The effect of problem stream indicators on anti-social behaviour policy outcomes: A Case Study of Better Neighbourhood Services Fund programs in Scotland

<u>Introduction</u>

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) policy *"dominates headlines and political agendas"*, due to the highly contentious framing of anti-social behaviour as a societal issue (Neary *et al.*, 2013, 118). This paper applies the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) to Better Neighbourhoods Services Fund (BNSF) ASB policies in Scotland to examine how different events in the problem stream affect ASB policy outcomes. This approach proposes a reclassification of ASB practices: victim-focused policy, and perpetrator vulnerability-focused policy (Hughes, 2011). As a result, two policy recommendations are proposed:

i) *Policy entrepreneurs to consider implications of indicators in ASB policy using new classification*

ii) *Better community consultation to minimise influence of subjective issue framing*

<u>Background</u>

Between 2001-2004, the £90 million BNSF program targeted the twelve most deprived areas in Scotland with funding to improve local services, reduce inequality, and provide extra support to communities in need. The report by Shiel et al. (2005) evaluates the ASB policies that Pathfinders chose to pursue with this funding. A classification is produced which categorises ASB policies across several characteristics (*Table 1).* However, when operationalizing this classification, it becomes difficult to differentiate between direct and indirect, and community safety and ASB policy. By their own admission, they find this categorisation to be *"blurred"* (Shiel et al. 2005., 7). In addition, the classification frames the development of ASB policy as a rational process, as *"pathfinders chose to strike a balance"* between the different characteristics (Shiel et al, 2005, iii). We find this to be a retrospective assessment that creates a classification based on policy outcome and removes the influence of context and the ambiguity within the policy process.

"Pathfinders chose to strike a balance between…"	
Small Projects	Large Projects
Capital Projects	Revenue Projects
Section of Community Targeted	Wider Community Targeted
Direct Approach	Indirect Approach
Innovative Services	Existing Services

Table 1: ASB Practices Characteristics Classification (Shiel et al. 2005., iii)

In order to reclassify ASB policies, MSF is implemented in order to identify differences in the policy development. MSF is appropriate for this study as it attempts to analyse public policy at the system level, by modelling context to understand specific policy decisions. It recognises the ambiguity of the policy process, defined by *"the presence of multiple, conflicting and irreconcilable interpretations, public events, situations and processes"* (Zahariadis, 2016, 4). MSF provides an explanatory framework of this policy process composed of three streams - problem, politics and policy - along with a policy window and policy entrepreneurs (Jones et al., 2016). By utilising MSF, the context and ambiguity of the ASB policy process will be taken into account.

Theoretical Framework

Within MSF, each component and sub-component (*Figure 1)* must be comprehensively applied in order to gain valuable insight into the policy process (Cairney and Jones, 2016). This is conducted below in relation to ASB policy.
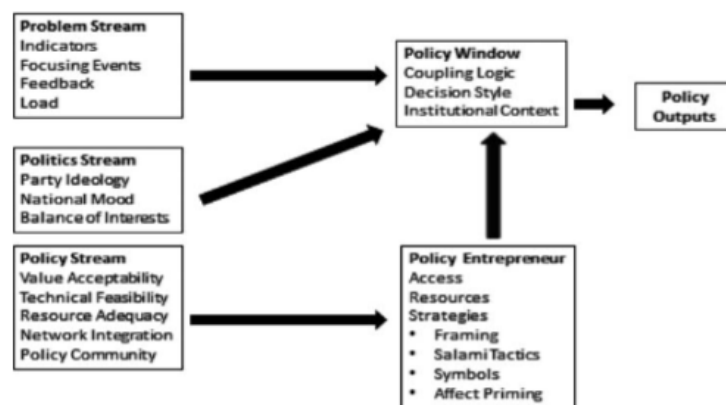

Figure 1: Multiple-Streams Framework Components and Sub-Components (Jones et al., 2016)

Policy Stream

In terms of the policy stream, 'resource adequacy' had the most influence on ASB policy, as all pathfinders were constrained financially. Most of the primary structures and funding allocation was done based on the pre-existing reports and feedback received from local community representatives as to what they perceived would solve the issue at hand (Shiel et al., 2005, 7). Therefore, pathfinders may have not received adequate funding for the more present issues identified during community consultation. It also needs to be noted that most of the projects began with an end date of 2004. This would imply most council authorities were more likely to reinforce the existing resources in place rather than starting a new one.

Politics Stream

There was far less activity within the politics stream that affected ASB policy. The trigger for the BNSF project came into play with the newly formed Scottish government setting the mood in 1999 whose party ideology and corresponding priority was community safety and curbing ASB (Shiel et al., 2005). It is likely that prior reports and consultations were used to set the national mood for the deployment of BNSF.

Policy Window

The change in government along with the previous reports in the problem stream opened an agenda window to tackle the ASB. With the BNSF setting aside a lump sum of 90 million GBP from 2001-2004 to tackle the issue at the agenda window gave it legitimacy in the policy window as now proposed solutions can be checked for their feasibility in execution (Shiel, et al., 2005).

Policy Entrepreneurs

Policy Entrepreneurs managed to extend the scheme for another year with an allocation of £31 million. The intentions of councillors is not included in Shiel et al. report (2005), making it difficult to discern their ambition and identify them as policy entrepreneurs.

Problem Stream Application

Turning our attention to the problem stream, we will see that events in this stream joined with events in the politics and policy stream to create the policy window for ASB policy. Furthermore, we find that different events in the problem stream - specifically different indicators framing the ASB issue in different ways - led to the adoption of different kinds of ASB policy. Within the problem stream are the conditions that stakeholders want rectified (Zahariadis, 2014, 32). Policy makers are made aware of these conditions through indicators, focusing events (such as crises or disasters), and feedback from other policies (Kingdon, 2011). For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on the role of indicators in the making of ASB policy.

Indicators are *the "endless array of rates, ratios, and anecdotes"* (Jones *et al.*, 2016, 15) that lead people to a particular understanding of a certain issue (Kagan, 2019, 227). Given individuals' bounded rationality, the way that a problem is viewed is highly subjective; this *"ambiguity"* is a core principle of MSF (Herweg, Zahariadis and Zohlnhöfer, 2018, 18). The way a problem is framed has significant implications for the course of action chosen to deal with the problem (Knaggard, 2015, 454).

Key indicators in the BNSF program, that led to three-quarters of Pathfinders focusing on ASB and community safety, were community consultations (Shiel et al., 2005, 13, 36). Consultations were compulsory for Pathfinders receiving the funding (Shiel et al, 2005, 32). However, there was a severe lack of input from service-users, young people, and marginalised community members (2005). As a result, the perceptions of community safety were built on fear of crime and concerns about youths, even though there's little evidence for the prevalence of these issues (2005). East Ayrshire, where two-thirds of BNSF money was spent on community safety and ASB, is held up as an example of good practice in consultation(2005). A "major concern" was young people *"hanging out"*; projects included improved street lighting, CCTV, litter-picking, and gardening (2005, 11, 13, 26).

Policy Recommendation

From applying MSF, it is evident that differences in anti-social behaviour policy are in part a result of community consultations as indicators within the problem stream. These differences are not addressed in the classification provided by Shiel et al. (2005), which mistakenly assumes a rational policy process and is unhelpful in differentiating ASB policy. Therefore, to address these shortcomings, two policy recommendations are proposed:

i) *Policy entrepreneurs to consider implications of indicators in ASB policy, utilising Hughes (2011) two approach classification*

ii) *Better community consultation to minimise influence of subjective issue framing*

The first recommendation proposes that policy entrepreneurs should consider the role of community consultation as indicators. Hughes (2011) develops a classification of ASB policy in relation to issue framing:

i) *Victim and community protection approach*

ii) *Perpetrator and behaviour approach*

The victim-focused approach uses broad definitions of ASB to empower victims or potential victims to define what is harmful and to view the perpetrator as 'a risk'. This means community consultation is framed through a law and order discourse, as the most vocal in a community decide what is deemed 'anti-social' and who the perpetrators are. The second approach views the perpetrator as 'at risk' of causing themselves harm (Hughes, 2011). Health and wellbeing discourses are used within community consultation in order to consider

how to address ASB. The resulting policy focuses on harm to the perpetrator and the root cause of ASB.

In deploying the classification on BSFN pathfinders, it is possible to classify ASB policies that adopt victim-focused policies compared to perpetrator-focused. Predominantly the victim-focused approaches use the majority of funding for environmental improvement projects or increased police presence, as seen in North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, and Dundee. West Dunbartonshire is the only pathfinder that adopts an exclusive perpetrator focused approach, by using funding to improve access to sports facilities and youth outreach (Shiel, Clark and Richards, 2005).

Evidently, the classification can aid identifying areas that may require better community consultation practices to avoid a victim-focused approach, the second recommendation. This would involve ensuring a wide-range of participants are consulted and indicators are not framed in a misleading way. East Ayrshire showed evidence of a perpetrator focused approach to community consultation with the development of the North West Youth and Learning Centre. The centre provides a space for youth activities, and was developed through close consultation with young people (Shiel, et al., 2005).

Conclusion

Through the comprehensive deployment of the multiple stream framework, this policy memo highlights the significant role of community consultation as indicators for issue framing within ASB policies. This finding should be explored further in other community policy settings. Two policy recommendations have been suggested, which attempt to move beyond the rational, *"blurred"* classification produced by Shiel et al. (2005, 7). Implementing these recommendations should improve understanding on the development of ASB policy in relation to a victim- or perpetrator-based approach and encourage better community consultations practices.

Word Count: *1579*

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Appendix

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