Families, Family Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals

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Key messages

• Innovation in, and global coverage of, family policies continue to expand – they must take a role in SDG ambitions

• Plenty of quality evidence of cross-sectoral effects of family policy
  • A family policy portfolio is needed: designed for purpose, complementary with other social sectors

• Family-focused delivery, and tailored service support, strengthen standard interventions (health and cash benefits)

• Still, evidence points to both positive and negative design effects – trade-offs

• COVID-19 adds complexity and opportunity
Why study family policies and the SDGs?

• Families are considered to be the cornerstone of society, most common social unit in all countries

• Innovation in, and global coverage of family policies continue to expand, as does the role of families as delivery points for social support (e.g. in comparison to schools).

• This study asked:
  • How do family policies affect the different goals?
  • How do family attributes impact on effective policies?
  • How can family policies be mobilized?
SDGs covered: and how they were selected

- Group consultation led to a selection of focal goals:
  - And 2 targets within each (e.g. SDG 1: No Poverty)
    - **1.1** By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere
    - **1.2** Reduce at least by half, % of people living in poverty in all its dimensions
SDGs covered: and how they were selected

• This selection does not mean to say there is not a role for family policy in the other goal areas! But...

• Some goals family is not the main benefit unit or point of delivery
  • Trans-national efforts and agreements (e.g. environments, climate change, eco-systems, water, sanitation)
  • Society / community level interventions may be necessary (e.g. infrastructure and industrialisation, city planning, global governance, sustainable consumption)

• Nonetheless, families will be affected, and family involvement and action, as part of communities and societies, is important
How we undertook the research

• A global team of academics, and advisors

• Data review of global indicator series by target
  • Sources: SDG indicators database, World Development Indicators, etc.
  • Each indicators was mapped by category from published data, assessed for compatibility (e.g. evidence of validity tests), most recent data was used
  • Appropriate cautions raised (e.g. expected underreporting, poor coverage, old data)

• Literature review was standardized:
  • Selected databases (institutional databases, Google Scholar, etc.) using key words, and following-up citations, and date ranges
  • Focus on experiments, evaluations, and meta studies / reviews

• Review meetings, presentation of progress (Barcelona, San Jose, New York)
How we selected studies to include?

Three step quality assurance process:

- **Conceptually coherent:** Do the data used to represent the family outcomes and policies of interest?
- **Methodologically valid:** Does the author use an appropriate methodology and method to test associations?
- **Scientifically valid:** Are the results of statistical/empirical tests fully and correctly interpreted?

Each author mapped: Study method, benefit or program type and delivery method, where the intervention was undertaken?, for who?, what were the results?

120 studies met the criteria (<70% of total reviewed), most were health studies, fewest were youth employment studies.
Main findings by SDG

• There is no silver bullet:
  • But family cash benefits consistently reduce poverty and deprivation – can effectively promote employment and gender equality
  • Family focused health approaches are effective – behavioral interventions need family therapists too
  • Parental factors are key to education success, family policies work for school access – less so learning
  • Family policies need to be gender neutral in outcomes
  • Youth employment effects are under-informed
  • Violence preventions means conditions and education (NFP)
• Observed SDGs connections via family focused policy and programming

• Strong spillover effects found in the majority of cases

• Yet to cover:
  • Health system effects
Global Recommendations

• Practitioners working with families can take note of the important role played by family professionals, early interventions, and family involvement

• At a global level, more data work on the family is needed

• Evidence is needed support the use of effective family policy, innovation in cross-sectoral integration, and implementation strategies.

• Evidence on scalability and transfer of family policies needed
COVID-19 considerations

• The SDGs commitment remains
• COVID-19 crisis is unique with multiple routes to affecting family life
• A complex multifaceted situation requires careful response
  • Public policy for families? The role of stimulus and austerity?
• A story of inequality before, during and after (poverty, gender inequality)
• A focus on family is more relevant than ever –
• Opportunity for resetting the public policy discourse
Thank you

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