**Chapter 3: Using a Policy Advocacy Framework**

***Policy Advocacy Learning Challenges and Exercises***

***Selected from the book***

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 3.1**

**After reading the case example on pp. 61-65 of your text, address the following questions:**

* Which of the seven core problems was the social worker addressing in this case advocacy

intervention?

* What contextual factors were liabilities that she had to deal with and surmount?
* What contextual factors were assets she could use to facilitate her work?
* Which of the eight challenges in the micro advocacy framework did she undertake?
* Which of the four skills did she use?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 3.2**

**Moving Toward Mezzo Policy Advocacy to Help Pregnant High School Students**

Social workers engage in mezzo policy practice to help pregnant high school students when they seek to change policies and procedures in specific high schools or school districts. Despite the importance of teen education and equal education requirements of Title IX, many guidance counselors still informally counsel pregnant students to leave their high school for alternative schools, without providing them assistance or resources and telling them they have the option to stay put. Official school policies could be established that prohibit encouraging pregnant students to leave high schools for alternative schools.

Sex education can be improved in specific schools or school districts by developing or using models that have been proven to be effective in preventing or delaying teen pregnancy. Do specific policy and program deficiencies impede *preventive* strategies, such as sex education programs that discuss not only abstinence, but also birth con­trol strategies? Do school have nurses on the premises who distribute condoms? Do schools inform teenagers that they can consult medical staff if they have unprotected sexual encounters to see if they wish to use medications to avert pregnancy? Are schools linked to Planned Parenthood so that students can obtain information about their options?

Address the following questions with respect to mezzo policy advocacy with teenagers in schools:

* Do social workers *frequently* engage in micro policy advocacy for pregnant ado­lescents to help them obtain their rights, suggesting *systemic defects* in organi­zational policies, such as prejudice by school staff against this population or a lack of quality education programs geared to the needs of this population?
* Do pregnant adolescents drop out of a specific school due to hostile treatment by a specific teacher or guidance counselor or due to defective policies in a specific school (organizational factors), in the school district (community factors), or in the state department of education (government factors)—or some combination of these factors?
* Did deficiencies in the policy and regulatory context contribute to the problem, such as a lack of guidelines from the school district, the state department of education, or the federal department of education to protect the teens’ rights to education?
* Do budgets of specific schools or school districts prioritize services for pregnant teenagers—or sex education or nurses in schools?
* Are pregnant students of color treated differently in specific schools or school districts than Caucasian pregnant students? Are low-income pregnant students treated differently than more affluent pregnant students?
* Do schools keep data on the educational paths of pregnant teens?
* Do specific schools give pregnant adolescents special accommodations, allow­ing them to be tardy or absent when obtaining medical care?
* What policies have specific schools or school districts developed to help young women remain in school after they have given birth, such as assistance with childcare, supportive counseling, and special accommodations?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 3.3**

**Moving Toward Macro Policy Advocacy to Help Pregnant High School Students**

The United States has the highest rates of teen pregnancies of any industrialized nation, even though the pregnancy rate has markedly declined for teens ages 15 to 19. Only one third of teen mothers finish high school, and only 1.5% have a college degree by age 30.

Public schools differ markedly in their policies regarding pregnant teen mothers, partly because of the absence of clear state laws or federal policies. Some of them send them to continuation schools during their pregnancy, where they are separated from their friends, and do not invite them back to their regular school after they have given birth. Continuation schools are of uncertain quality, partly because their standards are not well defined by state law. State laws are often unclear about whether adolescents can remain in continuation schools even after giving birth. Various laws forbid schools from expelling teen mothers, but they receive little policy guidance otherwise. Little case law enforces or guides the provision of educational services for teen mothers in many localities and states. Some evidence suggests, as well, that African American and low-income pregnant adolescents are treated more harshly than white and affluent adolescents. The laws and policies of some states do not require schools to provide sexual education. Many schools ignore the importance of preventive health education and comprehensive sex education. Many states do not require schools to keep data on the educational trajectories of teen mothers prior to giving birth or after they give birth.

Nor is it clear to what extent some states fund special programs for pregnant teens and teen mothers. While some teens can count on support from their parents and relatives, others lack such support—and may particularly need financial assistance from schools for medical care, childcare, counseling, and other provisions.

Nor is it clear what budgetary and policy roles exist for school districts as compared to state educational agencies and policies. Some state officials may wish to cede responsibility to school districts that lack resources and staff to help pregnant teens and teen mothers.

Advocates need to consider, as well, whether and under what circumstances preg­nant teens can seek termination of their pregnancies. What laws in their states impact these decisions—and do these laws need to be reformed? What positions do Planned Parenthood and other advocacy groups take on this issue in specific states?

These kinds of *systemic policy factors* can be addressed only through **macro policy advocacy.**

Identify some dysfunctional policies in your locality, region, or state that might be addressed through macro policy advocacy by social workers working with teenagers in schools or other settings.

Our discussion suggests that advocacy at micro, mezzo, and macro levels can be linked. Discuss how a social worker might move between micro policy advocacy, mezzo policy advocacy and macro policy advocacy.

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 3.4**

**Identifying Red Flag Alerts in Specific Settings**

Take any setting that provides human services with which you are familiar, whether your field agency or where you have volunteered or worked. Select any of the seven core problems that we discussed in Chapter 1 and that are listed in Table 3.1. Try to develop a list of one specific manifestation of each of the seven core problems listed in Table 3.1. Then ask a professional who works in the setting you have identified to discuss with you the extent to which these seven manifestations are relatively common in the setting. Also ask this professional to augment your list with several additional problems, and perhaps to delete one or more of the problems that you have identified.

Discuss the following questions:

* Is it possible to develop specific Red Flag Alerts in the setting that you have chosen?
* Would these Red Flag Alerts facilitate the use of micro policy advocacy by social workers in this setting?
* To what extent did you use research findings, ethical principles, or pragmatic factors to develop these Red Flag Alerts?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 3.5**

**Locating Information About Specific Social Problems**

Other manifestations of the seven core problems can be obtained by consulting the Internet, such as by typing problems into online search sites such as Google Search, Google Advanced Search or Google Scholar, or Microsoft’s Bing. Assume, for example, that you wonder if you are likely to encounter malnutrition among schoolchildren in a particular low-income neighborhood. You can find information about malnutrition among low-income children generally or in specific regions. This information may not accurately predict or measure malnutrition in a specific geographic area or a specific school district, so you would need to interview or contact researchers with geographic-specific knowledge about childhood malnutrition.

Take a stab at obtaining information about one of the following problems—and deciding if it should be designated a Red Flag Alert. Identify where social workers might encounter individuals with these problems by sector and geographic area, as well as by the type of agency or hospital where they work.

* The extent to which veterans receive services for brain trauma or for mental problems
* The extent to which homeless people receive affordable housing
* The extent to which sufficient services are given to truants in schools
* The extent to which released prisoners receive assistance with finding employment