P01 / Pandemic Shifts? The Non-profit Sector, Public Policy, and COVID-19

Topic : OTHER SECTORIAL POLICY

Chair : Meghan Joy (Concordia University)

Second Chair : John Shields (Toronto Metropolitan University)

Third Chair : Siu Mee Cheng (Toronto Metropolitan University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The objective of this panel is to understand the public policy role of non-profit organizations (NPOs) in the context of COVID-19, how this role was affected by pre-pandemic (non) policymaking on the NPO sector and identify new research agendas in the field of public policy on state-non-profit sector relations. NPOs are crucial social service delivery, policy advocacy, mutual support, recreational and expressive organizations yet as a sector, have not been a central focus of public policymaking practice and research. This panel welcomes both conceptual and empirical papers that seek to invigorate a research agenda in the field of political science and public policy on NPO-public sector relations.

The pandemic has brought social service systems, already weakened by decades of neoliberal austerity, into a state of crisis with devastating consequences for the most marginalized members of society. In this context of state failure to provide basic services and supports to all population groups, NPOs were relied upon by public sector agencies and residents alike to fill gaps on the frontlines. In some cases, core funding and human resource support, long advocated for by the NPO sector, flooded in from governments at all levels (Shields and Abu Alrob 2020; Lasby and Barr 2021). Evidence suggests that this support was ad hoc and uneven as it did not benefit all NPOs equally depending on size, degree of professionalization, and policy domain of focus. The NPO sector is now at increased risk due to COVID-19 burnout, an HR crisis driven by staff turnover and poor renumeration, negative inflation impacts on an already weakened funding structure, and the threat of a return to government austerity measures (ONN and AFO 2022). It is thus essential to acknowledge and understand how existing inequities within the NPO sector affected the state-NPO relationship during various waves of COVID-19 and as we move towards a post-pandemic period.

What is important here is that there was, in a period of crisis, a reinforced recognition that the state needed NPOs, and that state support enabled the sector’s capacity to reach and assist people in need. The mutual relationship between the state and non-profit sector in a time of crisis is not surprising to those who have long argued that in a mixed welfare model, the NPO sector has always been a significant social service provider and employer (Salamon 2015; Evans and Shields 2018). This fact has, in large measure, gone under the radar of both the state and the political science discipline (Joy and Shields 2020). In the Canadian context, there is no public policy and bureaucratic apparatus that coherently governs the relationship between the state and non-profit sector, despite fits and starts at the federal level (Laforest 2011). Furthermore, smaller organizations who specialize in advocating for and supporting marginalized populations in cities have been particularly under-examined (Phillips et al. 2021). This panel welcomes papers that study the unique nature of community-based NPOs and their care and mutual support role in the pandemic and beyond.

CALL FOR PAPERS

this Panel will only accept ONSITE presentations

The objective of this panel is to understand the public policy role of NPOs in the context of the pandemic, how this role was affected by pre-pandemic (non) policymaking on the sector and identify new research agendas on state-NPO relations. We are particularly interested in conceptual and empirical papers that explore the uneven impact of the pandemic on different organizations that make up the non-profit sector and that study the unique nature of community-based NPOs.

A non-exhaustive list of potential paper topics include:

· The health of NPOs in a context of neoliberal capitalism and new public management/governance and how

this impacted the sector during the pandemic

· State policymaking during the pandemic directed to the NPO sector as well as more broadly, such as new health and safety regulations and emergency employment support, and how this impacted the sector

· State policymaking in particular policy fields during the pandemic, such as immigration, housing, aging, childcare, food security, among others, and how this impacted the NPO sector

· The impact of the pandemic on NPO sub-sectors and the marginalized populations with whom they work (including, among others and in intersection, women, members of the 2SPLGBTQIA+ community, individuals and families in low-income/deep poverty, folks experiencing houselessness, newcomers/immigrants/refugees, youth, BIPOC communities, and older adults)

· Structural supports and public policies that prepare NPOs for future crises (i.e., climate change, financial instability, and other pandemics)

· Whether public policy theories clarify the dynamic and plural policy role of the NPO sector and its relations with government (including, among others, implementation and street level bureaucrats, governance/networks and advocacy coalitions, policy design and instruments, as well as critical theories)

· International comparisons of public policies and the NPO sector

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Session 1

Wednesday, June 28th 15:50 to 17:50 (KHS335)

The Limits of Nonprofit Sector Resilience: Evidence from Canadian Nonprofit Sector Surveys During the Pandemic

John Shields (Toronto Metropolitan University)

Siu Cheng (Ryerson University)

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic created tremendous strains on society and placed a spotlight on the vital role of the social, human and health service providing component of the nonprofit sector. With the magnification of need, the demand for nonprofit services expanded exponentially and the 'response resilience' of the sector was put to the test. While the nonprofit sector is known for its innovative abilities to creatively respond to emerging societal needs – to be resilient – it is also the case that the sector is chronically under-resourced, and, hence, precariously situated. The tension between nonprofit sector resilience and precarity have been very much at play during the pandemic. This paper uses existing reports on surveys of the nonprofit sector during the pandemic period from 2020 to 2022 to assess the state of the service providing nonprofit sector in Canada. The hollowing out of the social welfare state under neoliberalism has shifted responsibility downward on to nonprofit providers to fill growing service gaps and act as a residual protective safety net. The pandemic crisis demonstrated the limits of the sector in addressing societal needs and the necessity of re-activating the state – bringing the state back-in – to provide sweeping pandemic supports to manage the pandemic crisis. This situation allows us to draw policy lessons regarding the capacity limits of the nonprofit sector and to question the legitimacy of neoliberal claims regarding the ability of the nonprofit sector to replace much of the state's social welfare role in society.

Key Words

COVID-19 Pandemic; Nonprofit Sector; Resilience, Precarity; Services; Neoliberalism; Capacity Limits

Policy on the Frontlines: Non-profit Organizations and Age-friendly Policy During COVID-19 in Montreal

Meghan Joy (Concordia University)

Co-authors: Shannon Hebblethwaite, Kim Sawchuk, Christina Haralanova, Laurie Fournier, Kate Marr-Laing

Non-profit organizations (NPOs) are a vital component of the community care infrastructure that addresses the social needs of older adults (Joy, 2020). These organizations provide services, programs, opportunities for connection and identity formation, mutual support, information sharing and policy advocacy. NPOs, as well as their paid and voluntary workers, are thus deeply political agents. Despite this, the community non-profit sector remains overlooked in political research and in policymaking, including in policies addressed to older adults (Joy and Shields, 2020). When the sector is examined, the focus has mostly been on larger national organizations and federal policymaking (Laforest, 2011). Research on community-based agencies situated geographically and providing various forms of care for and advocacy with populations that have been marginalized is limited (Philipps and Wyatt, 2021). Furthermore, even though both local governments and NPOs are on the frontlines of policy, the public role of and relationship between these actors is underexplored. This results in a major lacuna in our understanding of the practice and effects of policy in everyday life.

For instance, the Age-friendly Cities (AFC) program is a popular policy approach intended to support older adults to age-in-place and which expects older adults, NPOs, and local governments to work in partnership to design and action local policy. Yet, there is little research that explores the unique role of community NPOs in age-friendly policy and practice. This paper highlights the results of a project that has sought to explore, through policy analysis, an environmental scan, descriptive data from 20 surveys of NPOs, and interviews with NPO staff (15), policy actors (6), and older adults (12) how the community non-profit sector has supported older adults in Montreal during COVID-19. The pandemic has exposed major policy failures in Quebec, such as precarious housing and inequalities in the social support and health care system, that contribute to the marginalization of older people (Hebblethwaite, Young and Martin Rubio, 2021). This paper theorizes the nature of the community non-profit policy role in this context and offers policy relevant and programmatic insights to ensure that NPOs are celebrated, supported, and integrated into a fulsome age-friendly policy agenda and action plan moving forward.

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Lived Expertise of Homelessness in Community-Engaged Research in Niagara, Canada

Joanne Heritz (Brock University)

How do we apply a gender lens to the affordable housing needs of vulnerable women? is the question asked by the YWCA Niagara Region (YWCA), the leading provider of shelter, supportive and transitional housing for women and gender diverse people in Niagara. Brock University’s Niagara Community Observatory (NCO) partnered with the YWCA to identify the barriers to accessing safe and affordable housing with priority placed on community engagement and inclusive access to housing.

The housing crisis impacts more negatively on women in Niagara. Hidden homelessness is more prevalent compared to street homelessness especially for women who are faced with high-risk strategies for themselves and for their children, to avoid the dangers of the street and co-ed shelters. Women experience severe hardship compared to men. They are at increased risk for child separations and foster care placements. Women must often relocate to flee abusive relationships facing economic challenges that include low income, inadequate social assistance, and poor credit scores.

Federal and provincial social housing funding has devolved to cash strapped municipalities over time. Shortfalls in funding and the current housing crisis create urgency in listening to the lived experiences of women regarding housing policy development. This community-engaged research project focused on women who have knowledge and experience about everyday life regarding issues of housing. These women also face additional intersectional barriers based on their Indigeneity, race, age, gender, and ability. Lived experience advisory groups acknowledge the inequalities in society and believe that including individuals experiencing homelessness is a shift to a balanced approach to end homelessness in Canada. Following principles of inclusion that aim to shift the role of the person experiencing homelessness from a social services recipient to a housing policy advisor, advisory groups provide input for service delivery and system planning for housing services at the municipal level of government.

The YWCA formed a Housing Advisory Council (HAC) that steered the research project. HAC membership consisted of the executive director and members of the board of the YWCA, women and gender diverse people with lived expertise of homelessness, and Brock NCO researchers. The source of knowledge and lived expertise of homelessness came from three focus groups that that took place in Spring 2022. The policy brief and video clip produced from the research project provides the YWCA with deliverables for distribution to decision-makers in Niagara's twelve municipalities, to heighten awareness in improving access to safe and affordable housing for their most vulnerable residents.

The paper commences with context that scaffolds how policy discriminated against women’s access to housing over time. Next, is an overview of community-engaged research, focusing on barriers women face in securing housing for themselves and their children addressing themes of affordability, support services,

trauma, discrimination, and safety. A discussion of the federal, provincial and local policy recommendations, is followed by the conclusion which identifies the value brought to partnered research, including the insights gained by working with partners in contributing to housing policy change.

Challenges of Non-Profit Organizations' advocacy during Covid19 pandemic: The case of domestic workers

Mauricio Hernandez-Estrada (Jade Propuestas Sociales y Alternativas al Desarrollo, México)

Raquel Aguilera (UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA DE YUCATAN)

COVID-19 crisis had various impacts on different economic and social sectors. Within employment, persons doing "paid domestic work" are considered a particularly marginalized population, given the effects of COVID-19 crisis plus previous circumstances they have experienced in such activity.

2030 Sustainable Development Agenda has been promoting decent work, including salary and decent working conditions. However, it is still required deep efforts to achieve this purpose and COVID-19 pandemic made scenarios more complicated and visible within local context.

Jade Propuestas Sociales y Alternativas al Desarrollo (Jade Sociales), a local, non-partisan, and non-profit civil society organization elaborated a Diagnosis that provided relevant information to measure the socio-economic impacts on domestic workers in Yucatán, México, during the health contingency of COVID-19 pandemic (including phone interviews with workers).

Currently, the research has allowed: 1) to know a profile of working women, not usually identified in Mexico at a local level (including who they are, and how they work, with household and income detailed data); 2) to identify the main socioeconomic effects on female domestic workers during the pandemic, related to salary, lack of access to social security, health services and other direct effects (in transportation, health or discrimination); 3) to visibilize the poor government support (at different levels) focused on programs to domestic workers during COVID-19 pandemic; and 4) to develop specific recommendations for the ecosystem associated with public policies for paid domestic workers at a local and national level.

The purpose of this paper is to present the challenges and learnings from the advocacy process in specific public policies related to the agenda of domestic workers, based on the experience in Yucatan, México, from the project "Domestic workers and their human rights" promoted by Jade Sociales since 2020.

This empirical paper analyze the advocacy actions from the project, to provide global references on the needs required to make visible the context, problem and situation of paid domestic workers in this region of Yucatan. Findings are useful for different audiences, including authorities, activists, workers, organizations and academia. We understand advocacy as a process to influence government actions from the public policy cycle, Valencia (2012), where research and participatory action, under certain contexts, are linked during the whole project.

A complementary approach for advocacy with women domestic workers is associated to frameworks of Care economy, Carrasco et al. (2011); Tribin-Uribe et al. (2021). This approach gained value during the process, based on the experiences from advocacy, demonstrating a lack of vision from authorities, public policy professionals and other groups.

Some findings are presented as part of anonymous testimonies recovered in workshops, meetings and individual interviews with workers and profiles associated with the project.

Street Haven Women's Shelter Services During the COVID19 pandemic

Siu Mee Cheng (Toronto Metropolitan University)

Street Haven (SH) is a multi-service women's agency that provides shelter, supportive housing, addictions treatment and training supports to homeless women living in deep poverty. SH has the distinction of having created Canada's first women's shelter services. Although SH has a long and deep history of providing shelter services for homeless women in Toronto, it was deeply impacted by the COVID19 pandemic. The pandemic impacted the organization in several domains including shelter services, client care and client utilization, human resources, finances and fundraising, health and safety, and working conditions. The pandemic reduced services provision for the organization so that less clients could be served at its main shelter site because of public health measures. This was countered with the opening of temporary hotel shelters, which doubled the services for the organization. In addition, over the course of the pandemic, client complexity increased making care needs greater. SH also saw changes in client behaviour, with more severe behaviour being exercised by clients as the pandemic wore on; more crisis events and incidents of violent acts by clients against other clients and staff. Mandatory public health measures including mandatory vaccination required created a need to establish strong labour relations to ensure public health and safety.

The cumulation of stress over the course of the successive pandemic waves have also been observed among the staff. SH also saw a corresponding increasing staffing due to the opening of the shelter hotel. From a finance perspective, the organization saw an improvement during the pandemic thanks in part to the Federal Government's wage subsidies and a marked increase in donations from individual donors and corporations. The organization also saw changes in how work was done with an emphasis on greater reliance on digital technology to ensure greater operations and services. As the pandemic has continued, SH had initially been able to minimize the scale of outbreaks within its shelter sites, but with the re-opening of society and easing of public health measures, outbreaks have become more frequent and larger in scale, especially in the seventh pandemic wave.