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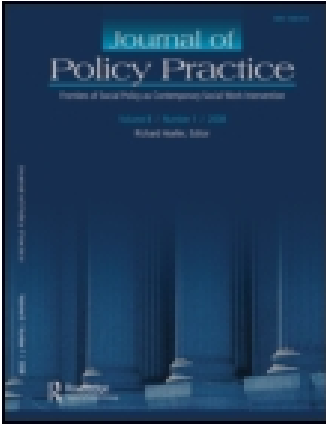
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Julie A. Steen ^a

^a University of Central Florida , School of Social Work , Orlando , Florida , USA

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The Development of Foster Care Privatization Policy in Florida: An Application of Kingdon's Policy Development Model

JULIE A. STEEN

University of Central Florida, School of Social Work, Orlando, Florida, USA

This study focused on the context surrounding the development of Florida's foster care privatization policy. Using a retrospective case study method, documents regarding the development of Florida's foster care privatization policy were collected and analyzed. Results suggest that the policy evolved in a manner consistent with Kingdon's (1984) policy development model, which incorporates factors in the political, problem, and policy domains. Alignment of opportunities in these domains set the stage for this policy's adoption. These findings build on those found in the research literature and provide a base for further research on the topic of child welfare policy change.

KEYWORDS agenda-setting, child welfare policy, foster care, policy making, privatization

Privatization of child protection systems is emerging as one of the most substantial policy shifts in recent decades. Many state legislatures now view this policy option as the preferred choice in child protection system reform (McCullough & Schmitt, 2000; United States General Accounting Office, 1998; Westat & Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2002). Florida's system is one such example of this trend. During the 1998 Legislative Session, Florida's legislators mandated the privatization of all foster care services (Florida Senate, 2000–2011a). Researchers have responded to this policy shift with evaluations of policy impact (Blackstone, Buck, & Hakim, 2004; Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, 2006; Friesen, 2001; Humphrey, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2006; Petr & Johnson, 1999; Yampolskaya,

Address correspondence to Julie A. Steen, University of Central Florida, School of Social Work, P.O. Box 163358, Orlando, FL 32816. E-mail: julie.steen@ucf.edu

Paulson, Armstrong, Jordan, & Vargo, 2004). However, scant attention has been paid to the context in which privatization policies arise. In order to address this emerging issue, this manuscript presents a case study of the context in which Florida's foster care privatization policy developed. This analysis is framed by Kingdon's (1984) policy development model. Following a description of the 1998 privatization policy, the method and results are presented, along with implications for future policy research.

FLORIDA'S FOSTER CARE PRIVATIZATION POLICY

During the 1998 legislative session, members of the Florida House and Senate passed House Bill 3217, which mandated the statewide privatization of Florida's foster care system. This policy built on past legislation that allowed for the development of pilot projects in which foster care privatization could be tested (Florida Senate, 2000–2011a). One such pilot project located in Sarasota was in progress at the time of this bill's passage (Judd, 1998a). The 1998 policy created a transition process, which was to begin with the submission of a plan for the statewide implementation of foster care privatization. A deadline of January 2003 was set for the completion of the transition. The policy also included criteria for the selection of private agencies and additional standards for quality assurance (Florida Senate, 2000–2011a).

During the legislative process, the foster care privatization policy was packaged with two similar child protection reforms. Both of these reforms involved the transition of certain child protective services to governmental units outside of the Florida Department of Children and Family Services. The management and operation of child protective investigations was assigned to the sheriff's departments in the counties of Pinellas, Manatee, and Pasco. This transition was set to begin during the 1998–1999 fiscal year with the full transfer being completed by the following fiscal year. In addition, responsibility for child welfare legal services was shifted to offices in the court system (e.g., the state attorney and the Office of the Attorney General). This provision was set to begin during the 1999–2000 fiscal year in the counties of Sarasota, Pinellas, Pasco, and Manatee (Florida Senate, 2000–2011a). House Bill 3217 included both of these reforms alongside the foster care privatization policy.

METHOD

A retrospective case study design was employed with the goal of identifying the context in which this policy developed. Data collection focused on several data sources, including newspaper articles, online legislative bill records from the Florida Senate Archive (Florida Senate, 2000–2011a, 2000–2011b,

2000–2011c, 2000–2011d, 2000–2011e, and 2000–2011f), and the report of the Governor's Child Abuse Task Force (1998). Content analysis of available documents was first conducted in order to select documents for inclusion in the study. Following selection of documents, material that was relevant to the research question was collected and reported in this manuscript. Inclusion criteria were based on variables found in the conceptual framework provided by Kingdon (1984).

Kingdon's (1984) policy development model, which guided the analysis, asserts that policy development is more likely to progress toward adoption when events in three separate streams occur simultaneously. These three separate streams focus on the politics stream (i.e., political context in which the policy is introduced), the problem stream (i.e., the identification of a problem by the public and/or political actors), and the policy stream (i.e., the framing of a particular policy as a solution to the problem identified in the problem stream). When an opening appears simultaneously in each of the three streams, policy adoption is more likely. In addition to these three streams, Kingdon's model emphasizes the role of the policy entrepreneur, which is a policy actor who successfully or unsuccessfully frames his/her preferred policy as the solution to the problem. Each of these key concepts is considered in the application of the model to the development of Florida's privatization policy.

APPLICATION OF KINGDON'S POLICY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Politics Stream

The politics stream is the political context in which the policy develops. According to Kingdon (1984, p. 152), this stream is "composed of such things as public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions in Congress and changes of administration." These factors come together to form a policy environment that is either supportive of or hostile to the policy proposal. In the case of Florida's foster care privatization policy, the political stream included several notable characteristics, each of which is described in this section.

The Florida Legislative Session of 1998 was set within an era of changing political landscapes. While Florida had previously been a stronghold of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party surged ahead in the 1990s. The 1994 gubernatorial race was a close one, with incumbent Lawton Chiles narrowly winning the race against challenger Jeb Bush (Rapp, 1998). While Republicans were unable to take the governor's seat in 1994, they were able to attain a majority in the Florida Senate (Dunkelberger, 1994). This momentum continued into the 1996 election, in which the Republican Party gained control of the Florida House (Rapp, 1998). These shifts were substantial ones,

as the Florida House and Senate had been led by Democrats for more than a century (Griffin & Kennedy, 1997; Hollis, 1996). Emboldened by their successes, Florida Republicans often took their lead from former gubernatorial candidate, Jeb Bush. In the words of one Florida Representative, “Jeb was almost a phantom governor” (Rapp, 1998, p. 38). However, this “phantom” status would not last long. Bush began campaigning again in 1997, eventually winning the governor’s seat in the fall of 1998 (Griffin, 1997a; Kennedy, 1998).

During late 1997 and early 1998, Jeb Bush’s campaign was in full swing. Having lost in 1994, he sought to redefine himself with a new focus on issues of poverty, education, and child protection (Gwynne & Duffy, 1998; Levine, 1998; “The Second Son Also Rises,” 1997). He voiced his position regarding child protection in an editorial titled “In Sarasota, a Place to Call Home.” He critiqued the current system, stating “It doesn’t take a master’s degree in social services to see what’s wrong. Like most states, Florida has invested an entire generation on a government-operated child-welfare system fraught with perverse incentives, overwhelmed caseworkers and layers of regulations” (Bush, 1997, p. G3). The solution he offered was a system “handled by local communities and private charities” (Bush, 1997, p. G3). His editorial lauded a foster care privatization pilot project in Sarasota, comparing the project to the orphan trains of Charles Brace and the Children’s Aid Society. In his conclusion, he states:

When it comes to our children, we should celebrate good ideas. We should let the spirit of community restore our sense of compassion and responsibility for the helpless. And community-based care should become an alternative for every child in Florida. (Bush, 1997, p. G3)

In the weeks following this editorial, Bush considered possible running mates, including Ginny Brown-Waite, the future Senate sponsor of the foster care privatization bill (DeWitt, 1997; Judd, 1998b).

During the 1997 and 1998 legislative sessions, the Senate was led by President Toni Jennings, a Republican who had a competitive relationship with Bush. In 1994, she had the opportunity to be Bush’s running mate, but declined the offer (Griffin, 1997a). In 1997, she considered an entry into the race for the governor’s seat, which would have resulted in a battle with Bush during the Republican primary (Griffin, 1997b; Griffin & Kennedy, 1997). The competition between Jennings and Bush could be seen in the politics of the 1997 Legislative Session, with Bush organizing advocates against one of Jennings’ efforts in the Senate (Griffin, 1997c). On the other hand, Jennings created a culture within the Senate that fostered bipartisan efforts. In this way, her leadership style sharply departed from her House counterpart, Daniel Webster (Griffin, 1998; Rado, 1998).

During this time, the Florida House of Representatives, led by Speaker Daniel Webster, was engaged in many conflicts. The House Speaker battled Governor Chiles over many issues, including school construction, school vouchers, and veto overrides (Elmore, 1998a; Griffin, 1998; Rado, 1998). In addition, conflicts emerged amongst members of the House, with animosities developing both within and between the political parties (Griffin, 1998). At one point during the 1998 Legislative Session, a physical fight between two Republican Representatives took place in the House Chamber ("Vouchers Debate Sparks House Scuffle," 1998). Legislators spoke of the tension in the House:

"I can't sleep at night," said Rep. Mary Brennan, D-Pinellas Park, who has struggled through two lengthy committee meetings this week marked by raw nerves. (Rado, 1998, p. 5B)

"You can see the fights on the floor, but they're much worse behind the scenes," said Rep. Lois Frankel, D-West Palm Beach. "I'm going to need to go to a rest home after this is over." (Kleindienst & Nitkin, 1998, p. 1)

These characteristics of the House, along with the characteristics of the Senate and the upcoming gubernatorial election, compose one of the three streams Kingdon (1984) deemed relevant in policy development. Their relationship to the path of the bill will become evident as we progress through Kingdon's model.

Problem Stream

One of the first stages in the policy process is the identification of a problem that concerns the public and warrants the attention of government officials. Kingdon (1984) identified three ways in which a problem comes to the attention of policy makers. The issue may become clear through statistical indicators of a growing problem, feedback from professionals and citizens involved in the subject matter, and focusing events that are publicized by the media. These processes by which the problem may rise in prominence on the policy-making agenda take place in what Kingdon (1984) terms the problem stream. In the case of Florida's foster care privatization policy, the problem stream was dominated by several key focusing events. Kingdon argues that focusing events by themselves are often not enough to propel a policy forward. He states, "the disaster acts as an early warning, but then needs to be combined with more solid indication that the problem is widespread" (Kingdon, 1984, p.104).

The application of Kingdon's model to the case of Florida's foster care privatization policy requires a consideration of the focusing events occurring before the policy's adoption. During the fall of 1997, media outlets began

reporting on six child abuse fatalities. Five of these fatalities occurred within quick succession of one another. The victims included Beaunca Jones, Nia Scott, Alexandria Champagne, Saydee Alvarado, and Walkiria Batista. The first of these five deaths occurred on September 4 and the last occurred on September 11 (Decker, 1997). A sixth child, Jonathan Flam, died in October (Kennedy, 1997a). These cases had several notable similarities. All of the children were either infants or toddlers at the time of their deaths and all of them died following beatings from caretakers. In five of the six cases, the perpetrator was the mother's boyfriend. In the remaining case, the perpetrator was the mother. Perhaps the most important similarity across the cases was prior involvement with the Department of Children and Family Services. All of these children had been the subjects of child maltreatment investigations by the Florida Department of Children and Family Services at some point before their deaths (Decker, 1997; Kaczor, 1997; Kennedy, 1997a; Savino & Kennedy, 1997).

The Florida Department of Children and Family Services responded to these focusing events by examining the first five cases and taking action where they deemed appropriate. Based on the preliminary report that resulted from this examination, the top administrator, Secretary Ed Feaver, "acknowledged child protection investigators failed to do an adequate job protecting four of the five youngsters" (Savino & Kennedy, 1997, p. A1). His forthright presentation of the cases and the failures of his agency can be seen in his statements, as quoted below:

"Even a cursory look at those cases indicates the need for critical improvements in our child-protection system," Feaver said. (Kennedy, 1997b, p. A1)

"We absolutely did not do our job," said Ed Feaver, secretary of the state Department of Children and Families. "It looks like we waited far too long to act in response to examples of what looked like child abuse." (Savino & Kennedy, 1997, p. A1)

Problems identified in the preliminary report include "inadequate supervisory oversight, a lack of communications among employees and a failure to do background checks on boyfriends" (Kaczor, 1997, p. 1B). In one of the five cases, the errors were so egregious, the protective investigator was fired and his supervisor was suspended. In this case, the protective investigator received a report "on May 21 that Walkiria suffered a bloody eye, facial bruises and serious loss of hair" (Savino, 1997a, p. A1). However, he did not make face-to-face contact with the child until August 7. In addition, he "waited three months to request medical reports from [the child's] doctor" (Savino & Kennedy, 1997, p. A1). His supervisor failed to review the case, "even though it stayed open for four months" (Savino & Kennedy, 1997, p. A1). Secretary Ed Feaver responded with the following statement: "In this

case, I don't care if you have 80 cases you're watching, there are certain things you are supposed to do to guarantee a child's safety that just don't take that much time' (Savino & Kennedy, 1997, p. A1).

While the secretary of the Department of Children and Family Services openly addressed the failures of his employees, the behavior of professionals from other agencies was also questioned. The multidisciplinary nature of the failure was particularly evident in the Batista case. "[T]he report also described the lack of urgency demonstrated by 'any of the professionals who were assigned to this case'" (Savino, 1997b, p. 1). Before the death of Walkiria Batista, her case involved two police officers who responded to child maltreatment reports, six physicians who treated the child, and a clinical social worker who counseled the child (Savino, 1997a, 1997b, and 1997c). The maltreatment reports began in early May, with the first report coming from doctors who treated her for a fractured knee (Savino, 1997b). On July 9, a clinical social worker assessed the child and found her to have "an 'adjustment disorder' attributable to the child's unwillingness to accept her mother's new boyfriend," the perpetrator who abused and eventually killed her (Savino, 1997a, p. A1). A week and a half later, she was seen by doctors for a dislocated shoulder. In early August, she was finally seen by the protective investigator based on the May 21 report of injuries to her eye, face, and scalp (Savino, 1997a). One month later, she was dead (Decker, 1997).

Governor Lawton Chiles and challenger Jeb Bush both entered the public discussion regarding these focusing events. Chiles is reported to have said, "I am sickened by the continuing number of children who are dying at the hands of adults and I want to make sure we're doing everything possible to prevent his kind of tragedy" (Kennedy, 1997a, p. D1). To this end, he formed a task force to examine the child protection system and produce recommendations for system change (Kennedy, 1997a). The final report was released in mid-April of the following year, near the end of the 1998 Florida Legislative Session (Dunkelberger, 1998; Governor's Child Abuse Task Force, 1998). In response to Chiles' formation of the task force, Bush held a press conference on October 31 in which he argued that maltreated children need immediate action rather than a task force study. He stated that child maltreatment is "the most pressing problem in Florida" and the child protection system is in "complete and total breakdown" ("Bush calls for 'community care,'" 1997, p. 2A). His solution was a five-point plan that echoed the sentiment found in his September 7 editorial (Bush, 1997). Accordingly, the plan consisted of the following strategies: privatization of foster care and adoption, shift of investigative function from the Department of Children and Family Services to law enforcement offices, expansion of a child abuse prevention program called Healthy Families, reform of the court system, and engagement with community members in the protection of children ("Bush calls for 'community care,'" 1997).

Policy Stream

As stated earlier, the policy stream includes the activities of a policy actor who attempts to frame his or her preferred policy as the solution to the problem identified in the problem stream. These policy actors, which have been termed by Kingdon (1984) as policy entrepreneurs, work toward the adoption of the policy through their advocacy efforts. In the case of Florida's foster care privatization policy, the influence of Bush should not be underestimated. However, another key policy entrepreneur is evident. Her contribution to the passage of the policy will be delineated below.

One of the entrepreneurs in this case is Senator Ginny Brown-Waite, the Senate sponsor of the foster care privatization bill. During the fall of 1997, Jeb Bush considered Brown-Waite as a possible running mate on the Republican ticket for the 1998 gubernatorial election (DeWitt, 1997). Ten days after Bush's press conference regarding his five-point plan for the child protection system, Senator Brown-Waite filed Senate Bill 352, the text of which would eventually become Florida's foster care privatization policy (Florida Senate, 2000–2011b).

When examining her role in this policy's development, her personal experience with foster care is important to note. During the 1980s, she adopted a girl from Florida's foster care system. In discussions regarding the foster care privatization bill, she expressed her frustration with the failure of the system to protect her adopted daughter before her daughter came into her care. This experience is reflected in the following quotes:

“When I went through her records,” Brown-Waite, R-Spring Hill, said recently, “I thought, ‘God, why didn’t the social workers intervene? Why didn’t they say the parent wasn’t prepared to parent’.” (Judd, 1998b, p. B3)

“I saw how that child was allowed to remain in that situation that a second-grader would have known was a dangerous situation,” [Brown-Waite] said. (Smith, 1998a, p. 7B)

While political motivation may have played a role in Brown-Waite's sponsorship of the foster care privatization bill, her personal motivations, as evident in these quotes, should also be considered.

Brown-Waite's presentations of the bill were dramatic and emotional. According to those in attendance at committee meetings where her bill was heard, “her voice [was] strained and [her] eyes welled up at times” (“Legislation to privatize,” 1998, p. 5B). During one of these committee hearings, Brown-Waite “carried a sign that read, ‘Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results’” (Judd, 1998b, p. B3). Her statements regarding the bill repeatedly focused on this line of thought: the public agency has failed and a new model is needed.

"I've had a lot of concerns in the last few years in the direction that the Legislature was sending the Department of Children and Family Services," said Brown-Waite, R-Spring Hill. "I fear that we were sending a message that we really didn't . . . want to protect Florida's children." ("Legislation to privatize," 1998, p. 5B)

"The question is can we continue to allow a system that has failed our children? Can we continue to fund it and even grow it?" said Brown-Waite, who sat next to Murman during the House debate. (Smith, 1998b, p. 1B)

"This is a vehicle we'll all be proud of when we go home," Sen. Ginny Brown-Waite, R-Spring Hill, the bill's Senate sponsor, told other lawmakers. "In the future," Brown-Waite added, "other states will be looking to Florida as a model." (Judd, 1998c, p. 9A)

Though these statements do not include technical details of how the bill would have prevented the child deaths witnessed in fall of 1997, they frame the problem as being deeply rooted in a system that must be replaced.

Responses to Brown-Waite's bill included the full range of policy positions, including support, opposition, and cautious neutrality. Supporters included representatives of organizations that might financially benefit from the bill. When Bush presented his plan for child protection system reform at his October 1997 press conference, he was accompanied by an executive from the Children's Home Society, a potential recipient of foster care contracts ("Bush calls for 'community care,'" 1997). Sheriffs' offices, which could possibly take over child maltreatment investigations and receive the dollars associated with these investigations, also issued support. "The president of the Florida Sheriff's Association said the state's police agencies support the bill. 'It's a good idea,' said Everett Rice, the sheriff of Pinellas County. 'There's a strong correlation between child protection investigations and criminal investigations'" ("Legislation to privatize," 1998, p. 5B).

On the other hand, there was strong opposition from legislators representing Pinellas County, which was listed in the bill as one of the two Florida counties where responsibility for investigations would be shifted to law enforcement. Their position is outlined in the following quotes:

"It's basically trying to put a mandate on us that we should not have to have because our child protection and foster care (services) are run very well," said Rep. Lars Lafner, D-St. Petersburg. (Smith, 1998b, p. 1B)

"If it's such a good idea, let's do it in Hillsborough County," Rep. Mary Brennan, D-Pinellas Park, said of Murman's bill to start a pilot child protection program in Pinellas and Pasco counties. (Smith, 1998b, p. 1B) [Note: Murman, the sponsor of the House companion bill, represented Hillsborough County.]

"I have received nothing but negative phone calls on this," said Rep. Margo Fischer, D-St. Petersburg. (Smith, 1998b, p. 1B)

The views of Governor Chiles and Secretary Feaver are also important to note. Their statements on the matter of foster care privatization may best be described as cautious neutrality, however, Secretary Feaver explicitly opposed the portion of the bill that would remove the investigative function from the Department of Children and Family Services. His position is reflected in the following quotes:

“I do not have any opposition to that approach if it’s done well,” Feaver said. But he pointed out that many communities lack the private resources available in Sarasota. The state also still handles investigations of child abuse and neglect in Sarasota and Feaver afterward said he would be reluctant to privatize that function. “It would be like privatizing the police force,” Feaver said. (Kaczor, 1997, p. 1B)

“Certain things are governmental responsibilities, pure and simple,” Feaver said. “The government has got to fund the system whether it’s publicly run or privately run. Some of this is a reaction to what people perceive as the department not doing its job well. But some of it is a cover-up to not wanting to do the necessary investment.” (Judd, 1998b, p. B3)

Children and Families Secretary Ed Feaver said he is not opposed to the idea of having nonprofit groups help, but it “could be a disaster” unless handled carefully. He said he will not ask Gov. Lawton Chiles to veto the bill in its current form. (Elmore, 1998b, p. 8A)

Governor Chiles was not vocal regarding his position on the bill, though his spokeswoman made the following comment:

“He agrees there are functions that can be privatized,” said April Herrle, a spokeswoman for Chiles. “But he wants to be very careful about doing it so we don’t endanger kids. There is part of it that is the state’s responsibility and only the state should be doing it.” (Judd, 1998b, p. B3)

Alignment of Policy Windows

In Kingdon’s (1984) model, policy adoption is more likely when opportunities arise due to an alignment of events in each of the three streams (i.e., politics, problem, and policy). This model is evident in the passage of the foster care privatization bill. The political landscape was changing, as Bush’s campaign emphasized privatization approaches. The Republicans, eager to wield their newfound power and support a Republican gubernatorial candidate, were open to Bush’s proposals. One senator in particular, who was under consideration for the running mate position, filed and sponsored the bill in the Senate. At the same time, Florida experienced a rapid succession of child abuse fatalities, which revealed the deficits in public child welfare practice. The Senate sponsor, Ginny Brown-Waite, was able to link the policy

proposal to these deaths, along with the personal stories of her adopted daughter. According to Kingdon's model, the foster care privatization policy became law because the three streams of problem (e.g., child abuse fatalities), politics (e.g., changing political landscapes), and policy (e.g., Bush's 5-point plan and Brown-Waite's bill) aligned in the 1998 Legislative Session and the months preceding the Session.

Although the bill successfully passed through the 1998 Legislative Session, its path was not without resistance. The Senate version of the bill, Senate Bill 352, was filed in November of 1997. The bill passed through two Senate committees and received a unanimous vote on the floor of the Senate in April of 1998 (Florida Senate, 2000–2011b, 2000–2011c). Newspaper reports indicate that Senate Democrats sitting on one of these committees voiced reservations about the bill, but still voted in favor (Elmore, 1998b). Though the House version of the bill, House Bill 3217, successfully passed through two House committees and the full House, House Democrats put forth a stronger opposition than was seen in the Senate. The House version was filed in November 1997 by Representative Sandra Murman. This version also passed through two committees, but was not well-received on the floor of the House (Florida Senate, 2000–2011d, 2000–2011e). Representative Brennan, who was based in the district that would be affected by the shift in investigative function to law enforcement units, offered several amendments to the bill. One of these amendments would have moved this investigative pilot project out of her district and into the district represented by Murman. Her amendments did not pass (Florida Senate, 2000–2011f; Smith, 1998b). The final vote on the bill was close, with 64 Representatives voting in favor, 49 Representatives voting against, and 7 Representatives not issuing a vote (Florida Senate, 2000–2011e). One might conclude that the difference in the path across legislative chambers was a result of the characteristics found in the politics stream, specifically the contentious culture of the House and the bipartisan culture of the Senate.

DISCUSSION

This case study suggests that Florida's foster care privatization policy developed in a manner that was consistent with Kingdon's (1984) model. The research literature highlights similar circumstances of policy change following child abuse fatalities in Australia, England, and New Zealand (Connolly & Doolan, 2007; Driscoll, 2009; Garrett, 2009; Goddard & Liddell, 1995). While the dominant policy option in the policy stream varied between this case and the cases found in past literature, the characteristics of the problem stream were remarkably similar. These studies further our understanding of the child welfare policy process, but they possess the limitations that accompany the case study method. However, their findings are consistent with

those identified through a quantitative study of child welfare policy change. Douglas (2009) conducted a large-scale study of this issue and found statistical support for a link between child maltreatment fatalities and policy change. Future policy research should build on these studies and test the relevance of other policy development models (Dye, 2007). In doing so, researchers can identify a wide array of policy process predictors and assess the degree to which each policy development model is relevant in the child welfare policy field.

The implications of these policy process findings are also important subjects of future study. Specifically, the quality of policy that develops within this process is an essential consideration. Reviews of the child welfare policy development process suggest mixed success in the creation of sound policy. For example, Connolly and Doolan (2007) describe the destructive nature of risk-averse child welfare policies that developed in New Zealand following high-profile child abuse fatalities. On the other hand, England's child welfare system was successful in making some progress under new policies that were designed after the death of Victoria Climbié. However, the new policies were not without unintended consequences. Further, the policies were unable to prevent the death of Baby P a few years later (Driscoll, 2009). The most successful outcome can be seen in the case of Australia, which created a mandatory child maltreatment reporting law in response to the death of Daniel Valerio. Despite this success, it should be noted that this new policy probably would not have prevented Daniel's death, since his abuse had been voluntarily reported to and investigated by child protective services (Goddard & Liddell, 1995). This last example reveals a disconnection between the focusing event found in the problem stream and the policy option that advances. Likewise, this disconnection can be seen in the case of Florida's foster care privatization policy, since the privatization of foster care would not have prevented the deaths that occurred in September 1997. While policy may develop as a result of a child abuse fatality, the policy may have little relevance to the child welfare case that sparked its creation and adoption. Future research should assess the relationship between the characteristics of the policy development process and the impact of the resulting policy for both the typical case found in the child welfare system and the outlier case involved in the focusing event.

CONCLUSION

Since these policy shifts have the potential to substantially impact child protection systems and the children within these systems, research regarding the child welfare policy process must move forward. Further research is needed to more clearly identify the variables that influence policy change. The knowledge gained from these studies can strengthen the policy practice

of child welfare advocates by helping them understand the policy process and harness this process for the good of children.

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