This book is about valuing the family. It is not about family values. It is about valuing families no matter what their size, composition, structure, or race/ethnicity, or the sexual orientation of their members. It is about valuing families whether they are rich or poor, old or young, childless or with children. Valuing families means recognizing that in a diverse society such as the United States, family structures and membership vary widely, and the values held by the many kinds of families are diverse. Even though the values held by families vary widely, we believe all families have core needs that should be supported by and reflected in the nation’s policies. Broadly stated, these include policies that improve the well-being of families and their access to work, food, housing, and health care, as well as the care and support of children and the elderly. Attention to these core needs will strengthen families—however different from the “norm” they may be, and however different their value systems. Thus, we believe that valuing families in all their diversity is the starting point for sound public policy.

Valuing families means paying attention to their changing needs over the life span. Problems such as poverty, homelessness, illness, inadequate housing, unemployment, and abusive relationships may come and go, but these situations challenge the ability of families to provide adequate care and intergenerational support for their members. As pointed out by Early and GlenMaye (2000), “Rhetoric about ‘family values’ is of no help to families who face real-life dilemmas, but valuing families through recognizing and building on their strengths can assist families in improving their lives” (p. 118). From a social work practice perspective, the strengths approach is recommended, but such practice is constrained and even thwarted by
policies and programs that are individualistic in nature, and not aligned with the diversity of family situations.

The United States is a land of contradictions. The dominant culture holds the individual to be primary and at the same time claims to place the greatest value on the family. Despite the rhetoric of “family values,” our nation’s programs and policies—which typically are based on discrete categories of individuals—often fall short of providing the support needed to truly value families. By fragmenting families into mere groupings of individuals, programs and policies often fail to provide the support families need not just to survive but to thrive. Our emphasis on this fragmentation often ties the hands of agencies that want to provide services outside limited categories or creates a labyrinth of services far too complex for most families to navigate successfully. (Zahn, Hirota, Garcia, & Ro, 2003, p. 1797)

Thus, in view of the individualistic nature of policy in the United States, valuing families means that social workers and other human service professionals are duty bound to advocate policy change that puts the family at the center of policy discussions and proposals.

In real life, there is often a separation between the family values stance and the way families actually live their lives. Box 1.1 illustrates this disconnection in the context of marriage and the practice of family values. Our view is that valuing families is a universal perspective that supersedes political ideologies and nation-state differences. The true meaning of family values comes from actually placing value on the things that families do to provide physical, emotional, social, and financial support. This means that the actions of families—their love, caring, and commitment to the well-being of their members—are primary, and these should be valued over an emphasis on family structure.

Important Themes for Family Policy

This book has two main purposes. First, it is intended to serve as an introductory text on issues related to family policy. Second, it is intended to serve as a guide to readers who want to be able to analyze issues related to family policy and then engage in advocacy for policy change. In our quest to write a family policy book, we have drawn on the work of other scholars, activists, and policy institutes, including research reports, census data,
The disconnect between who values marriage and who actually practices it is especially striking. The 10 states with the highest divorce rates are all red or conservative states whose voters overwhelmingly support “values" candidates. Born-again Christians are as likely to divorce as other Americans, and the Bible Belt has the highest divorce rate in the nation. By contrast, the Northeast, noted for liberal politics and greater tolerance for alternative lifestyles, is the region where marriages are most likely to last. Massachusetts, the poster state for nontraditional family values with its legalization of same-sex marriage, has the lowest divorce rate in the country.

Educated elites are often accused of undermining the family with their liberal, relativist values. On average, it’s true that affluent, highly educated Americans are far more likely than less-educated or lower-income Americans to see divorce, cohabitation and unwed motherhood as acceptable behavior. But in practice they are far more likely to marry, less likely to divorce and less likely to have kids out of wedlock than their poorer brethren.

We see the same pattern internationally. Germans are much more accepting of teenagers engaging in sex than Americans are. But Germany has much lower rates of teen pregnancies and teen births than the United States. Norwegians consider out-of-wedlock births much more acceptable than do most Americans and a higher proportion of children are born to unmarried women in Norway than in the United States. But unmarried Norwegian mothers are much more likely than their U.S. counterparts to live with the father of their child. On average, Norwegian children spend 90 percent of their youth living with both parents, while U.S. children average just two-thirds of their youth living with both parents. . . .

What really matters in family and community life are not the abstract principles people give lip service to but the real relationships they enter into and how they handle commitments, whether those commitments are legally recognized or not. In today’s changing family and marital landscape, we should spend less time passing judgment on people’s theoretical “family values” and more time helping people build healthy relationships in their daily lives.

government documents, books, and journal articles. Starting in chapter 2, the reader will encounter many tables and charts that are very detailed. The purpose of these tables and charts is to provide readers with enough information to move beyond the conceptual level of understanding family policy to the operational level, where they can analyze and engage in family policy advocacy.

As we studied family policy, nine important themes emerged. Here we provide a brief introduction to these themes so that readers will be aware of these topics when they are revisited in later chapters. At the end of this chapter, the last three themes—devolution, privatization and managed care, and policy analysis and advocacy skills—are addressed in detail because they are so central to policy development and implementation.

First, there is not a uniform definition of the family in the United States. Because there is not a uniform definition of the family, policy has tended to address the traditional nuclear family—the so-called benchmark family—and ignore other types of family units. Moreover, as the changing demographics of families in the United States today show, it is inappropriate to equate the term *family* with the two-parent intact nuclear family. Thus, we have adopted a functional definition of the family, which is based on what families do to care for and support their members.

The second theme that emerged from our research is the lack of consensus on what constitutes family well-being. Trzcinski (1995) points out that although “consensus seems to exist across ideological lines for the most commonly cited goals of family policy,” which are to strengthen and support families and ensure family well-being, “this consensus is illusory and exists only when the concepts of strengthening, support, and well-being are not explicitly defined” (p. 20). Differences occur because values are interconnected with how people view the world, and based on their values, people make assumptions about how family life is or should be. These value-based ideas about family well-being often come from the subjective life history or life experiences of people. Since everyone does not share the same life experience, it is often difficult to step outside these experiences and the values embedded in them to consider policy for various types of families in different situations. Consequently, when dominant ideologies permeate policies and programs, they may or may not be in the best interest of many families, especially in light of the great diversity in the makeup of families in the United States.

The third theme of the book is that a comprehensive set of family policies does not exist in the United States. The United States is one of the only countries in the world whose constitution does not specifically use the word
family (Bogenschneider, 2002). Neither federal nor state governments have explicit sets of policies that are considered family policy. Although policy makers pass legislation that responds to specific issues, these policies do not provide a comprehensive vision of family well-being. Policy makers find it difficult to agree on what conditions constitute social problems, which factors contribute to them, what values should drive decisions, and how society ought to officially respond. Considering this lack of a comprehensive family policy, we take the view that all policy is family policy, since all policy affects families in one way or another. In saying this, we understand that some policies have an obvious direct effect on families, while other policies indirectly affect the family unit, and still other policies seem to have little or no effect. We espouse the idea that all policy is family policy in an effort to emphasize the importance of looking seriously at all policies to see the extent to which they support or assist families in all their diversity. We also believe that this is an important mind-set for students and policy practitioners as they seek to advocate for and work with families.

The fourth theme is the disagreement about how much the government should intervene in the private affairs of the family. Many policy makers feel the family should be outside the purview of policy, and family well-being should be regarded as a private matter. Given the current political propensity to control family privacy in areas such as abortion and same-sex marriage, this argument seems, at best, disingenuous. Nevertheless, the argument about the private sphere of the family persists because family policy implies regulation and intervention in family life.

The fifth theme is the question of whether family poverty and family problems are due to structural factors or individual behavior. Are family problems caused by circumstances outside one’s control or the result of one’s own doing? Historically, this debate is known in social work as the difference between those who are “deserving” and “undeserving” of help. During times of wide-ranging crisis such as the Great Depression or, more recently, the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Ike or the nation’s economic turmoil following the subprime mortgage crisis, there has been public recognition that many problems are outside the control of families. In situations such as this, public opinion turns in favor of government intervention and action. Federal, state, and local government policies and programs are viewed as essential to restoring the economy and attending to people’s needs through social programs. But at other times and in less crisis-oriented situations, the notion that family functioning is the purview of the family takes hold politically, and the dominant view is that little or no government intervention is needed or appropriate.
Family policy making is all the more difficult because of the rapidly changing nature of the U.S. population. The sixth theme is that families are in flux, changing in demographics, structure, issues of diversity, and development over the life span. Some of these demographic trends and issues are discussed in this chapter, and also in later chapters. In addition, the changing structure of families over the life span makes it difficult to develop a standard, coherent body of family policy that takes the changing nature of the family into account. In turn, the changing nature of the family is affected by policy, by changes in social norms, and by external factors. What results is a complex policy analysis and policy development situation, in which the formulation of policies that are responsive to family needs and supportive of family well-being is very difficult. As Kay (2006) points out, “dynamic models of complex systems are much more difficult to construct than static ones. The difficulty arises because there are several processes . . . going on at the same time” (p. 1). Thus, just in terms of addressing the rapidly changing composition of families in the United States, family policy making is necessarily a dynamic process.

The debate over the auspices of policy development and implementation is the seventh theme. Should the federal government mandate uniform policy standards? Or should states have the final say about how policy will be implemented in the local context? This concept is referred to as devolution. Devolution is often framed as a state’s rights issue, and the argument centers on whether it is constitutionally appropriate for the federal government to implement broad social policy objectives. Recent court decisions in such areas as civil rights and educational standards appear to have established that the federal government has such powers. Sometimes, the devolution argument is framed as whether a broad set of federal social policies is appropriate when local conditions within states may differ radically. The recent efforts of the federal government to allow states to develop programs in the areas of welfare, health care, and child welfare seem to be examples of this view. Although policies are often established at the federal level, through devolution they may be altered when states and local governments are given leeway to develop their own programs that implement the federal policy.

Privatization and managed care are the eighth major theme of the book. The privatization of programs and services occurs when government contracts for services with nonprofit and business corporations to implement programs and services. Managed care is a market-based method of rationing benefits and services, and this approach is often used as part of privatization. In today’s world, privatization and managed care are often used by all levels of government to implement programs and services.
Later in this chapter, we look more closely at privatization and managed care, and in various chapters of the book, we discuss how these processes affect the implementation of family policies.

The ninth major theme of this book is the importance of policy analysis and advocacy. The dynamic nature of policy making requires policy analysis and advocacy skills, which are directly tied to practice. In the absence of critical analysis, only superficial knowledge of policy and its relationship to family well-being is possible. Social workers are positioned to advocate policy that is tied to the real experiences of the families experiencing problems or the effects of current policy on families. Without advocacy, it is unlikely that citizens, social workers, and other human service professionals will be able to bring about the changes needed to develop policies that support and assist families. Instead, policy change will likely take place as the result of some crisis or because of the influence of powerful interests who may or may not be focused on improving family functioning.

Because of their importance to the overall purpose of this book, we conclude this chapter by highlighting the last three major themes. First, we look at changing demographics and social trends that are greatly affecting today's families. This is followed by discussions of devolution, privatization, and managed care. Policy analysis and advocacy are briefly covered, leading up to more detailed discussions in chapter 2 and chapter 3. Finally, we discuss why it is important for social workers and other human service workers to understand the relationship between policy and practice.

Changing Demographics and Social Trends

The family is a fundamental social unit. Families produce, nurture, and protect children. They educate and socialize future adults. They care for the disabled and the aged. Families engage in work and production. These basic roles and functions of the family have not changed dramatically over time. But the way in which families carry out these roles and functions has changed at different times in history. In pre-agricultural hunting-and-gathering societies, the good of the community overshadowed the well-being of the family. In agricultural societies, the extended family played a central role in farming and property holding. With industrialization and mass production, people flocked to urban areas and traveled across oceans for new jobs. Many families were no longer living in their place of origin, where they could rely on the extended family or the local community for support. Likewise, the twentieth century brought many economic changes in the United States. The booms and busts of the Industrial Revolution...
gave way to the globalization of industries, and a shift to a lower-wage service economy. The gap between the rich and the poor increased. Whereas a family’s income once came from a single wage earner, it is now common for both parents to have to work to make ends meet. With both parents working, the need for child care outside the home has dramatically increased.

Family structure is also dynamic. It changes over the course of its members’ life span. For example, family structure changes with cohabitation, marriage, childbirth, divorce, remarriage or the decision to remain single, and widowhood. Family roles also change as families experience life changes in terms of childbearing and caregiving responsibilities, illness and health, and job loss and employment. Families shape and, in turn, are shaped by changes in social norms related to single parenthood, interracial families, families headed by gay and lesbian parents, grandparents raising grandchildren, and the growing elderly population. All these and other economic, social, and demographic factors cause changes in the family. The following section briefly looks at changing demographics and family trends that support the need to rethink what the term family means in the rapidly evolving social and economic structure that now exists in the United States. A consideration of these trends is important to the development of policies that support and assist all types of families in the United States.

**Family Membership and Structure**

The U.S. Census Bureau (2005b) reports that “Family households represented 81 percent of households in 1970 and 68 percent of America’s 113.1 million households in 2005” (p. 1). Of the households counted in the United States, only slightly more than half (52%) were headed by married couples. It also reports that between 1970 and 2005, the number of married-couple families with children under eighteen fell from 40 percent of all households to 23 percent, and, in many of these families, one or both of the biological parents of the children who lived in the household did not live in the household. Although the majority of children live with two married parents, 26 percent of all children lived with a mother only, and 6 percent with a father only. The percentage of families with children headed by one adult increased from 11 percent in 1970 to 16 percent in 2003 (Fields, 2004). More than 5 million couples reported they were not married; however, it is likely that this is underreported. Single-mother families increased from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2003, while single-father families increased from fewer than half a million to 2 million.
Childbirth among teenagers steadily declined between 1970 and 1990, but the number of births among unmarried women increased. As a result of this trend, the number of children living with a single parent increased. Much of the increase is due to older unmarried women having children, and increases in the divorce rate, which rose rapidly throughout the 1970s and 1980s before leveling off somewhat in the 1990s. Another major change in family composition is the increase in families headed by gays and lesbians. The American Civil Liberties Union (2005) estimates that 7.8 million to 10.4 million people (3–4% of the population) identify themselves as gay, but some researchers have estimated the gay population to be nearer to 10 percent of the total population. In the 2000 census, 1.2 million people (600,000 households) identified themselves as living with same-sex partners. Estimates suggest that between 1 and 9 million children live with one gay parent or more (American Civil Liberties Union, 2005). Same-sex partnerships, gay and lesbian parenting and custody, and adoption by gay and lesbian individuals are politically divisive issues. The courts and federal and state legislatures are grappling with the civil rights of gay and lesbian partners in employment, parental custody, hospital visitation, benefits, and financial matters.

An additional 3.9 million families are multigenerational households. Some consist of one parent or more, and grandparents and/or other relatives and children. In others, the parents of the children are absent. In 2003, there were 3 million sub-families—mainly multigenerational families consisting of elderly parents supporting their adult children and grandchildren, or young adults with children taking care of their parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005b). The number of grandparents raising grandchildren increased from 957,000 in 1970 to 1.4 million in 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a). Another demographic trend is the increase of one-person households from 16.2 percent in 1970 to 26.4 percent of all nonfamily households in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005b). Much of this increase in one-person households is accounted for by delays in marriage and greater life expectancy for the elderly.

Race and Ethnicity

Between 1990 and 2000, the overall U.S. population increased 13 percent. The number of Hispanics increased 57 percent, blacks 16 percent, Asians 52 percent, and Native Americans 16 percent, and the white non-Hispanic population increased 3 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). It is predicted that major population changes will occur by 2050. The white
non-Hispanic population, which constituted 69 percent of the population in 2000, will make up only 50 percent by 2050. Blacks will increase from 13 percent to 15 percent of the overall population, and Hispanics from 13 percent to 24 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). The U.S. Census Bureau (2005b) released data in 2005 showing that “among people 15 and older in 2005, 56 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 58 percent of Asians were married and living with a spouse. . . . The proportion married and living with a spouse was 31 percent for Blacks and 46 percent for Hispanics” (p. 5).

Education

As the racial and ethnic composition of the population changes, it is likely that this will have an impact on individuals’ levels of education. Education affects the life chances of individuals. In 2004, 87 percent of young adults age eighteen to twenty-four had obtained a high school diploma or a General Equivalence Diploma (GED). However, there were substantial differences by race and ethnicity. Ninety-two percent of whites held a diploma by age twenty-four, compared to 83 percent of blacks and 70 percent of Hispanics (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2006).

Similar differences hold for college degrees. Twenty-eight percent of all U.S. adults attained a bachelor’s degree by the age of twenty-nine in 2004. Thirty-four percent of college degrees were granted to whites. Blacks lagged behind at 18 percent, and Hispanics at 10 percent. These differences in educational attainment affect the ability of heads of households to support their families. Fifteen percent of all children have a parent who has not received a high school diploma. For children with foreign-born parents, that number increases to 43 percent. The income of individuals with a high school degree is almost double the income of those who drop out of high school, and on average, college graduates make more than double the income of high school graduates. Since families of color currently experience three times the rate of poverty as white families, a major increase in the ethnic and racial diversity of families has implications for family policy. In this changing demographic context, if there is no serious policy development in the areas of education and professional training, it is likely that a large proportion of families will experience increased economic stresses in the coming decades. This is cause for even more concern when one considers the negative trend toward inequality in the distribution of income and wealth, and the impact of globalization on income and job opportunities.
Devolution

Devolution is the process by which government establishes broad policies and then delegates, by statute or regulation, the responsibility for implementing and administering those policies to a lower-level governmental body or private entity. Devolution is a major force affecting the development of policies supporting family well-being in the United States. Because of devolution, federal influence over policies that have an impact on family well-being has diminished over the past three decades. Through devolution, states have assumed much of the responsibility for both policy creation and the implementation of family policy and programs. Devolution decentralizes government responsibility to the state or local level. Broad policy may be created at the federal level, but state and local governments have authority to shape—and the responsibility to partially pay for—social welfare services.

Devolution has its pros and cons. On one hand, it provides states with the opportunity to create innovative programs for families from a local grassroots perspective. Under the guidelines of broad federal mandates, states can tailor social policy and programs to local conditions. On the other hand, by relinquishing responsibility to the states, the federal government is limited in guaranteeing entitlement, or the rights of individuals to assistance through state-specific programs and policies. Moreover, the tradeoff is that although states have more decision-making authority, less money comes from the federal government to fund programs. The result is that some states are more progressive in their support for families, while others invest less in family programs and services.

The budget for funding many of the programs that assist families is funneled down to states and local governments through federal departments. Often funds are distributed through block grants or through grants to and/or contracts with public agencies and private for-profit or nonprofit organizations. A block grant is an intergovernmental transfer of money from the federal government to a regional or local body. Within general guidelines established by Congress and the executive branch, block grants give discretion to local bodies in the way that the money is spent. Block grants are commonly used to fund health, education, child welfare, community development, and many other types of programs. Opponents argue that block grants reduce the federal government’s responsibility for social welfare, while proponents argue that block grants allow state and local governments to better assess local needs. Another criticism of block grants is that strong federal oversight is needed to ensure equity and fairness in the distribution of resources. Historically, most federal programs were funded...
by matching state and federal funds, but the process of devolution has increased the use of block grants. While there are drawbacks to both of these strategies, they do provide opportunities for social workers to influence policy development close to home. Since devolution brings decision-making authority down to state and local governments, social workers and other human service professionals have greater access to decision makers.

Privatization and Managed Care

Another important trend is the privatization of service delivery. Through privatization, programs are operated by for-profit and nonprofit organizations rather than by government agencies. Privatization can result from devolution or direct funding by federal, state, or local governments. Privatization is based on the belief that private corporations are more innovative, efficient, and effective in providing services than government bureaucracies. Like devolution, privatization presents its own set of political challenges. As the privatization of services has increased, a whole host of agencies have received government funds, and this has increased the complexity of the service delivery system. Critics challenge the movement toward privatization, especially when contracts for social services are given to large for-profit organizations. By definition, a for-profit organization is one that expects to make a profit that will be funneled back to the owners or shareholders of the company or corporation. The assumption is that for-profit corporations increase profits by reducing services or raising fees—both of which may negatively affect potential service users. Cost reduction also implies fewer available services, a dilemma that is at the very heart of the for-profit controversy. A recent example of how privatization can negatively affect service delivery relates to for-profit companies that own nursing homes. According to Duhigg (2007), “By many regulatory benchmarks, residents at those nursing homes are worse off, on average, than they were under previous owners, according to an analysis by The New York Times of data collected by government agencies from 2000 to 2006. The Times analysis shows that . . . many other nursing homes acquired by large private investors have cut expenses and staff, sometimes below minimum legal requirements.”

Managed care is often related to privatization. Managed care is a market-based approach to service delivery that attempts to contain costs by targeting and rationing services. Companies and nonprofit corporations use managed care as a financial accountability method when they sign a contract for services with government. Managed care is widely used in many
areas of family policy, including health care, mental health services, and child welfare.

Policy Analysis and Advocacy

Despite the complications of privatization and managed care, there are many opportunities for advocacy within organizations that contract for services with government agencies. Many policies can be changed at the agency level, particularly since so much decision making is left to the agency responsible for implementing government-funded programs or services. Thus, advocates may focus on changing the practices of an agency based on the organization’s policies, which may or may not be formalized. Often policy is informal—that is, based on the culture of the organization, traditional ways of doing things, or the agency’s desire to standardize delivery of services, regardless of the diversity of needs of the population being served (Ezell, 2001).

Advocacy that is not based on a critical analysis of the policies or issues affecting families can lead to the development of ineffective or misguided interventions. In chapters 2 and 3, we spend some time explaining policy analysis and advocacy. According to Meenaghan, Kilty, and McNutt (2004), there are two traditions in policy formation. One tradition relies heavily on a rational problem-solving approach, while the other stresses the impact of political forces and power. A rational approach to policy making is based on the assumption that scientific inquiry will provide policy makers with unbiased information about problems and possible solutions for family problems. Research will provide information that is inclusive of all family forms, and policy makers will use this information to make decisions. If this assumption were always true, then a rational approach to policy decisions would be sufficient. In reality, however, it is nearly impossible to account for all of society’s values, take all possible policy alternatives into account, weigh the consequences of each alternative for all groups affected, and make a rational decision about which policy options are best.

An alternative view is that policy making is not a very rational process. Policy making is, rather, primarily a political process. For example, studies commissioned by the legislative and executive branches of government—and to a lesser extent the judicial branch—are often totally ignored by policy makers. This happens even when studies are based on fact finding and rational analyses of the options and possible solutions to the problems (e.g., Brodkin & Kaufman, 2000; Quinn & Magill, 1994). Indeed, there is rarely consensus about the problems confronting society and what, if
anything, should be done about them. DiNitto (2006) contends that political conflict raises questions about how rational policy decisions can really be made in a society where few values are agreed on by all, and whose members cannot always agree on what the problems actually are, and when policy makers and elected officials may be more interested in reaping rewards for themselves, such as power, status, or reelection.

Issues of power and status in the policy-making arena are extremely important to the dynamics of the policy process. How do problems and issues get on the public agenda? Who has power in the policy-making process? What special interests do they represent? Can these interests be divorced from the policy-making process? Karger and Stoesz (2007) suggest that since the 1970s, social welfare policy has largely been shaped by values that emphasize individualism, work, and the unregulated use of the market rather than on a rational set of assumptions guided by reliable research. The interests being served by the values inherent in a given policy decision are important because these dictate the way in which services are delivered and resources are distributed. If social policies are shaped by the values of those in power, then it is possible to define problems according to the beliefs and values of largely privileged individuals who tend to look at issues from the perspective of people with similar resources, education, and opportunity structures. Certain values are seen as optimal, and if families deviate from the norm, their problems are seen as either less important or created by their own individual shortcomings. Welfare reform is a good example of this. Although the ultimate goal of welfare reform was to move people off welfare and into work, the kinds of jobs available and the necessity of a living wage associated with the work were not a top priority. Health benefits and access to affordable quality day care were also secondary considerations at best. Thus, although the need may be defined rationally, the values of different actors shape how the problem is defined, and how the solution is viewed when a policy is proposed. Who gets what—and how they receive it—becomes largely a discussion of who is at the table and who is making the decision. It is also important to understand that forces beyond the control of the policy makers may play a major role in determining what policies can be developed.

The Relationship between Policy and Practice

It is important for social workers to understand the limitations that policy puts on practice and the ways in which policy and practice are inextricably connected. The topics in this book are used to explore the challenges that
workers confront when assisting families. Our discussions attempt to make explicit the connection between practice with families and the wide range of policies that inform, guide, and regulate that practice. Every day social workers and other human service workers experience the limitations of policy as they assist families to maneuver their way through a fragmented system of policies and programs dealing with separate yet overlapping problems. Often the family is not the focus of the policy. Rather, individuals with presenting problems are the focus, and the family unit is considered secondarily, or not at all.

Thus, without an understanding of how policy shapes practice and ways to advocate better services, helping professionals are likely to experience powerlessness and frustration in their work (Lewandowski, 2003). Understanding the linkage between policy and practice is not enough. Workers need information on how to analyze policy and how to advocate for families, both individually and systemically. And before they become active in advocacy, social workers need to feel a sense of efficacy (Hamilton & Fauri, 2001). This book presents skills for analyzing policies and programs, and for advocating for families at multiple levels of the organizational and political spectrum. Taken together, the various chapters of the book provide not only conceptual tools for understanding and analyzing family policy, but also practical skills for advocating and developing policies that value the family in all its diversity.

**For Further Reading**


**References**


