given government agency. For example, the matrix has been used to identify three entry points for analysing the gender impacts of finance policy through:

- 1) ongoing routine work (such as macroeconomic and budget management);
- 2) time-bound work (associated with structural reforms to improve the efficiency of resource use, poverty eradication, and including privatisation and deregulation policies); and
- 3) plans for future work (for example, financial sector reform and credit liberalisation).

These three distinct kinds of policy work are analysed in terms of their impacts on three dimensions of gender difference:

- 1) generational reproduction of human beings, eg the unpaid and paid care economy consisting of mainly women workers;
- 2) gender power relations as manifest in gender divisions of resources, labour, norms and institutions; and
- 3) individual women and girls compared with individual men and boys. As well as revealing gender-differentiated impacts, this matrix tool illuminates the effects of different policies and combinations of policies on the distribution of family responsibilities, with implications for family functioning and living standards. As such, it is highly relevant for analysing policy impacts on families.

APPLICABILITY TO FAMILY-CENTRED ANALYSIS

Gender policy analysis offers some important insights for family policy analysis. In many instances, families can easily replace gender as the object of analysis. Adapted to family analysis, gender analysis encourages conceptual thinking about differences in the population, and by analogy, differences among families. It asks the analyst to consider how value assumptions about families may inform or underlie policies and subsequently impact on family outcomes.

Gender analysis is a cross-cutting form of analysis. For instance, gender analysis of the costs of domestic violence shows how an issue ostensibly to do with family functioning can affect family living standards as well as family formation and dissolution (Snively 1994). Understanding the interaction between policy and family violence requires an integrated analysis, taking into account employment, justice, social welfare, health

and gender issues. As such, family-centred analysis informed by gender analysis acknowledges the linkages between impacts on living standards, family formation and the functional roles of family members.

Crucially, gender analysis can inform family-centred analysis by raising awareness of how intra-family power and inequalities affect family decision-making. Policies impact not on families as a homogeneous unit but on individuals differently positioned within families. These distributional issues have major implications for analysing the direct and indirect impacts of policies on individual and family living standards in particular.

The equity focus of gender analysis is also relevant to family impact analysis since respecting the rights of individuals within families and ensuring that they can access services and opportunities are essential to achieving good outcomes for family functioning and family living standards. Gender equity policies are associated with an improvement in family living standards. For example, pay equity for women workers in the public sector is predicted to have a positive impact on family income and living standards, particularly in families with female heads of households. It is also expected to have an impact on women's equality with men. Given the interconnected nature of gender and family relations, a family-centred analysis needs to be gender-sensitive, to improve gender equality and family outcomes.³¹

Gender analysis uses checklists and detailed case studies to show how ostensibly neutral policies have a differential impact on women and men. Rather than asking questions at each stage of the policy process, since it is a relatively new approach in New Zealand government, family-centred analysis could use checklists tailored to assess impacts on high-priority family issue areas. The Families Commission has identified eight key issues facing New Zealand families and society. Among these key issues are combating family violence, addressing family living standards and poverty, and supporting families to balance paid work, family and community commitments. A family-centred analysis informed by gender analysis prioritises these issues in screening policies since they range across policy areas and are susceptible to indirect policy impacts. Chapter Six of this report offers more specific guidance with respect to a New Zealand-specific family checklist tool.

The case study method is also highly recommended for family-centred policy analysis. Such an approach can show how explicit attention to families helped a non-family-specific policy achieve its intended objectives. For example, case studies of how consideration of families in the delivery of a public service improving access to it in the justice or employment area, for instance, could be developed. Comparisons of the impact of a range of alternative taxation policies on different families could potentially offer a compelling case study of family impact analysis. Alternatively, cross-national comparative research showing how different policies have different gender and family impacts could be useful.³²

³¹ In their study of European public opinion Brayfield, Marina and Luo (2001) found that there was a desire for strong state support for families in countries with weak "male breadwinner family" norms. They also observed there was a significant gender gap between men's and women's family policy preferences in Europe.

³² For example, Pacholok and Gauthier (2004) investigate the time use of dual-earner parents in four countries with very different state support for families. Their study reveals the direct impact of these policy packages on the gender division of paid and unpaid work in family (see also Zimmerman 1988; Gornick and Meyers 2003 for examples of comparative gender policy research).

CHAPTER FOUR

impact assessment

This chapter reviews different approaches to impact assessment. It focuses on impact assessment as an ex ante method for predicting policy impacts. It highlights distinctions between the use of “types” of assessment — for example, social impact assessment and health impact assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Impact assessment aims to systematically predict the consequences of a proposed project or policy intervention. This contrasts with programme evaluation, which typically occurs after a project or policy has been implemented. Increasingly, however, impact assessment is being applied post-intervention as well. This chapter focuses on the use of impact assessment for predicting rather than measuring policy impacts. However, it discusses ex post impact assessment insofar as it contributes to the evidence base necessary to support ex ante impact assessment.

Environmental impact assessment was the first type of impact assessment developed to counteract the dominance of benefit-cost analysis in policy development and debate. Social impact assessment was later developed as a subset of environmental assessment. In New Zealand, the Environment Court has the power to require a social impact assessment and the 2002 Local Government Act also requires local governments to anticipate the effects of projects on community well-being. Social impact assessment is designed to make policy-makers more fully aware of the consequences of their decisions and the trade-offs involved between different objectives as well as the people who will likely be affected by them.

Health impact assessment of government policy is a more recent development, although health impact assessment of projects has been used in the resource management process since 1995 (Public Health Commission 1995). Health impact assessment is a formal multi-method approach used to predict the potential health effects of a policy, with particular attention paid to impacts on health inequalities. It is applied throughout the policy development process, but most importantly in the early stages, to identify and mitigate potential social, cultural, economic and environmental factors that will affect health outcomes. It is these societal rather than health-specific interventions that have improved life expectancy and the quality of life over the long term.

The New Zealand Health Strategy lists health impact assessment of non-health-specific public policies such as social welfare, education and environmental policies as one of its key objectives. To achieve that objective the Public Health Advisory Committee (2004) has developed a voluntary guide for analysts and policy-makers across government to help them analyse the health impacts of policies. The implementation of health impact assessment is intended to make the policy process more outcomes-based rather than inputs-based.³³

Impact assessments typically take the form of advisory statements — provided as a guide to policy-makers who may or may not change a policy as a result of these assessments. They may also give opportunities for stakeholders likely to be affected by the policy intervention to participate in planning processes. Impact assessment aims to improve the quality of the policy development process, and the policies that result by using evidence, focusing on outcomes, and including input from a range of stakeholders.

In a comprehensive analysis of impact statements, Serge Taylor (1984:296-300) argues that an impact assessment is the most effective tool available to convince a diverse range of government agencies to think about a subject beyond their general purview. Because agency roles and mandates differ, setting simple standards for them to follow is

³³ For example, policy-making should be more focused on reducing smoking (outcome) rather than just the introduction of programmes to stop smoking (input) (Public Health Advisory Committee 2004). Signal and Durham (2000) argue that health impact assessment is crucially needed in the context of governments' efforts to address the growing pressure on the health system by shifting the focus from controlling the costs of personal health care to improving population and sub-population group health outcomes.

neither analytically nor politically feasible. Thus, impact assessment statements promote systematic thinking but also allow flexibility to account for differing contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Benefit-analysis is an attractive method because it reduces all impacts (positive and negative) to one comparative metric: *dollars*. In contrast, impact assessments do not rely on just one metric. They open up the political process, by introducing all the possible environmental, social or health costs of policies as well as the distribution of costs and benefits on specific population groups. Impact assessments take into account not just physical effects on human populations, for instance the material impact on family income, but also intangible effects such as the sense of relative deprivation or family efficacy as a result of policy changes (Burdge 2003a:239). These effects are generally outside the parameters of cost-benefit analysis.

With no common metric being used, it is difficult to make comparisons across impacts or to find easy ways of discussing *trade-offs*. (This is called the *incommensurability problem*.) For instance, an impact assessment tool does not help policy-makers to weigh the relative value of paid parental leave, which contributes to child, family and maternal health and well-being against such factors as cost-effectiveness, labour supply and productivity and public support. But impact assessment is a more appropriate methodology than economic modelling when the scale of the proposed policy or programme is small and localised. Economic data are aggregate and multipliers are subject to considerable variation in local settings (Burdge 2003a:227). At the same time, social and health impact assessments often take place in the context of “cost pressures” on the introduction or continuation of a programme or policy and as such, in order to have influence, they need to be able to anticipate economic benefit-cost considerations even if they cannot be quantified or converted into dollar values (Ziller and Phibbs 2003:142).

To predict the probable impact of a policy or programme, impact assessments seek to understand the behaviour of individuals, families and communities likely to be affected by the policy change. In simplified terms they:

- 1) identify and measure relevant baseline conditions
- 2) define the policy intervention that is anticipated to have an impact on baseline conditions
- 3) estimate the relevant conditions after the intervention using available research evidence and ex post evaluations of other similar policies and compare them with baseline conditions.

Impact assessment involves identifying the range of projected impacts and evaluating their significance. Social impact assessment distinguishes the scale and intensity of the impacts and their duration in time and space. It considers whether the impact is direct, cumulative (ie does it compound existing baseline conditions?), or secondary (ie will the policy change result in other changes that will have an impact?). Often, impact assessments address the dynamic quality of social or health impacts by taking a series of snapshots over time as implementation of the policy unfolds and filling in what happens in between (Burdge 2003b). Crucially, social and health impact assessments predict the distribution of impacts on different population groups, for instance on vulnerable populations such as children, elderly people, low-income sole parents, immigrant families and so on.

Social impact assessment involves developing indicators appropriate to the policy under consideration of *different types of social impact*. These indicators can be used to measure and monitor change over time. They become part of the evidence basis for understanding the impact of a proposed policy (Burdge 2003a). For example, the US Committee on Social Impact Assessment suggests a typology of five different types of social impacts and some indicators designed to measure them. Table 1 gives two examples of types of social impacts — community and family changes and political and social resources — and their relevant indicators.

TABLE 1: TYPES OF SOCIAL IMPACT AND INDICATORS TO MEASURE THEM	
COMMUNITY AND FAMILY CHANGES	POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RESOURCES
Perceptions of risk, health and safety	Distribution of power and authority
Displacement/relocation concerns	Conflict newcomers and old-comers
Trust in political and social institutions	Identification of stakeholders
Residential stability	Interested and affected parties
Density of acquaintanceships	Leadership capacity and characteristics
Attitudes toward proposed action	Interorganisational cooperation
Family and friendship networks	
Concerns about social well-being	

Source: The Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment (2003)

Health impact assessment in New Zealand includes impacts on physical, mental, spiritual and family/community well-being (ie strong relationships within families) following the “Te Whare Tapa Wha” model. In order to assess these impacts the *determinants of health* that may be affected by the proposed policy or programme, and that may in turn affect health outcomes, need to be identified. Table 2 lists selected categories of determinants of health and some examples of specific health determinants as suggested by the New Zealand Public Health Advisory Committee’s, *Guide to Health Impact Assessment* (2004).

TABLE 2: DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS	INDIVIDUAL/BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS
Social support, social cohesion	Personal behaviours (eg diet, smoking, alcohol, physical activity)
Equity	Life skills
Social isolation	Personal safety
Participation in community and public affairs	Belief in the future and sense of control over their lives
Family connections	Employment status
Cultural and spiritual participation	Educational attainment
Discrimination	Level of income and disposable income
Level and fear of crime	Stress levels
Reputation of community/area	Self-esteem and confidence

Source: New Zealand Public Health Advisory Committee (2004)

Empirical findings from social science research literature help analysts to identify both indicators for types of social impacts and key determinants of health. The conceptual process of identifying these factors involves documenting inevitable gaps in data needed for impact assessment and methodological problems encountered in operationalising impacts as indicators or determinants. But suggesting new baseline datasets and information to be collected is part of the iterative process of impact assessment.

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

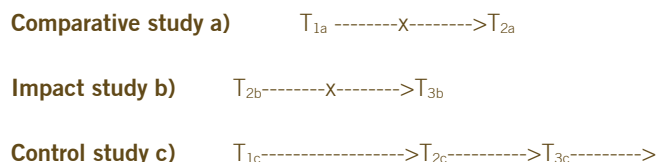
Several different methods are used in social and health impact assessments. The methods chosen depend on the timeframe of the impact assessment and whether it is required for routine “reactive” policy work or for more “strategic” long-term policy development (Signal and Durham 2000). Instant social impact assessment can be achieved if the problem analysis (ie which determinants of health or social impacts indicators are most significant), baseline study and set of future scenarios are prepared in advance (Becker 2001:317).

The model of the classic experimental design is one of the most desirable methods for ex post impact assessment. The evidence generated through experiments that measure actual impacts helps analysts to predict policy impacts in other instances. Quasi-experimental design involves finding a group that has experienced the proposed policy or programme and comparing it with a control group in a similar setting that has never been subject to the policy or programme in order to ascertain its real-world impacts in the population under assessment.³⁴ However, such quasi-experiments are hard to conduct since comparison groups are not readily found or always politically feasible in the social world. Figure 1 illustrates an experimental design used in a social impact

³⁴ Quasi-experimental design is inferior to true experimental design since it does not provide a secure basis for assuming that the two groups compared are equivalent in all respects.

assessment study. Observations of conditions are made at each time point (eg T_1 and T_2). The probable social impact of building a motorway in location b) is assessed by analysing the effects of the motorway that was built in location a) five years previous compared with a similar location c) where no motorway has been proposed or built.

FIGURE 1: BASIC SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT MODEL



Source: The Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment (2003)

Comparative institutional analysis is another similar method used in impact assessments to the extent that it draws on real-world experiences of similar interventions in the past or in another jurisdiction to guide future expectations about the proposed intervention. Typically this analysis involves in-depth case studies drawing on secondary literature and/or field research.

Impact assessment may also involve relatively simple methods, such as *straight line trend projections* that take an existing trend and project the same rate of change into the future, assuming what happened in the past is likely to happen in the future. Large-scale impact assessments use *demographic data* on individual life courses to analyse population-wide problems (Becker 2001:318) and predict impacts on individuals in defined demographic groups.

Another example of mapping and recording impact assessments is the *integrated benefit-cost matrix*. This matrix documents the costs and benefits to individuals and groups in terms of financial and non-financial costs and benefits — including those foregone as a result of an intervention (Ziller and Phibbs 2003). This matrix can be used in a deliberative forum to encourage weighting by agreement of the relative impacts of costs and benefits giving everyone's views equal legitimacy in the initial matrix exercise.

Regardless of the specific method adopted, impact assessment is designed to clearly identify the winners and the losers of a given policy or programme (think in terms of different kinds of families as well as the institution of the family itself). Impact assessment also stresses the vulnerability of under-represented and disadvantaged groups taking the view that no one category of persons should have to bear the brunt of adverse policy impacts.

APPLICABILITY FOR FAMILY-CENTRED POLICY ANALYSIS

When conducted comprehensively, impact assessment can provide a dynamic interpretation of policy and allow for the prediction of impacts across different timeframes. These are strengths for family-centred analysis since families are constantly changing and policy impacts on them often involve both short- and long-term impacts. For example, assuming rational behaviour, a change to eligibility for paid parental leave would be likely to have an impact on some decisions about family formation as soon as the policy change was announced and regardless of the exact date of implementation. Thus, policy analysts need to be able to make rapid ex ante assessments of family impact from day one. The time and cost involved in doing “in the field” or thorough impact assessments of every policy would be immense. This is a

serious constraint on the usefulness of impact assessment for family-centred analysis. However, rapid appraisal encourages analysts to use existing knowledge, for instance, impact assessments of past or similar policies in other jurisdictions, in order to predict the impacts of current policy proposals (Signal and Durham 2000:14). But this method relies to a significant extent on the quality of the research and ex post evaluation evidence for understanding policy impacts and the determinants of outcomes for families.

Family-centred analysis does not yet have an adequate evidence base to draw on for ex ante impact assessment. In contrast, health impact assessment in New Zealand is relatively well developed. For example, the health impact of the government policy introducing market rents on state housing in the middle 1990s has been thoroughly analysed. Researchers made a plausible case using empirical evidence that this change of policy led to household crowding in Auckland, which in turn created the conditions for the spread of meningococcal disease. Short-term benefits can become long-term costs for the government when health impacts are taken into account. Ten years on the government decided to make a huge and controversial investment of resources for the development of a vaccine for the disease and for a nation-wide programme of immunisations for all children (Baker et al. 2000). Had an assessment of health impacts been conducted before the housing policy was implemented, the benefit-cost analysis would have looked different and alternative policies might have been chosen.

Impact assessment gives a value to well-documented social relationships alongside financial considerations; for instance in assessing policy impacts. However, it is difficult to relate indirect and long-term social benefits and costs to more direct, quantifiable short-term costs and benefits (Ziller and Phibbs 2003:142). Often, impact assessments are based on socio-economic data that describe the past rather than the prospective future given the impact of the proposed policy. They also give serious attention to long-term policy impacts and the timeframe of impacts in general. Both these contributions are useful for family-centred analysis. In addition, impact assessment is a flexible approach, typically tailored to local projects and policies, revealing impacts that often fall out of larger or aggregate analyses.

Impact assessment does however lack a coherent theoretical framework for judging the causes of policy impacts. The recommended list of types of social impacts reveals one of the weaknesses of the tool. It contains no explicit criteria for identifying or prioritising impacts. When applied to analysing policy impacts on families how can we be sure that all possible impacts are assessed? Indicators, which are commonly used in impact assessment, reveal correlations between policies and impacts. However, the use of indicators cannot establish causation by isolating the effects of a policy on families from the generic social impacts that are the result of broad changes in the social and economic environment. As research-based knowledge of the determinants of family outcomes accumulates, impact assessment will become more useful as a method of predicting policy impacts on families. Family impact assessment could learn from the success in developing health impact assessment based on a strong body of research evidence that identifies the key determinant of health outcomes for population groups.

CHAPTER FIVE

family impact assessment

This chapter examines the applications in peer countries of family-specific tools of analysis to assess the impact of policy on families. In recent years, efforts have been made to develop family-based policy frameworks to guide policy-making and programme evaluation in a number of contexts. The chapter assesses how far and in what ways these frameworks could be adapted to the New Zealand context.

INTRODUCTION

The movement for family impact analysis began in the United States in the mid-1970s after a Senate hearing on the impact of policies on family well-being. The United States Family Impact Seminar was formed in 1976 to explore the “substantive, political and administrative feasibility” of requiring family impact statements (Ooms 1995:2).³⁵ It continues to thrive in several American states, including California and New York, as an educative forum for policy analysts and policy-makers. Subsequently, family impact analysis was taken up by the Study Commission of the Family in the United Kingdom which began producing annual “family policy reviews” of parliamentary legislation in 1978. Similarly, the state of New South Wales in Australia adopted family impact statements in the 1980s. More recently, the Australian federal government has made family impact statements a requirement on Cabinet submissions. Thus, family impact analysis has currency in several peer countries and is relevant to consider in the New Zealand policy-making context.

Originally modelled on environmental impact assessment, family impact analysis differs from those approaches in two important ways. First, measuring family impacts is arguably more difficult than measuring environmental impacts given the normative debate associated with appropriate forms of families and the actual diversity of families (Ooms 1984). Consequently, family impact analysis has usually been limited to policy areas where family issues are explicit. Second, compared with environmental and social impact assessments, which predict future impacts, family impact analyses have tended to assess past or present impacts of fully implemented policies, although these analyses have been clearly intended to inform future policy choices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Family impact assessment is not limited to a one-time family impact statement on any given policy (see Ory and Leik 1981). Rather it is informed by a broad vision of promoting a family perspective in policy-making. The second Director of the US Family Impact Seminar, Theodora Ooms (1984:169-70) lists six components that are essential in the development of such a family perspective in the mainstream policy process:

- 1) Sensitivity to family patterns
- 2) Understanding of family functions and roles
- 3) An appreciation of family involvement and family power
- 4) Family impact evaluation and policy analysis
- 5) Professional family-oriented training
- 6) Value issues

Importantly, family impact assessment needs to be informed by ongoing demographic, economic and social data on family trends for a variety of families and life-stages and by research knowledge about family functioning and the interaction of families with outside systems and institutions. It also needs to be aware of the ways in which families may be both causes and effects of individual well-being with respect to health, education and work productivity for instance. A family perspective is inevitably tied to value judgments and thus it needs to engage with the basic value assumptions and goals of policy in a transparent and balanced fashion.

³⁵ Although not actually implemented, President Ronald Reagan introduced an Executive Order in 1987 that required all proposed federal policies to be assessed against seven family impact criteria. President Bill Clinton annulled this Executive Order when coming to office in 1992.

Family impact analysis is informed by systems theory which considers the multiple and inter-related influences on individual and family outcomes.³⁶ Thus while family-strengths may be self-reinforcing, this approach brings with it an awareness of the tendency for problems to co-occur within the same family — including drug or alcohol addiction, domestic violence, unemployment and poor child nutrition. Furthermore, these needs and problems may be transmitted across several generations of the same family system (Briar-Lawson et al. 2001:159).

Required policy solutions may be equally multi-faceted and inter-connected. For example, government provision and subsidies for early childhood education (ECE) aim to improve family income and living standards by allowing parents to engage in paid work, and may aid family functioning through the support that trained ECE teachers give to parents in raising children. In this context it is often difficult to tell cause from effect and to know the appropriate government intervention to make. Research can provide evidence that shows the causal relationships in an aggregate or sub-population group. This evidence helps policy analysts to “frame and name” the root causes and the symptoms of the problem and suggest policy options (Briar-Lawson et al. 2001). But it does not prescribe any “right” policy or course of action for policy-makers.

Policy-makers face difficult choices in promoting a family perspective in public policies. Some of the trade-offs involve supporting reactive or quick-fix policies that respond to a crisis or urgent family need versus funding long-term preventive, proactive investments in social development and families.³⁷ Family-centred policies encourage and support prevention and targeted early intervention based on the recognition of the differential need across families. They also support universal entitlement provision to meet the general, common needs for all families. For example, it is consistent to promote both a policy ensuring universal access to early childhood education and subsidies targeted at some families to reduce the barriers and increase the incentives for their take-up of this education.

Family impact assessment involves making the policy theories behind the policy interventions explicit. Once policy theories are visible then it is easier to clarify the values within and across policy frameworks and to avoid the unintended effects of policies on families. For instance, one of the policy theories behind the in-work payment aspect of Working for Families is that family living standards and functioning (as well as a range of child-specific outcomes) will improve if parents are employed. Researchers and analysts can then test out this theory using scientific reasoning in a programme evaluation as long as there are policy baseline measures. In addition, they also need to assess the policy theory from a normative perspective, in terms of ethical codes, moral imperatives and legal, constitutional issues. For instance, should parents have the legal or constitutional right to meaningful employment and not just any job? Should sole parents be able to stay at home to raise their children supported by the state?

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

There is a variety of methodological strategies applicable to family impact analysis. Briar-Lawson and her co-authors (2001) suggest one rapid strategy for family impact assessment: Rather than starting with *policies* as the object of study and looking for

³⁶ Systems theory is closely related to network economics (see Kosfeld 2004).

³⁷ Briar-Lawson et al. (2001) suggest policy analysts develop a prevention gap index that documents the proportion of funding allocated to crisis-oriented services and supports and that which funds preventive and family promotion services, supports and resources. They argue that “the absence of a preventive agenda will place an increasing number of families in crisis”, and this will ultimately be more costly for governments and more difficult to turn around.

their effects on families, analysts could use consensually-defined indicators of *family living standards, functioning and formation/dissolution* as a barometer for gauging policy responsiveness. Thus, when family dissolution is high or family living standards are low or in decline this may indicate not only unmet family needs but also “policy needs, gaps and silences” (Briar-Lawson et al. 2001:151). But moving beyond this initial screening requires research into the reasons for changes in family indicators. Such research could highlight the particular policy areas where family impact assessment might be most useful. The remainder of this chapter discusses three main tools for implementing family impact analysis, family impact seminars, and family impact statements on Cabinet papers.

family impact checklist assessment tool

The checklist tool for assessing the impact of policies on families provides a guide for governments seeking to anticipate the positive and negative effects of policies and programmes on families. The Family Criteria (Ad Hoc) Task Force, comprised of politically diverse members from the US Consortium of Family Organizations, devised the checklist principles and questions through a one-year-long consultative process (Ooms and Preister 1988; Bogenschneider 2002). The checklist reflects a broad, non-partisan consensus in the United States and has been used by state and local governments and advocates of different political persuasions. Widely used to assess the impact of policies on family stability, family relationships and family responsibilities, the checklist includes six basic principles and 34 specific questions about families that serve as a measure of how sensitive to and supportive of families, policies are (Ooms and Preister 1988).³⁸ They propose that:

- 1) Policies and programmes should aim to support and supplement family functioning and provide substitute services such as foster care only as a last resort.
- 2) Policies and programmes should encourage and reinforce marital, parental and family commitment and stability especially when children are involved.
- 3) Policies and programmes must recognise the interdependence of family relationships, the strength and persistence of family ties and obligations, and the wealth of resources that families can mobilise to help their members.
- 4) Policies and programmes must treat families as partners when providing services to individuals and as an essential resource in policy development, programme planning and evaluation.
- 5) Policies and programmes must acknowledge and value the diversity of family life.
- 6) Families in greatest economic and social need, as well as those determined to be most vulnerable to breakdown, need to be included in government policies and programmes.

Each principle is accompanied by a series of family impact questions. For instance, the family diversity principle (6) asks a set of questions very relevant to assessing impacts on diverse families in New Zealand.³⁹

- > How does the policy affect various types of families?
- > If the policy targets only certain families, for example, only employed parents or sole parents, what is the justification? Does it discriminate against or penalise other types of families for insufficient reasons?

³⁸ For the full list of family principles and related checklist questions see the appendix.

³⁹ Taking the family diversity principle seriously, one US family impact study analysed the effects of seven different tax reform packages on eight different types of families, identifying the different winners and losers and the trade-offs between them (Ooms 1995).

- > How does it identify and respect the different values, attitudes and behaviour of families from various racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and geographic backgrounds that are relevant to programme effectiveness?

The criteria and questions can be adopted at an early stage of policy development or in designing evaluations. One of the purposes of the checklist tool is to make explicit the trade-offs in different policy options. For example, in the New Zealand context the new Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill may involve giving parental rights to more than two adults with caring and biological relationships to children. Following family diversity principle 6 the bill may acknowledge and value the diversity of families and not discriminate against them solely for reasons of structure or cultural values. Yet, by altering conventional norms of parenting, including who can be a parent, the Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill may create uncertainty of family norms and potentially conflict with principle 2 that intends policies to reinforce family commitment and stability.

The checklist method also includes three other assessment tools designed to assist family impact analysis and to identify areas for more detailed study. The *Family Diversity and Contexts* tool identifies the range of family forms, socio-economic characteristics, life cycle stages and contexts that have relevance for the assessment of policy and programmes. The *Family Functions and Roles* tool describes five primary social functions of families that may be directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally affected by policies and programmes.⁴⁰ Lastly the *Policy and Programme Implementation Components* tool summarises the sources and points of intervention as well as the dimensions of implementation that may affect families.

The latter feature of the family impact checklist tool is particularly insightful because it recognises that the nature of the impact on families (for instance, the duration and severity of the impact) may depend on the policy source or implementation. For example, a family impact analysis of maternity services in New Zealand might find that there has been a decline in general practitioner providers — and thus maternity choice — and a reduction in maternity beds in public hospitals. This analysis would seek to identify the sources of the government failure in the design and implementation of the policy. These sources might include fiscal disincentives for general practitioners implicit in the policy design and the assumption of the service model that mothers who have normal deliveries do not require hospitalisation. The sources of failure may also reflect problems with the implementation process such as budgetary rationalisation at the central government and district health board levels, and the practices of professional midwives or lack of cooperation between general practitioners and midwives with respect to maternity care.

family-friendly community checklist

Based on the US family impact analysis checklist, the Premiers Council (1992) in Alberta, Canada developed a “Family Policy Grid” to assess the family impacts of all government-proposed legislation. Like the US family impact assessment checklist, the family policy grid is a desktop tool that sets out eight family-centred principles and their rationales, and a number of specific questions consistent with each principle to assess the impacts of any government policy. The fact that Alberta was able to adapt the checklist developed by the US consortium to reflect their own province’s values and concerns suggests that the tool is relatively flexible and open to revision for different policy areas and jurisdictions.

⁴⁰ These aspects of family functioning are not inclusive of all family functions, merely those most likely to be affected by public policies. They are: family composition; economic support; child-rearing; family care (of elderly and disabled members for example); and coordinating or mediating the relationships between individual family members and public services.

From this policy tool, the *Family-Friendly Community Checklist* was developed to raise the profile of families and their needs and improve support for families by evaluating the impact of different aspects of the community on families and family life. The checklist tool facilitates community partners in self-assessing how a community rates in “family-friendliness” of its policies, programmes and practices. It is designed around four hallmarks of a strong family: stability; health; self-sufficiency; and safety. Survey questions probe public attitudes to different aspects of these four values in terms of 12 categories that include schools, neighbourhoods, parks, workplaces and family service agencies. Citizens answer the survey questions along a 0-5 scale. This bottom-up approach to assessing the impact of policies on families is particularly useful for local governments aiming to improve their responsiveness to families and communities. However, public opinion surveys are both too expensive and labour-intensive to be used to assess impacts of every policy. Moreover, while survey responses can identify and describe policy impacts, they do not generate information that can tell us what *causes* these impacts on families.

family impact seminars

The US Family Impact Seminar is an institutionalised method that has supported family impact assessments at the federal, state and local government levels since 1976. The Family Impact Seminars are an “ongoing series of seminars, briefing reports, and follow-up activities that provide objective, solution-oriented information” for policy analysts, administrators of family service agencies and policy-makers (Bogenschneider 2002:192-3). They are designed to demonstrate the benefits of bringing a family focus to policy-making and aim to build the capacity of policy-makers to conduct family impact assessments (Ooms 1995).

The seminars have addressed topics as diverse as teenage pregnancy, good parenting, welfare reform, juvenile crime, preschool kindergarten and elder care. They consist of presentations by researchers and analysts on the issue of the day followed by open deliberation toward the identification of common points. After each seminar a tape and a user-friendly background briefing report summarising the state-of-the-art research on the policy issue are prepared. Opportunities are provided for seminar attendees to engage with the researchers about the policy implications of their findings during and after the seminar. The Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars, which serves as a coordinating, clearing house for family impact seminars across the US states, is currently based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

family impact statement on cabinet submissions

Australia has recently adopted a tool for family impact analysis. In exchange for preferences at the last election, Prime Minister John Howard promised the new Family First Party that the government would include a “family impact statement” in each Cabinet submission. The use of the family impact statement is intended to formalise and standardise for Cabinet ministers the centrality of family impacts across all government decision-making. In the draft guidelines, attention has been given to ensuring that each family impact statement of new policy proposals will address economic factors, families’ access to services and infrastructure and the impact on family functioning and responsibilities.⁴¹ Since the guidelines have not been publicly released yet, we cannot know to what extent they have been based on the US checklist model. In a parallel development, the opposition Australian Labor Party has established a “Family Watch”

⁴¹ Kay Patterson, Minister for Family and Community Services Australia: Building a virtuous circle, *OECD Observer*, March 2005, retrieved at <http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/emailstory.php?aid=1550>

to monitor the impact of the Howard government's policies on families, with a particular focus on family budgets and living standards.

APPLICABILITY FOR FAMILY-CENTRED ANALYSIS

The most useful and feasible family impact assessment method for family-centred analysis is the checklist tool. The strength of the family impact assessment checklist is that it can be rapidly applied to assess policy impacts on families. It is also a flexible tool that appreciates the complexity and diversity of family impacts. The content of the checklist criteria and questions, for instance, can and have been readily adapted to reflect the values and concerns of different policy contexts and jurisdictions. However, the value of any family impact assessment depends on the quality of information and knowledge available to the policy analyst. Chapter Three reviewed some of the limitations of the checklist approach in this regard.

The US Consortium of Family Organizations devised a fairly conservative, albeit non-partisan, family impact assessment checklist. New Zealand policy-makers would want to revise this checklist. I suggest three areas in particular for revision. First, a New Zealand checklist would need to include questions for assessing policy impacts on the development of Māori whānau and the capacity of whānau to further Māori cultural identity. Second, a New Zealand checklist would also need to reflect norms and values that tend to view state support for families in a more positive light. New Zealand governments have considered adequate family living standards a fundamental outcome. Questions would need to probe the impact of policies on family living standards.⁴² Third, a New Zealand checklist tool would need to ask questions about impacts on families that are relatively neutral in terms of the legal status of the family relationships. New Zealand law and society accept a broader range of family relationships than is the case in most United States jurisdictions. Moreover, New Zealand governments typically seek to be relatively neutral with respect to prescribing the types of relationships that constitute a family.

⁴² See Krishnan et al. (2002). The study by Perry (2004) predicting the change in the child poverty rate as a result of the introduction of the Working For Families policy package is a good example of this use of baseline data for this purpose.

CHAPTER SIX

methods for family-centred policy analysis in new zealand

This chapter offers a methodological guide for policy analysts that is intended to increase their awareness of family impacts in the planning and implementation of public policies. It synthesises the insights from the four approaches reviewed in the report in order to guide non-family expert policy analysts who wish to understand the impact of government policies on New Zealand families. It focuses on how the tools of analysis suggested by these four methodologies could be adapted for the New Zealand context. It points out some of their limitations and the circumstances in which they might be most usefully applied. The chapter includes several illustrative examples of the application of these tools of analysis, highlighting how they can be used to understand different impacts across different types of family, across policy area and in terms of the core outcomes for families.

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

There is a variety of methodological strategies that policy analysts can use to assess the impact of policies on New Zealand families. However, the choice of appropriate methodology depends in the first instance on its relative cost-efficiency in terms of the investment of time and budgetary resources. In addition, whether a particular methodology is appropriate or not will often be a function of the type of family impact predicted, the availability of data relevant to assessing family impacts, the degree of accuracy expected, and whether the goal of analysis is merely greater understanding or providing hard evidence for the continuation or alteration of a policy or programme. The choice of methodology will also be decided on the strengths and weaknesses of its tools of analysis when applied to families: How flexible are they given that families are not static? Can they capture the different impacts on diverse families and diverse aspects of the family (functioning, formation and living standards)? Have they been used to analyse families in other jurisdictions or policy areas?

Before applying any specific tools to assess family impacts, a good understanding of families is essential if government policies and services are to be informed by the realities of family lives.

different types of families

Policy analysts typically think about the effect of policies on individual behaviour and outcomes for individuals. Yet individuals are embedded in family contexts. These contexts need to be acknowledged by policy-makers to ensure that policies and programmes meet their objectives and that they do not have unnecessary, negative impacts on individuals and families. Moreover, given the wealth of roles and functions performed by families today, they are, more often than not, part of the solution to many of the problems and issues that government seeks to address.

Family-centred policy analysis begins when analysts open up the concept of the family to consider New Zealand families in terms of their contemporary diversity, their dynamism and their various functions.

Family diversity suggests that there are many types of families in terms of their structure (with or without children, single, separated or two-parent family, foster family, blended family) and their socio-economic, ethnic, religious and local contexts. It also points to the diversity of individuals and relationships within families and reminds us that one cannot treat the family as a homogeneous unit like an individual or household. For instance, many New Zealand families are not traditional nuclear families; Māori and Pacific peoples often have particularly strong economic and cultural ties to their extended families. The implication of this diversity is that we need to be aware of how policies affect different family types.

Family dynamism suggests that families are always changing; they may be at different stages in the life cycle, they may be going through transitions with the permanent or temporary addition or loss of family members, or a change in structure with a divorce or separation. Depending on their situation, families will have different needs and may be affected by policies in different ways. Families with dependent children, for instance, may differ considerably from those families caring for older family members (although there will be many cases in which these families can and do overlap).

Regardless of differences in family structure and life-stage, families share certain key functions in common. *Family functions* are many, but the Ministry of Social Development has identified four core functions that are common in New Zealand today and most likely

to be affected by policy. These functions are similar to the functions identified by the US-based Family Impact Seminars (Ooms 1995). They are:

- > Nurturing, rearing, socialisation and protection of children.
- > Maintaining and improving the wellbeing of family members by providing them with emotional and material support.
- > Psychological anchorage of adults and children by way of affection, companionship and a sense of belonging and identity.
- > Passing on culture, knowledge, values, attitudes, obligations and property from one generation to the next (Ministry of Social Development 2004a:8).

An important objective of analysing the impacts of policies on families is to understand how policy affects the capacity of families to fulfil these core functions. An equally important goal is to understand whether and the extent to which policies have differential impacts on families according to their form and life-stage.

Given the complex nature of families and policy impacts, policy analysts will initially need to focus their analysis on a range of common types of families (such as single-parent, separated parent, two-parent, step- or blended families) rather than on all types of families present in New Zealand society. Likewise, analysts will need to begin with major areas of predicted policy impact on family formation, family functioning and living standards. Nonetheless, it is crucial that policies take into account both direct and indirect policy impacts on different family forms and consider policy impacts at particular points of transition or life-stage.

different types of policy

Different types of policies affect families in different ways. How you assess the family impacts of a policy will depend on whether the *policy or policy area is explicitly about families*. Families are clearly present in early childhood education policy since parents and children are the intended beneficiaries of the policy. But families need not be front and centre of a policy to be affected by it. Families are rarely discussed in labour market or tertiary education policies. Yet both types of policy have implications for families, whose decisions about labour supply and support for adult children may be influenced by the degree of government support. Analysis of family impacts will also be affected by *the size* of a policy and *the timeframe* for policy implementation. A large, nationwide policy that affects a good proportion of the population may require an impact assessment or programme evaluation whereas a policy affecting a relatively small or selective proportion of the total population will likely not have the resources for these methods.

Given the quantity of government policies that could be assessed for their impacts on families, some policies or policy types need to be prioritised. Applying techniques to find family impacts across all policy areas holds two risks. First, you might trivialise the concept. Second, resources will be thinly spread. In combination, this does a disservice to the goal of placing families at the centre of policy analysis.

different types of policy impact

Policies can have different kinds of impacts on different types of families. First, they can have both *positive and negative impacts*. Second, their *impacts can be direct or indirect*, such as when the opening hours of childcare centres have an impact on family income by reducing a parent's access to employment. In some cases policies can have simultaneous direct impacts on one type of family and indirect impacts on another type.

The Working for Families income support policy package, for example, will potentially have impacts on both eligible and non-eligible families. Third, policies can have *intended and unintended consequences* for families, and the larger and more ambitious the policy the more likely it is to have unintended consequences.⁴³ Fourth, the *duration of the policy impact* on families is important to take into account since some impacts are one-off or short-term and others are ongoing and long-term across a family life cycle. Fifth, the *scope of the policy impact* on families is also crucial. Some impacts will be systemic affecting most families while others may have significant or severe effects on a small number of families. For instance, a policy to legalise fees in state schools would have an impact on many families with school-age children whereas a change to the immigration criteria for family reunification would most likely have a relatively localised policy impact on a smaller subset of families.

guidelines for family-centred analysis

Here I suggest relevant approaches for assessing the impact of policies on New Zealand building on the strengths of microeconomic and gender analysis, impact assessment and family impact assessment reviewed in Chapters One to Five. I provide examples of how they might be applied in the New Zealand context to address key outcomes for families, in what circumstances and with what limitations.

SCREENING POLICIES USING A FAMILY IMPACT ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

The family impact assessment checklist approach is a first step in making an assessment of the impact of a government policy on families. Ideally it should be used as early as possible in the policy process, preferably when policies are first being drafted and/or considered. Although the US checklist tool was designed for assessing family-specific policies, it is especially recommended for screening non-family-specific policies in the New Zealand context. The checklist can be used to readily assess whether such policies are likely to have any family impacts, and to identify what those impacts might be. Addressing the checklist questions is intended to raise policy analysts' awareness of the importance of family issues in a policy domain where they have not typically been discussed. These checklist questions may encourage analysts to reframe the conventional questions and criteria they use to assess policy proposals.

Using a checklist can generate conceptually rich and relevant policy insights. Completing the checklist can reveal where the significant gaps in our knowledge or data about family impacts are, or where data are inaccurate or unavailable. Although this method cannot isolate the precise causes of policy impacts on families, it can help policy analysts to decide whether or not further impact assessment is needed using more rigorous methods as outlined further below.

checklist for assessing the impact of policies on new zealand families⁴⁴

This checklist appropriately reflects the outcomes framework for families developed by the Families Commission (2005). It is intended to be used as a guide to family-centred

⁴³ Establishing the causal relationship between a policy and its unintended consequences usually requires complex methodologies such as experimental design, pilot field studies or multivariate analysis to control for intervening and external factors.

⁴⁴ This checklist is adapted from a range of sources, including the US Family Impact Assessment Checklist Tool and Alberta Family Policy Grid discussed in Chapter Five and the various priorities and outcomes for New Zealand families discussed in *New Zealand Families Today* (Ministry of Social Development 2005a) and the Families Commission Statement of Intent 2005/06 (Families Commission 2005).

policy development. Checklist tools do however have some limitations and may be less effective in certain conditions (see Chapters Three and Five). Briefly, their effectiveness greatly depends on the information or research evidence available to the policy analyst. While policy analysts should use as much existing data and information as possible to assist them in completing the checklist assessment, without a sufficient information base to answer questions, analysts may rely solely on their own untested assumptions.

The questions set out below are examples of the kind of questions that could be used in a New Zealand family impact assessment checklist. They may be revised or supplemented for specific policy areas or to reflect specific government objectives. It may not be necessary to ask all questions in relation to all policies or policy areas. Some questions are more relevant to family-specific policies, while others are more relevant to non-family-specific policies. It is important to stress that “yes” answers are not necessarily “correct” answers and that the intention of the checklist is not merely to tick boxes. Rather, the task of evaluating a policy against the set of family-centred questions is intended to improve the quality of policy advice.

1. Family Recognition and Support

- > How are recognition and support for families demonstrated by the policy?
- > Does the policy help family members to carry out their responsibilities without undermining their autonomy?
- > What efforts are made to support families who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or at risk?
- > What attention, if any, is given to the broad societal context and its impact on families?
- > Does the policy recognise the connectedness of families to wider kin and community networks?
- > How does the policy address and balance individual and family needs?

2. Family Diversity

- > How does the policy affect different types of families? Does it provide good justification for targeting only certain family types?
- > Is identifying and respecting the cultural, ethnic, religious, sexual diversity of families relevant to the policy's effectiveness?
- > To what extent do the underlying assumptions about families on which this policy is based appropriately reflect an understanding of the diversity of family types and family needs?
- > Does the policy acknowledge family relationships and responsibilities across households and generations?
- > Does the policy enhance capacities in ways that are consistent with Māori cultural identity and self-determination?

3. Family Living Standards

- > Does the policy affect families' ability to maintain an adequate standard of living?
- > Does the policy affect families' ability to advance economically and build family assets?

4. Family Formation/Dissolution

- > Does the policy provide any incentives or disincentives for family decisions to marry, divorce, separate, bear/adopt children etc?
- > What is done to support the resiliency of families in self-managing through transition, adversity and change?

5. Family Functioning

- > To what extent does the policy address the safety of families and family members, preventing abuse, violence or neglect?
- > How does the policy uphold or enforce parental obligations?
- > How does the policy enhance parental competence and promote the knowledge, skills and commitment necessary for raising children?
- > How does the policy support the mutual care of family members, including children, older people, members with disabilities and those who are sick or vulnerable?
- > Does the policy affect the ability of families to transmit culture, knowledge and values across generations?
- > Does the policy affect families' ability to balance paid work, family and community commitments?
- > What efforts are made to ensure that the rights of individual family members are respected within families?
- > What are the implications of power relations within families for the policy?

6. Family Participation

- > How does the policy consider the importance of partnerships between government agencies, communities and families in meeting the needs of families?
- > In what ways does the policy ensure that families have access to effective services?
- > In what ways does the policy remove the barriers to families' participation in social and economic life?
- > What opportunities are provided for families to participate in the development, implementation, delivery and evaluation of policies and services?
- > How does the policy empower communities to respond to family needs?

If by completing this checklist the policy analyst identifies any potential direct or indirect negative impacts they should consider using a more rigorous method for assessing the scope and duration of the potential impacts, and whether or not they could be avoided. Such methods might include economic analysis, gender analysis and impact assessment.

economic analysis and gender analysis

Economic analysis as reviewed in Chapter Two is especially useful for analysing direct and indirect impacts on family living standards. Economic models assume that families engage in implicit benefit-cost analyses particularly with respect to their decisions about income, expenditure and the allocation of labour. Thus, they can predict individual and family behaviour in response to policies. Using the concepts of opportunity costs, incentive effects and unintended consequences, economic analysis can reveal the indirect impacts of policies on family living standards.

The strength of economic analysis is that it is a feasible, cost-efficient method. It makes use of existing empirical evidence on actual behavior to inform ex ante assessment. It can be applied to assessing direct and indirect impacts on small and large populations. Moreover, it provides sound predictions based on a consistent set of assumptions about individual and family behaviour. Benefit-cost models can also be used to discount for the duration of impacts.

Some of the limitations of economic models can be addressed by taking on board the insights of gender analysis. Gender analysis brings to the fore an awareness of the power differentials and bargaining dynamics within families. It corrects the economic

assumption of a homogeneous family by drawing attention to the way a policy may affect individual family members differentially depending on degree of equality in family relationships. For instance, whether a policy that increases the income support available to families will improve family living standards depends on how resources are distributed within the family. Research suggests that the distribution of family expenditure mirrors the distribution of income (ie who earns or manages it). On the basis of this gender analysis, economic models need to be adapted to take into account the relative incentives of a policy for individual family members as well as the direct incentives it creates for the family as a whole. The family impact assessment approach also suggests that economic models need to be adapted to explicitly address the relative incentives for different types of families created by a policy.

Further, family decision-making about the allocation of labour in response to a policy or policy change depends not only on a calculation of monetary benefits and costs. Rather, such decisions are the outcome of the bargaining among adult members, typically women and men, based on emotional and social trade-offs, the availability and quality of services such as childcare as well as the relative market price of their labour. This intra-family bargaining influences not only overall family income and living standards but also family functioning and the provision of care for family members. In addition, family impact assessment improves common economic analyses of impacts on family living standards by factoring in the family income support, care and parenting that extend beyond households.

A combination of economic analysis, gender analysis and family impact assessment frameworks can also be very relevant for assessing other outcomes of interest, such as family functioning, family formation and family diversity. For example, benefit-cost analysis informed by gender analysis has been used to analyse the direct and indirect costs of family violence. Gender analysis helps to frame the family violence issue as a labour, justice, social welfare and gender issue simultaneously. As such, family violence has direct effects on family functioning and family dissolution, but also indirect impacts on family living standards. Logically, this analysis can help analysts quantify and therefore better judge the full social and economic costs of a negative policy impact on family safety.

Economic analysis informed by family impact assessment's analysis of the diversity of family arrangements can be used to investigate on which subgroup of families a policy might have the most positive impact, ie where the marginal impact is greatest given limited resources. For example, microeconomic analysis has found that quality of preschool childcare has a greater marginal impact on children from low socio-economic family backgrounds than on children from other family backgrounds (Currie 2000).

With respect to outcomes for family formation, an economic analysis can predict the impacts of policies supplemented by gender analysis and family impact assessment. For example, an economic analysis of policy impacts on individual decisions to bear and/or raise children can assess whether a policy reduces or increases the opportunity costs of this behaviour. Gender analysis can supplement conventional economic analysis through its assessment of the gender-specific inequalities, for instance the gender gap in wages, which affect the relative opportunity structures for individual family members, and therefore have an impact on their fertility decisions.⁴⁵ Family impact assessment draws attention to the relational aspects of fertility decision-making including the influence of partners or other family members on family formation.

⁴⁵ There is a large economics literature on the gender wage gap (see, for example, Blau and Kahn 1997).

In sum, with adaptations by gender analysis and family impact assessment, economic modelling can more accurately predict the benefits and costs of a policy for particular families and their living standards, as well as some aspects of their functioning and formation.

impact assessment

The impact assessment approach used in social and health impact assessments includes some methods that can be useful for predicting policy impacts on families in a timely manner. (This approach should not be confused with the family impact assessment approach developed in North America using seminar and checklist tools.) However, these rapid assessment methods do not provide hard evidence of policy impacts but, like economic analysis, they are informed by existing empirical evidence and a range of theoretical arguments. Impact assessment methods are often most useful for assessing policies that have multiple objectives or complex intervention logics and where an economic analysis is less useful, such as for assessing aspects of family functioning. These methods are also useful for distinguishing the relative impacts of policies on different types of families and for revealing the interactions between family living standards, family structure and family functioning.

One method of impact assessment encourages us to think through hypothetical scenarios based on different causal intervention logics, including what would likely happen without the policy intervention. Intervention logics specify a chain of causal assumptions that identify policy inputs, activities and intended objectives and link these to ultimate government outcomes. These logics are similar to programme theories that generate a “plausible, sensible model of how a policy or programme is supposed to work” (Small 2005:329). To assess the family impacts of a policy, analysts can rework these logics and hypotheses for different types of families identified in the checklist phase of family analysis, using different life cycle scenarios. They can then draw on *analogous research evidence* to triangulate their family impact assessment of a policy intervention.

Research evidence of a past policy that caused a family impact helps to inform our ability to anticipate policy impacts. Analysts need to look for evaluations of analogous policies in a) other jurisdictions and/or b) other related policy areas. These previous evaluations may support hypotheses about the likely policy impacts on different families. For example, to predict the impact of the Working for Families policy, analysts were able to view evidence on the impact on family income, poverty rates and labour force participation of a similar policy package introduced in Great Britain. Analogous research evidence is also available to support assessment of impacts on family functioning. For example, there is good research on early intervention childhood education programmes and their effects on family functioning in terms of parental skills and efficacy and child development.

Analysts should be aware of the limitations of impact assessment, however. Predicting the effects of policy on family-level outcomes is difficult and depends on the quality of good ex post impact assessment information. These evaluation studies should be helpful in informing ex ante impact assessment. However, these studies may not be able to distinguish family outcomes, which result from complex interaction among individual and contextual social and economic factors of which policy or any single policy programme is only one. Moreover, policy analysts may not be able to find research that provides appropriate causal evidence of the determinants of family outcomes to assist their impact assessment. In this situation analysts should look for studies that rule out alternative explanations for the family outcomes of interest by concentrating on those

that have large samples, reliable research designs and multivariate analyses (ie they control for external and intervening variables for instance, for correlated family-level characteristics) (see Mackay 2005).

Although they can establish only co-relational linkages between policies and their impacts on families, studies that investigate the relationship between cross-national variation in policies and cross-national variation in family outcomes can be meaningful. For example, OECD cross-national studies show correlations between comprehensive packages of work/family reconciliation policies and relatively high women's employment rates (Gornick and Meyers 2003). These studies cannot rule out reverse correlation or the influence of unmeasured national characteristics but they can be useful in predicting impacts in combination with other methods such as economic analysis of specific policy and family variables.

CONCLUSION

This report recommends methods of family impact analysis that can be readily applied, preferably early in the policy process, to family-focused and non-family-specific policies. It suggests that a checklist screening approach is useful as a first stage followed by one or more of the in-depth methods, where appropriate. All the methods discussed here — the family impact assessment checklist, economic analysis, gender analysis and impact assessment — have insights for assessing policy impacts on families. However, some methods will be more relevant to particular policy areas and family outcomes than others. The choice of method or combination of methods will depend on cost considerations, the timeframe and scope of the policy, the availability of good research evidence and the degree of accuracy of prediction required.

Applying the four methods discussed here to predict policy impacts on families will, over time, generate successful cases of how taking families into account improves policy effectiveness and outcomes. These methods will help to make family impact analysis a standard feature of sound, evidence-based policy analysis in the public sector. Ultimately, such ex ante assessments of family impacts should provide qualitative evidence of the importance of conducting family-centred policy analysis. In the longer term as ex post evaluation research evidence identifying the determinants of family outcomes is built up, the task of predicting the family impacts of government policies will become both more rigorous and more straightforward.

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APPENDIX A

US CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF POLICIES ON FAMILIES

principle 1. family support and responsibilities

Policies and programs should aim to support and supplement family functioning and provide substitute services only as a last resort.

Does the proposal or program:

- > Support and supplement parents' and other family members' ability to carry out their responsibilities?
- > Provide incentives for other persons to take over family functioning when doing so may not be necessary?
- > Set unrealistic expectations for families to assume financial and/or caregiving responsibilities for dependent, seriously ill, or disabled family members?
- > Enforce absent parents' obligations to provide financial support for their children?

principle 2. family membership and stability

Whenever possible, policies and programs should encourage and reinforce marital, parental, and family commitment and stability, especially when children are involved. Intervention in family membership and living arrangements is usually justified only to protect family members from serious harm or at the request of the family itself.

Does the policy or program:

- > Provide incentives or disincentives to marry, separate or divorce?
- > Provide incentives or disincentives to give birth to, foster or adopt children?
- > Strengthen marital commitment or parental obligations?
- > Use appropriate criteria to justify removal of a child or adult from the family?
- > Allocate resources to help keep the marriage or family together when this is the appropriate goal?
- > Recognize that major changes in family relationships such as divorce or adoption are processes that extend over time and require continuing support and attention?

principle 3. family involvement and independence

Policies and programs must recognize the interdependence of family relationships, the strength and persistence of family ties and obligations, and the wealth of resources that families can mobilize to help their members.

To what extent does the policy or program:

- > Recognize the reciprocal influence of family needs on individual needs, and the influence of individual needs on family needs?
- > Involve the immediate and extended family members in working toward a solution?
- > Acknowledge the power and persistence of family ties, even when they are problematic or destructive?
- > Build on the informal social support networks (such as community/neighborhood organizations, religious communities) that are essential to families' lives?
- > Respect family decisions about the division of labour?
- > Address issues of power inequity in families?
- > Ensure perspectives of all family members are represented?
- > Assess and balance the competing needs, rights, and interests of various family members?
- > Protect the rights and safety of families while respecting parents' rights and family integrity?

principle 4. family partnership and empowerment

Policies and programs must encourage individuals and their close family members to collaborate as partners with program professionals in delivery of services to an individual. In addition, parent and family representatives are an essential resource in policy development, program planning, and evaluation.

In what specific ways does the policy or program:

- > Provide full information and a range of choices to families?
- > Respect family autonomy and allow families to make their own decisions? On what principles are family autonomy breached and program staff allowed to intervene and make decisions?

- > Encourage professionals to work in collaboration with the families of their clients, patients or students?
- > Take into account the family's need to coordinate the multiple services they may require and integrate well with other programs and services that families use?
- > Make services easily accessible to families in terms of location, operating hours, and easy to use application and intake forms?
- > Prevent participating families from being devalued, stigmatized, or subjected to humiliating circumstances?
- > Involve parents and family representatives in policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation?

principle 5. family diversity

Families come in many forms and configurations, and policies and programs must take into account their varying effects on different types of families. Policies and programs must acknowledge and value the diversity of family life and not discriminate against or penalize families solely for reasons of structure, roles, cultural values, or life stage.

How does the policy or program:

- > Affect the various types of families?

- > Acknowledge intergenerational relationships and responsibilities among family members?
- > Provide good justification for targeting only certain family types, for example, only employed parents or single parents? Does it discriminate against or penalize other types of families for insufficient reason?
- > Identify and respect the different values, attitudes and behavior of families from various racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and geographic backgrounds that are relevant to program effectiveness?

principle 6. support of vulnerable families

Families in greatest economic and social need, as well as those determined to be most vulnerable to breakdown, should be included in government policies and programs.

Does the policy or program:

- > Identify and publicly support services for families in the most extreme economic or social need?
- > Give support to families who are most vulnerable to breakdown and have the fewest resources?
- > Target efforts and resources toward preventing family problems before they become serious crises or chronic situations?

APPENDIX B

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Jacqui True is a director of Research and Policy Solutions and senior lecturer in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Auckland, where she teaches courses on policy analysis, international political economy and gender politics. She received her PhD in Political Science from York University in Toronto, Canada in 2000. Prior to that, she received a BA in Political Science from Victoria University of Wellington and graduate degrees from Monash University in Australia and the University of Arizona. She is the author of *Gender, Globalization, and Postsocialism* (New York: Columbia University Press 2003), a co-author of *Theories of International Relations* (Macmillan/St Martins 1996, 2nd edition 2001) and *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005). She has also published widely on gender mainstreaming approaches to public policy. In 2003-2004, with Michael Mintrom, she co-authored the report for the Human Rights Commission, *Framework for the Future: Equal Employment Opportunities in New Zealand*.

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