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Course – K204
Assignment No. T.M.A 02

‘Policies are developed with the needs and interests of specific individuals and groups in mind’ Using examples from the course, discuss how different kinds of policies affect the lives of children and families in the UK today.

In this essay I aim to look at how different kinds of policies affect the lives of children and their families. This essay will show an understanding of the main ideas that have underpinned some of the more recent policies we see today.

A policy can be defined as a set of actions or a program of goals on different issues such as children or the elderly adopted by a governing body that are a way of translating legislation into practice and services provided that control or enable society. Much of social policy is concerned with families and family life. It is clear that policies affect us all either directly or indirectly and although it is essential that there are different policies for children and adults or their families it is important to remember that it is essentially the parents that raise the child and therefore any policy aimed directly at the needs of children is likely to affect the family as well.

Most of us are aware of existing legislation of the protection of children who are orphaned, neglected or otherwise dependant. However, in more recent years the government has acted to meet more of the social and developmental needs of more

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children not only those special needs of children whose families are unable or unwilling to provide adequate care. This is reflected in the growing number of variety of policies aimed either directly at children or through professional service providers and parents and other adults. These are a broad range of policies including not only those on issues such child benefit, income support, health and education but also support for agencies working with children and a wide variety of research on the problems facing children and families. This interest in children's well-being can be explained as an indication that children are now being seen as the most important resource for a society's future. When looking at policies directed at children and their families it is possible to see some correlation between these policies and the type of society the government is trying to create. Almost every action that the state takes has an impact on families and family life.

In today's society it is clear to see that a family may no longer consist of a mother and a father with two children. Alternative family formations have occurred through cohabitation, reconstructed families through divorce and separation and same sex couples. This new social change has led to a change not only in family policies i.e. benefits and services aimed directly at couples with dependant children but public policies such as unemployment and housing policies.

Policies can be administered and developed at different levels, when looking at policies made at International level the influence of the European Union within British policy making is unmissable. In previous years the European Union focused on opening up trade between its members, family policy was placed very low on the political agenda. Until the 1980's the European Commission was reluctant to intervene in family affairs due to differences in views on the objectives of family policies between countries , some

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governments considered family life to belong to the private domain and therefore state intervention was forbidden.

When looking at policies influenced by the European Union that are directly aimed at benefiting the lives of children as a specific group rather than the family as a whole the European Union has done very little. For example when addressing policies which refer to the environment, factors such as the increasing numbers of cars on the road and the effect on children are still not taken into consideration. It has taken over forty years for the European Union Treaty to refer specifically to children as children were seen as a low political priority; this was shown by the lack of legislation and policies for them (Reader Foley p68).

However, there has been some progress within European Union policies which have a direct impact on the lives of children although many of the initiatives are aimed at older children and young adults through youth and employment schemes there have also been schemes funded which aim to eradicate issues such as violence and bullying surrounding younger children. Policies developed at national or regional level are largely influenced by the attitudes adopted by the particular government. Policy making styles often differ between countries due to conceptual problems i.e. due to the fact the definition of family policy is so unclear and vague; views on family change and the social problems that accompany them are experienced and perceived in different ways, leading to different policy responses. Consequently this has led to strong differences among countries in terms of the government's level of intervention and support to families and children. While some governments have opted for explicitly interventionist policies aimed at encouraging fertility and promoting a traditional family structure, others have

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opted for a less interventionist approach. Gauthier who analyzed family policy has devised a fourfold typology of approaches to family policy (topic 4) The first being pro-family/ pro-natalist approach whose major concern is low fertility and because of this the main task of family policy is to encourage families to have children. In this approach high levels of support are provided for maternity leave and childcare facilities. The second is a pro-traditional approach which focuses on the preservation of the family. In this approach the Government aims to take some responsibility for supporting families, but ultimately it is the families' responsibility to support them. The pro-egalitarian approach is seeks to promote gender equality. Men and women are treated as equal breadwinners and equal carers and policy aims to support dual parent/worker roles. This approach is in deep contrast to the previous one. The final approach pro-family but non-interventionist, the main concern is the families who are in need. The participation of women in the labor force is not discouraged, but limited benefits are provided by the state to support them. Families are seen as self sufficient able to meet their own needs with minimal help from the state. Policies which are developed at local level are often influenced by central government. Within the UK up until the 1980's the pro family non-interventionist approach was undertaken by the government which in turn shaped local policies. In 1997 when New Labour Government was elected a review of existing family policies was bought about, and using the more pro family and pro traditional approach saw new polices in education and child poverty aimed directly at children. Policies aimed at families with an indirect affect on children were also addressed such as childcare and employment. Under the new labour Government central government began to focus on local services provided for children and their families emphasizing on early years,

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education and childcare, an example of this the Sure Start government programme aimed at enabling the best start for every child, it brings together education, childcare, health and family support. Initiatives such as Sure Start were influenced by the Labour Governments need to eradicate poverty and anti-social behavior, although Labour was aware that poverty and anti social behaviour were just part of a bigger problem termed as ‘Social Exclusion’

‘...a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown., (Social Exclusion Unit quoted in Topic Four p22).

Social exclusion is central to policies aimed at disadvantaged children. Labour developed policies which saw about a change in funding and delivery of services. Policies aimed at lone parents enabling them to go back to work through childcare making it more affordable and changes to tax and benefits in order to help with the costs were introduced. Parent line and The National Parenting Institute were set up in a bid to combat social exclusion. Policies were also introduced to create wider awareness of abuse within the family home and other childcare environments as particular cases that received high media attention such as the death of Victoria Climbié forced children’s services to undergo a heavy review. The Laming Report stressed that there was a need for children’s services to work together. Both the media and the Laming Report were influences in new policies directed at the protection of children. These policies focused on effective communication enabling multiple agencies to work collaboratively with the

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emphasis on prevention and empowerment of children allowing them to have a say in the policies that affect them directly.

Almost every action that the state takes has an impact on families and family life either directly or indirectly. Different Governments still adopt different approaches to policy making. Labour Government has placed emphasis on good parenting, and initiatives such as Sure Start which aims to enable better education, health and childcare and the New Deal scheme which aims to help parents back to work have been introduced. Labour has emphasized on the expectations of the parents with new legislation allowing local authorities to fine parents whose children persistently truant. Policies have also been directed at eradicating child poverty and social exclusion.

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