Mental Health Policy Analysis

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Introduction

Policy is a crucial role in how society functions and affects the way that different groups of people live. Most importantly, policy affects those who may be struggling with different types of mental illnesses and disorders. It is important for social workers regardless of the population that they may be working for to understand the different types of policies that are targeted towards those who struggle with mental health. Even though a social worker may not be working specifically in a mental health hospital or institution, mental health also plays a role in hospice, the school system, the criminal justice system, and in child welfare. Understanding these policies will give social workers the necessary information to advocate for their clients. The purpose of this analysis will be to break down a specific policy that applies to those who struggle with mental health and how it may affect them politically and economically.

Definition of the Policy

The specific policy that will be analyzed is the Mandatory Treatment laws within the state of Alabama. What these laws state in summary is that for a person to receive the proper treatment as an inpatient, the criteria are as follows: must that they are a real danger to themselves or to other people, show continued suffering of mental illness without the proper treatment and being unable to function properly, and having the inability to make rational decisions (Treatment Advocacy Center 2018). For outpatient treatment, the person must show inability to make proper decisions and show mental suffering without treatment.

At-Risk Populations

Considering that the state of Alabama is a very politically conservative state, there isn't much education surrounding issues of mental health and the effect that it may have on minority

communities. For the most part, mental health is an issue among people regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, religion, or economic class. However, for this policy analysis, the focus will mainly be on how the policy affects adults who are struggling with a mental illness or disorder and may be taken to a mental health hospital by their family member or caretaker.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Policy

One of the major strengths of this specific policy is that the criteria may be applied to those who have more severe mental health disorders such as schizophrenia. Another one of the strengths of this policy is that it seems to apply to those who may try to bring harm to themselves or others or could be seen as actually dangerous. One of the weaknesses is that based on the one of the policies, it doesn't seem as though the policymakers within the state of Alabama are educated on the criteria of specific mental health disorders in the DSM-5 (Grohol 2020). Another weakness of this policy is that it doesn't seem to be applied to those who may be struggling with mental illness due to the state of Alabama's prison to hospitalization ratio (Prison Policy Initiative 2018). There are more people institutionalized within prisons that there are those within actual mental health hospitals (Treatment Advocacy Center 2018).

Best Practices

Research has an important role within the field of social work. The reason for its importance is that it helps to inform the politicians and other professionals within the policy sector of the strengths and weaknesses within their policies as it relates to mental health patients. One of the other best practices that politicians and other policymakers could also implement is evaluation. Evaluation and assessment will also help to determine the effectiveness of the current policies that the state of Alabama pertaining to mental health services and how they're being

delivered to patients. The way that this could be conducted would be through doing a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. In the policy meeting, the strengths of the policy should be discussed, along with the weaknesses. After analyzing the strengths and weaknesses, the next step would be to analyze the opportunities and threats that would result from improved policies.

Recommendations

One recommendation for the Alabama policymakers would be to complete an evaluation of the current policies as it pertains to the delivery of mental health services to those within the state of Alabama over the past ten years. Another recommendation would be for policymakers to look into changing the policy on providing timely treatment for the symptoms of the mental disorder or illness that they may have (Treatment Advocacy Center 2018). This is important considering that the patient's family members or friends may or may not have the proper information or education on specific types of disorders and may not be able to identify how dangerous the patient is to others or themselves. This could also help decrease the incarceration to hospitalization ratio.

Conclusion

Subjects such as mental health require much education. Psychoeducation is not only needed for practitioners within clinical social work agencies such as mental health hospitals or foster care centers, but also at town halls and government districts where policies are being discussed and made. Many times, policies affecting different types of populations are results of misinformation and lack of education. This is why advocacy and education are crucial within the realm of social work as it pertains to policy surrounding mental health treatment.

Letter

June 15, 2020

The Honorable Kay Ivey
Alabama State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama 36130

Dear Governor Ivey,

My name is Adam Turner and I am a citizen within the state of Alabama. I am also a graduate student finishing my Master's in Social Work with an emphasis in Mental Health Practice. The purpose of this letter is to express my concern with the policy Alabama Title 22 concerning mental health inpatient and outpatient treatment.

Alabama Code Title 22 states that for inpatient and outpatient treatment, the person must be a real danger to themselves and others, be unable to function independently and continue to experience mental stress without treatment or be unable to make rational decisions concerning their treatment. One of the weaknesses with this policy is that it doesn't take into considering the hospitalization to prison ration ratio within the state of Alabama. According to the Treatment Advocacy Center, the state of Alabama criminalizes those who are struggling with mental illness as opposed to hospitalizing them. Also, according to the Prison Policy Initiative, the state of Alabama has the highest incarceration rate not only in the United States but also in the entire world. This policy also does not take into consideration the variety of mental health disorders as described within the DSM-5 and may not always be seen as completely severe.

I write this letter to urge you and other policymakers into reviewing and improving this policy so that all mental health patients will be able to have access to proper care. Another way that you could help with this issue is by hosting mental health training with other colleagues to help bring more awareness and education to the issue.

Thank you for taking this time to read this letter and I look forward to your response on the issue and how you will address it.

Sincerely,
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