MULTIFACETED FAMILY IMPACT ANALYSIS IN ITALY: COUNTERING INEQUALITIES BY CREATING FAMILY IMPACT CHECKLISTS TO HELP PROFESSIONALS "THINK FAMILY"

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Abstract
This study examines the process of creation of four tools, in aiding professionals to create family-friendly programs that enhance individual and community well-being, drawing from the American Family Impact Lens model. This project aims to enhance the evaluation of policies and practices affecting family well-being, with a focus on reducing inequalities. The study developed and validated four Family Impact Checklists tailored for family mediation, elderly home care, child protection services, and family-work balance management. Using a multidisciplinary approach, including co-design sessions and a Delphi method involving experts, the checklists were refined to ensure relevance and effectiveness. The findings indicate that these tools promote a family-oriented culture among practitioners, enhancing their ability to design and implement family-friendly interventions.

Keywords
Evaluation checklist; family impact lens; family's wellbeing; participatory methods; services; social innovation

1. INTRODUCTION

The assessment of the impact of policies and services on families in Italy has been on the agenda of the Government, through the National Observatory on the Family, since 2012, with the approval of the National Plan for the Family. The present project aims to give impetus to the evaluation of the effects of policies and practices on the well-being of families, supporting government action with a multidisciplinary research oriented towards reducing inequalities.
In Italy, the issue of family impact has been in the academic debate for some time and starting from the American model of the Family Impact Lens (Bogenschneider et al. 2012) several research projects have been developed to adapt this approach to the Italian context (Belletti, Bramanti, & Carrà 2018; Carrà, Moscatelli, & Ferrari 2020). The decision to invest in this model is based on an exploration of international literature. Most of the research analyzing the family impact of programs and interventions on various issues is based on this model (Wong 2010). The strength and resilience of the U.S. model lie in the fact that policies must assess family impact and, therefore, have a tool to achieve this, but above all, that policies must be evidence-based, meaning based on research data. In 2020, a FamILens® trademark was registered to protect a model that is becoming increasingly coherent with the Italian context. In particular, during the pandemic, some interdisciplinary research (Carrà & Moscatelli 2021; Centro di Ateneo Studi e Ricerche sulla Famiglia 2020; Manzi & Mazzucchelli 2020; Mazzucchelli, Bosoni, & Medina 2020) developed scales of family impact administered to families, thus exploring the possibility of observing the impact from the point of view of families perceptions and relating this perception to typically sociological dimensions such as the breadth of

support networks and gender inequalities, as well as to some psycho-social constructs, like social participation.

Despite the recognized importance of supporting families through policies and practices and the political interest on them, exists a lack of specific instruments and tools for designing policy/services with a "family thinking" approach. This deficiency leaves practitioners inadequately equipped to design programs addressing diverse range of family dynamics. To address this gap, this study explores how to align policies and services with the specific needs of families. As recently realized in some health contexts (Crandall et al. 2019), the project aimed to develop four Family Impact Checklists to gauge services' attention to family well-being. This multidisciplinary tool, known as modular Family Impact Checklists, assesses ex-ante, in itinere, and ex-post the effects of four specific interventions on families, enabling the implementation of appropriate corrective measures if necessary. Specifically, the study's objective was to define and validate the Family Impact Checklist for use in four key intervention areas: family mediation, elderly home care, child protection social services and human resources management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Families constitute a fundamental cornerstone for individual and community well-being across the entire life course. A large amount of research has consistently demonstrated that family-centred approaches for family services result in more positive outcomes for both individuals and family relationships. Conversely adopting an individualized approach in the provision of personal services risks significantly increasing fragmentation and standardization, resulting in a breakdown of needs focused on the individual. Adopting a whole-family perspective, involving families in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions, represents a powerful engine of innovation, capable of significantly improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and outcomes of interventions, as indicated by various empirical evidence on the effects of policies and interventions that have placed families at the center of such

processes (Spoth et al. 2002; Dunst et al. 2007; Brown et al. 2010; Lewin et al. 2022). Personalized approaches that place crucial importance on the subject's relationships at all levels (from primary and secondary networks of beneficiaries to service networks) can foster a more participatory and efficient welfare model (Morris et al. 2008). The family, in fact, when not plagued by severe issues that compromise its main functions, represents the primary provider of highly personalized services. It is interesting to note that terms such as "familial" (in the context of communities for minors) or "home-based" (referring to care or education) have become synonymous with higher quality, as they presuppose an intervention style as similar as possible to family care (Carrà 2003). This underscores the pivotal role families play in enhancing educational success, fostering social competences, facilitating work-life balance and mitigating the impact of various risk factors. But the role of the family in welfare must be guaranteed by a correct application of the principle of subsidiarity, which cannot generate a corporatist-conservative regime but through their involvement in a strategy of co-design and co-production (Connolly, White, & Satka 2017; Pesenti & Lodigiani 2013; Prandini 2018) that is enabling them (Carrà & Moscatelli 2021) and non-delegating. This approach values the family environment as an element that contributes to improving the quality of life for those receiving the interventions. In this perspective, the interpretation of the problem leading a person to seek a service is altered, promoting a needs and resources assessment centered on relationships, not individuals, recognizing the unique ability of the family to generate supra-individual well-being, which impacts the entire community.

The FamILens®, that is the Italian version of the American Family Impact Lens, in this perspective, represents a participative tool aimed at studying the family impact of a policy, intervention, service, or project, overcoming welfare dependency, sees familiarization as the highest level of personalization (Carrà 2003). The structure of FamILens® clearly fits within the constructivist evaluation approach: through a backward process of reconstructing the theory of change (Weiss 1995), it is possible to identify the steps that have been taken in the implementation of the program/project (theory of implementation) and the mechanisms that led to changes (the impact) on families, allowing reflection on

social change and the possibility of understanding whether the implemented activity is at least one of the relevant causes of that change.
An increasing number of researchers agree that no single methodological toolkit can be appropriate for this evaluation (Stern 2016). From our point of view, the participatory method is the most promising. The aim of participatory evaluation is to generate 'social competence' (empowerment) through the learning produced in the process (Turra 2005). Furthermore, policymakers have progressively shifted towards the importance of learning aspect of evaluation (analyzing the results achieved to expand knowledge and improve future actions) (Stern 2016), in a participatory evaluation setting, understood as a cognitive and learning process that, through a common formulation of evaluation questions, allows for the sharing of the expected results of the evaluation (Vecchia 2003).

3. METHODOLOGY: USING FAMILENS AS A TOOL FOR POLICY AND INTERVENTION INNOVATION

Welfare policies and services should explicitly consider families and their well-being as priority objectives in both current and future measures and actions, actively involving them in co-design and co-production processes. In this sense, the FamILens model serves as a useful approach in both the design and evaluation of policies and services, providing a conceptual framework to analyse the impact and consequences these services and policies have on families. The model for assessing family impact must be continuously confirmed based on updated data regarding the situation of families and changes that have occurred. In this context, the original model is now being studied and updated to respond more specifically to the characteristics of specific context. In the research presented here, the formulation of the FamILens model is based on 6 "principles". These refer to 6 criteria that policymakers and operators must adhere to when analyzing existing policies and practices or designing new ones. Essentially, without delving into the details of the original formulation, the

questions to ask, from which we started in the research on the four different contexts mentioned above, are:

1. Are families being empowered, or are they being replaced in their primary functions?
2. Is family stability promoted during critical phases?
3. Is the strength and persistence of family bonds recognized, and are healthy couple, marital, and parental relationships promoted?
4. Is the diversity of family forms (such as different cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, geographic origins, and socio-economic statuses; families with members with special needs, families at different stages of their family life cycle) recognized and respected?
5. Is active family involvement in design and implementation promoted?
6. Is networking among families facilitated?

Using these principles, we adapted the framework of the family impact lens in a large scale research in Italy about 4 different area of intervention, co-creating checklists in four different contexts: 1. family mediation, 2. child protection services, 3. elderly home care, 4. family-work balance management. A large and diversified research group (35 resources, belonging to 5 Faculties of the Catholic University in Milan) was involved in the project, to overcome sectoralism through a collegial and collaborative approach. In setting up the working group, the aim was to reflect as much as possible the plurality of policymaking areas, also introducing skills capable of outlining the demographic and legal framework within which policies and services are designed. Each of the four study incorporated co-design sessions and a two-round Delphi involving over 15 experts in each domain for validation.

In the co-design session four working groups were created, led by two facilitators which involved, in addition to members of the research team, other professionals belonging to different disciplinary fields, called external experts (each of the four teams was composed of at least 10 researchers or external professionals). The groups met 3 times between June and September 2023, and each produced a draft of the checklist using a co-design methodology. This was the structure of the co-design for each of the four checklists:

1. First meeting: family impact starters were used to promote discussion on how services impact on families: what they achieve and what are some difficulties, on which we need to work or promote change
2. Second meeting: proposal of items to compose the checklist, in relation to the 6 principles of FamILens
3. Third meeting: selection and revision of items

For the validation, a two-round Delphi method was carried out with a panel of 15-18 operators/professionals for each of the four areas investigated, coming from different contexts and throughout Italy (see tab.1). the first round was in November 2023, the second round in February 2024, each participant was given an Amazon coupon (10 eur for each round). The Delphi method (named after the Oracle of Delphi in ancient Greece) was developed in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a decision-making tool for national security during the Cold War. Experts in foreign policy and national security were gathered from across the country to reach a general consensus on key issues. Researchers quickly realized that this method had potential for use in other contexts as well. Subsequently, the method began to expand into fields such as medicine, computer science, and social policy (Adler & Ziglio 1996). In general, the Delphi method can be defined as a structured, iterative communication process aimed at reaching a shared and common resolution to a problem. It is a method used to find reliable convergence in the opinions expressed by a group of experts on one or more specific issues. Convergence of opinions refers to the process of gathering multiple expert insights on a given issue and channeling them towards conclusions that are as widely agreed upon as possible. The Delphi method is a mixed-method approach that involves iterative consultations, using either open-ended or closed-ended questions. It is also a participatory method in that it ensures the anonymity of the participants in the consultation process. These participants work in parallel and may meet at the end of the process or, in some cases, never interact as was the case of this research. The Delphi method can also be conducted in semi-anonymity, where experts know the identities of the other participants but have no direct interaction and do not know the specific opinions expressed by others. The Delphi Method allows experts work remotely with adaptable questions (open;

closed, etc.…), facilitating participatory processes through iteration and structuring the checklist from round to round; in our research panelists in each area received the checklist in the first phase and were invited to judge the clarity and usefulness of each item and in the second phase to review the changes made, introducing any additional changes and improvements. This consensus method led, after the second round, to define a different specific checklist for professionals in each of the four key areas. There were specific challenges and limitations associated with the validation process. In particular, the validation of the family management checklist involved only seven experts, while the family mediation checklist experienced significant dropout rates between the first and second rounds. These unforeseen issues compromised the depth of the results and the potential insights that could have been valuable for improving student outcomes. The problem may stem from a lack of interest among some experts involved, particularly regarding the topic of family management. For the child protection area, issues related to engagement and sampling were also observed.

Table n.1- Expert involved in the validation of the 4 Checklists

	Expert involved in round 1	Expert involved in round 2	Experts approving final Checklist without revisions (round 2)	Experts approving final Checklist with revisions (round 2)
Family mediation	18	13	12	1
Child protection services	17	11	2	9
Elderly home care	15	14	2	13
Family work balance	7	7	7	1

Management				

Source: Our elaboration about Deplhi outcomes and participation

4. MAIN FINDINGS

The co-design session was a moment of sharing knowledge and ideating key elements. Strategic practices were identified to promote family well-being in each of the four specific fields. This phase demonstrated that a remotely conducted design process can be effective, with a generally high level of participant engagement, facilitated in part by the digitalization of the tools. At the same time, however, this type of interaction proves less suitable for the informal exchange of information, for fostering deep connections among members of the same group, and for ensuring balanced participation among all participants. In-person interaction would have allowed them to get to know each other and engage in conversations beyond the primary purpose of the meetings. Another noteworthy aspect was the strong interconnection among the checklist items, which sometimes spanned multiple principles. Additionally, a key insight from the group work was the refinement of the content of objectives and principles. For instance, in the case of mediation, there was a preference for emphasizing the continuity of family and parental relationships rather than the promotion of the stability of family relationships. This redefinition aligned more closely with the practical realities of mediation practices. While specific themes emerged within the other subgroups. The heterogeneity of the professional roles within each group represented also both a strength and a limitation of this part of the study. On the one hand, the opportunity to form groups that were not solely composed of "experts" in the respective fields (such as home care assistants, social workers, mediators, or HR managers) but also included other professionals such as psychologists, sociologists, and researchers allowed for a well-rounded perspective on the topic. Each participant, through their contributions, highlighted different aspects of the context, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the study's objectives. At the same time, however, this diversity posed a challenge to the workflow, as there was a

general difficulty in agreeing on a shared and comprehensible language. Consequently, a significant amount of time was spent by facilitators explaining terms that were not immediately clear and adapting them to a language that neither deviated excessively from scientific and research standards nor created difficulties for the panel of experts who would validate the questionnaire in the Delphi phase. In the case of the family mediation group, efforts were made to address this issue from the very beginning of the process. The first meeting, in fact, was entirely dedicated to establishing a shared definition of the family mediation context (what it is, who works in it, their skills, tools, etc.).

The validation was carried out in 6 months with online questionnaire Qualtrics and with a final OneDrive document and another short Qualtrics questionnaire. It identified how many times each principle of one specific checklist was modified and when it was judged less useful in the checklist's economy. The four checklists, although different from each other, all maintain the same internal structure. Encompass a variable number of items across the six "think family" principles: family responsibility, family stability, family relationship, family diversity, family engagement, and family networking. These principles proposed by the FamILens model are declined in a series of operational items that include actions and/or practices typical for each area and provide for various response options organized on a Likert scale on 6 points (very, adequately, to a limited extent, allowing respondents to not answer), depending on the extent to which said action or practice is implemented in the scope under analysis. All checklists have between 29 and 34 items in total (table 2). In some cases, some proposed items were therefore removed from the final version, and many elements of each individual item were modified, according to experts' remarks. For example, in the mediation checklist, four items were judged less useful. On average in this checklist, each item received 1.5 modification proposals, 4 items were judged less useful and overall, 77 suggestions were made to the tool. However, the outcome of the validation of the checklist on child protection was radically different: in that case, more than 122 modification suggestions were made, averaging 3.5 per item and 15 items were proposed for elimination.

Table n. 2- Data on the process of validation and structure of the 4 Checklists

	Items after round 1 Delphi	Revisions proposed	Items judjed less useful	Items in final checklist after round 2 Delphi
Family mediation	31	77	4	29
Child protection services	36	122	15	36
Elderly home care	29	34	13	29
Family work balance Management	36	30	4	34

Source: Our comparative elaboration about the final Checklists structure

The most transformative group was the child protection services group (nearly all items were modified by the 17 experts). Fifteen items were deemed irrelevant to the research and excluded. The mediation group proved to be moderately transformative, with the second-highest number of modifications suggested by 18 experts, resulting in 28 out of 31 items being modified. However, it was less transformative than the child protection group, as it involved a higher number of experts but yielded fewer modifications. The least transformative groups, in this case, were the assistance and management groups. Both made fewer modification proposals compared to the other groups. The research process and initial feedback from experts indicate that the Family Impact Checklist is a useful metareflexive tool for practitioners. It helps them evaluate their performance and abilities in recognizing the importance of families and is useful for redesigning actions and interventions. These four tools promote a 'family-

oriented' culture based on shared learning, thanks to the active participation of professionals in the co-design and evaluation process of this research.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The four developed tools can significantly aid professionals in formulating impactful, family-friendly programs that enhance individual and community well-being. The literature suggests that adopting the Family Impact Checklist in policy and intervention design can lead to substantial improvements in family well-being, generative capacity, and the effectiveness of policies and interventions. Self-assessment tools represent an innovative approach to fostering the integration of family-centered perspectives into projects, services, and organizations.

As presented above specific limitation of the study was the continuity of participation from Delphi experts during the validation rounds, due to dropouts. Additionally, securing involvement from individuals and experts representing various national entities and regions across Italy posed a challenge, even though the composition of the co-design teams and the panel of validators was designed based on heterogeneity criteria.

Following this phase, four large-scale family impact analyses will be conducted in 2024, using surveys with validated checklists targeting statistically significant samples of professionals from each studied field. The new 4 checklists, validated and created through the collaboration of multiple professionals within the same sector, can subsequently be used to conduct a Family Impact Analysis via a survey aimed at practitioners and professionals in the fields of elderly home care, child protection services, family mediation services, and human resource management. This will allow for measuring the prevalence of a "think family" approach in the professional areas under investigation and provide specific recommendations for its implementation. Specifically, at the time of submitting this contribution, the management checklist has been administered to over 300 managers for self-assessment through a questionnaire, while the mediation

checklist has been provided to 200 mediators. The analysis of results and validation through factorial statistical analyses are ongoing.

Adopting a family impact perspective represents a significant cultural shift for those working in administrative roles, social services, and companies. Consequently, the process of change will be prolonged, especially since this is the framework's initial extensive application occurring Italy. The central idea of the project was to initiate and maintain a virtuous and circular dialogue between practitioners and researchers, as academia must position itself as a promoter of initiatives that encourage them to reconsider what they are doing and what they plan to do in relation to familiarization. Essentially, the Family Impact Lens and its entire methodological framework represent a radical shift in approach toward an educational activity: it involves moving from policy advocacy (Gen & Wright 2013) to policy education (Bogenschneider 2003). Policy Advocacy refers to efforts aimed at influencing policymaking to promote specific policies or changes to existing policies. Its primary goal is to persuade policymakers, opinion leaders, and the general public to support a particular policy or piece of legislation. This includes activities such as lobbying, public awareness campaigns, active participation in political discussions, and campaigns to promote a specific cause. In Italy, for example, an organization that regularly engages in policy advocacy for families is the Forum delle Associazioni familiari. In contrast, the approach of Policy Education focuses on informing and educating the public, including policymakers, about the goals and effects of existing or proposed policies, from an impartial, non-partisan perspective. The primary objective is to ensure that all involved actors fully understand the implications of interventions, their objectives, and possible consequences. In our research the Policy Education action took place at the level of operationalizing the principles, which are translated into indicators (Family Impact Checklist) appropriate for the object to which they are applied, within a process of family impact analysis. The activities carried out in the project design, as well as the dissemination of detailed information, presentation of research results, training, production of educational materials, and facilitation of informed debate, characterized the project and will remain at the core of its development.

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