

Chapter 9

CURRENT APPROACHES TO PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES

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POLICY

The policy is defined by the Turkish Language Association as “the whole principle of organizing and realizing the activities of the state in terms of purpose, method and content”. When looked at the lexical meaning of “policy” in English and translated into Turkish, we encounter following definitions as “A method or process chosen among the alternatives to determine and guide current and future decisions in the light of certain conditions; announced goals that the state hopes to pursue or achieve in the interests of the national community”. Policy can simply be defined as “the path to a goal” (Kahveci & Tokaç, 2010).

THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC POLICY

States have many applications in different areas. They organize social life, resolve conflicts between components of society, and offer goods and services to individuals in the community in a variety of ways. In this context, everything that states prefer to do or not to do form public policies. Public policies vary in different dimensions due to the fact that social needs are related to different policy areas and therefore, governments make certain choices in a wide range of fields such as education, health, housing, social security, justice, defense, foreign relations, foreign trade and tax policies. In this context, ministries in a country or other public administrations such as bound, related and connected institutions are responsible for the public policy making, execution and/or coordination in the related fields (Altun, Şahin & Öztaş, 2017).

The scope of public policy includes the processes of detecting public related problems and legislating for their solutions, managing administrative arrangements, choosing between alternative solutions, determining the most appropriate methods for the solution and putting them into practice. Public policy, with its structure that appeals to various social segments, is an area where the common

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good is shaped from one point of view, and from another point of view, is an area where actors try to bring their own interests to the forefront. In this context, public policy is an area of interaction in which some interests come to the forefront at some times, a consensus is reached between the interests some other times and also an area that can be subject to the search for common benefits (Yerlikaya, 2015).

Public policy is considered not to include an instant decision and/or action, but to express a process. The policy process includes the stages of agenda building, acceptance of the problem, research, policy design, consultation, decision making, implementation, output, impact, conclusion, evaluation, development and termination. According to a narrower approach that groups some of these elements, it is possible to define the policy process through the stages of agenda building, policy preparation, decision making, implementation and evaluation ((Altun, Şahin & Öztaş, 2017).

Public policies are activities that are at the center of government practices and have great importance. Public policies, in principle, consist of government interventions. In today's societies, citizens expect a lot from the state. In this sense, citizens think that government can eliminate poverty, establish peace and confidence in all areas, prevent crime and disorder, ensure appropriate urbanization and supply cheap energy sources by establishing and implementing correct and healthy public policies. It is believed that the state's production of equally effective policies in these areas depends on the implementation of efficient methods and techniques (Demir, 2011).

Public policies contain important roles for public institutions. However, not only public institutions and organizations play a role in the formation of public policies. Private or non-governmental organizations, sometimes fully or partially, may also play a role, depending on the country. In order for a policy to be accepted as a public policy, it must either be created by the public institution or formed within the framework of public administration (Usta, 2013).

Education, health, energy, environment, defense, foreign policy, housing and other public policies are developed and implemented by public administration institutions and public officials to serve citizens. Public policy is not just about decision-making, it can be expressed as an action model that expands over time and covers many decisions. The main characteristic of public policy is that it is formulated, implemented and evaluated by the authorities within a political system. The impact of public policies is related to changes updated with new information. There are two types of results in the public policy analysis process. The first is to reveal the knowledge of the policy process, and the second is to provide informa-

tion for the policy process. First one reveals how the management process is and the other one is based on research on how policy makers develop and evaluate public policies (Kırışık & Sezer, 2015).

Successful implementation of the developed public policies depends on administrative capacity. Expectations are high from the government regarding public policy. Achieving public goals and solving public problems become important in realizing these expectations. The increasing number and variety of public policies bring more participation and demands to the agenda, which leads to the development of democracy (Kırışık & Sezer, 2015).

The biggest challenge in the public policy process is to balance between public interest and individual interests. This balance must be in accordance with the democratic process. There is no broad choice of information, motivation or time required in all areas of public policy. Ideally, the democratic theory suggests that the government's decisions will take place in line with its own perspective, and then the conflicting interests will be encountered (Kırışık & Sezer, 2015).

Public policy is not just about decisions taken at once. It consists of a series of movements developed and implemented by governments and public institutions. Making decisions is a process that involves passing the laws that constitute the operational form of these decisions and their implementation. In addition, public policies are shaped, formulated and implemented in different ways depending on whether countries are developed or developing, democratic or totalitarian, and the level of social economic development (Kırışık & Sezer, 2015).

POLICY ACTORS

Public administration in the 21st century has become more inclusive for economic and social order and individual life with the production and/or financing of it by the states and its serving at public service area especially after the formation of nation states. Nonetheless, the economic and social life order outside of public services is shaped, maintained and operated largely by the legislative framework defined by political power and the public policies ((Altun, Şahin & Öztaş, 2017).

This makes every individual, social and institutional actor a part of public policy. In other words, in the current situation, no actor has a chance to stay out of public policy. In other saying, each actor is an indispensable member of the policy process in its various stages. In this context, anyone who takes an formal or informal role at any stage in the process of public policy making is seen as a policy actor (Altun, Şahin & Öztaş, 2017).

In general, policy actors can be defined to reveal common goals and group behaviors in terms of participation and to determine their roles and responsibilities in the policy process, and also in detail to understand the needs and motivation factors and to reveal permeability between the actors. Accordingly, it seems possible to classify policy actors in groups as the world of politics, public institutions, the legislative body, the judiciary and supervisory bodies, the academia and the world of science, the business world, the media, individuals and the external sector (Oliver, Lorenc & Innvaer, 2014).

Although it may change in some cases, political world, public institutions and the legislative organs take place in the decision-making phase, which has been identified as the focus process according to the legal setup of the political systems. In this study, these three actors are evaluated together under the concept of “public administration”, by ignoring the distinction between legislature and executive and their role sharing and relations. In this framework, public administration can be called the constructive actor of the policy process, and the others listed as participant actors (DeMarchi, Lucertini & Tsoukias, 2016).

Individuals can be present both individually and as part of institutional actors in the policy making process. For example, while a public employee is an actor alone as an individual, on the other hand, she/he is a member of public institutions as an administrator or employee. The same person can be a direct or indirect part of public institutions as a beneficiary of public services, the political world and the legislature as a congruent, the business world as a shareholder or customer, and the media as a customer. From this perspective, it is possible to give many similar examples (Altun, Şahin & Öztaş, 2017).

EMERGENCE OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY-MAKING AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

When the Labour Party won the elections in the UK in 1997, the relationship between scientific knowledge and public policies came to the agenda again. The “what matters is what works” aphorism used by the Labour Party in the elections later inspired a series of policy documents and government programs, and aimed to restructure public policies based on scientific data. Evidence-based transformation, which first started in the health sector during the Labor Party government, has also spread to direct social service areas such as social services, crime prevention and education over time (Köktaş & Köseoğlu, 2016).

Scientific data and evidence-based policy making did not first appear with the Labor Party, on the contrary, this was a historical phenomenon with ontological and epistemological foundations. The idea that scientific research data on this subject

is the only way to reach social reality can be traced until the Enlightenment period. That is why Sanderson interpreted the mission of the Labor Party Government as “a return to the modernist project” (Köktaş & Köseoğlu, 2016).

Although the relationship between social sciences and public policy making has always been problematic in the UK, some progress was made in the field of health with the establishment of Cochrane Collaboration, which aimed to develop evidence by examining the effects of health interventions in the early 1990s. The results of the systematic reviews were sent electronically to the Cochrane Library to create a searchable database. Campbell Collaboration was created in 1999, inspired by this initiative in the field of social policy education policy. For this reason, it can be said that the bases of evidence-based policy making are the “evidence-based medicine” practices that express the process of systematically finding, evaluating and using research findings as the basis of clinical decisions. It has been observed that, evidence-based policy making has gained a broader meaning in the form of the use of systematically obtained evidence in public policy beyond clinical decisions and practices. In this respect, evidence-based policy making is a way to bring social science research and researchers closer to political decision making. In addition, this approach helps people get better informed about policies, programs and projects by placing the best evidence found in social research at the core of policy development and implementation (Köktaş & Köseoğlu, 2016).

In the case of a political dilemma, it can be said that the correct approach is the evidence-based approach. Ultimately, when making decisions, individual experience and expert opinions can be influenced by personal characteristics or political skills. Scientific studies shed light on universal facts and provide an overview. Evidence-based health policy is shaped on research findings. However, it is stated that the use of evidence-based health policy and the research result does not mean the same thing. While both are considered scientific processes, they focus on different stages of knowledge development. The use of the research result is the use of part of the research. Evidence-based health policy consists of a combination of theory, decision making, judgment, scientific knowledge and research to evaluate evidence (Bayın & Akbulut, 2012).

In the evidence-based health policy, the political decision maker reflects the scientific data to decision dynamics by adding the political decision experiences to the values and expectations of the society within the legal, cultural and social structure of the environment, and it is stated that equality and accessibility should be two indispensable elements in this decision-making process (Kahveci & Tokaç, 2010).

Evidence-based policy making and decision-making over the last decade in Turkey, especially in the health sector, has been an increasingly important approach. At the end of a process that started with evidence-based medicine practices in the health sector, the establishment of evidence-based health policies has been a subject that policy actors in this field have been addressing in recent years (Kahveci & Toka, 2010).

The importance of public health policies and their indispensable effects on health are clearly seen. It is thought that effective public health policies will have a positive contribution to public health and therefore to public welfare. It is clear that effectively implemented public health policies will positively contribute to our country's level of development and economic well-being.

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