Research, policy and practice: Why is research important?

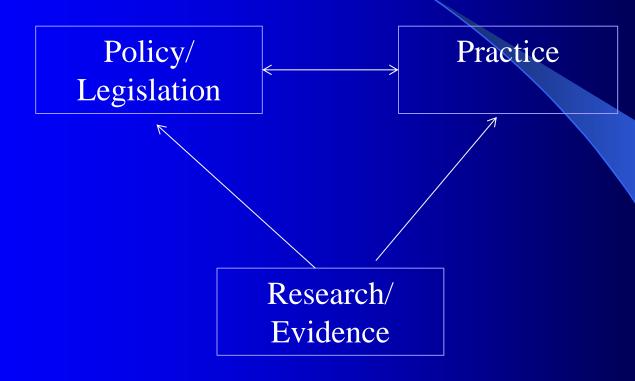
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Outline

- Why is research important?
- Broad value of longitudinal research such as POCLS
- Some of the specific research Qs which could be examined in the POCLS
- Challenges in using or translating research findings

Why is research important?

Conceptual Links



Conceptual links

Policy and legislation: sets out the principles, responsibilities and obligations for all parties involved in the CP system.

Practice: What services are provided or actions taken to assist children and families

Role of evidence

- Both policy and practice should be reflective
- The scale of policy and practice responses should match the scale and nature of the problems that exist
- Be tailored to different levels or areas of need
- Be responsive to changes over time

Role of evidence 2

- Be able to identify what is working well (in terms of outcomes) and what is not working well
- What is inefficient? could be done better or with fewer resources
- To what extent does policy/ legislation constrain or benefit practice

Levels of Evidence

- Good practice should be based on evidence that it works
- Evidence-based: Scientific research shows that X works
- Evidence-Informed: Research indicates that X probably works: advances, disadvantages. Broader range of evidence often used.

Broad value of longitudinal studies

Research such as the POCLS can do several useful things

 A. Provide insights into what we are doing correctly

 B. What things we perhaps should not do

C. What new things we should do

Additional value

- It goes beyond insights only obtained from data linkage
- It can capture more nuanced data; more specific questions; get multiple respondent viewpoints; look at service needs in more detail; use standardised measures

Avoiding the policy change cycle

- Evidence should be used to inform change, but also where NO change should occur
- The right action AND inaction
- The child protection area has been too much riven by policy cycles

Family Preservation vs. Protection cycle

• Family Preservation: Too many children in care; minimise entries, increase exits; get them back home

 Protection focus: Children are at risk at home; should be in care; better to bring more into care

How it happens

 The policy swings to family reunification when there are too many children in care

 It swings to protection when a reunified child dies when home and a major report or Royal Commission is held

Local myths vs Overall reality

- What is happening at the local level or in everyday practice may not reflect the totality of the system
- There will be cases of instability in care, but most may be stable and doing well
- Trends in one area might not be maintained in other areas

'Mythbusting': Finding what is likely to be true

- Kinship care is of a poorer quality
- Aboriginal children have more placement instability or are doing worse in care
- Placement instability is rife in the system
- Children are rapidly losing contact with their parents

A common reference point

- A large Statewide study provides a common reference point
- It tells us what is actually happening vs.
 what we think might be happening
- It keeps discussion grounded in factual knowledge. The scale and nature of problems are known vs. just inferred from opinion and 'guestimates'.

How evidence can help

- How are most children doing in care?
 May be doing well.
- Which cases are causing the most cost to the Department (may be able to use a 90:10 rule to focus on the harder cases to reduce costs)
- Look at risk factors leading to entry: which families need help and what sort?

How evidence can help: 2

- Helping to target early interventions
- What services are needed; not being received; by which children and in which areas?

Specific Areas / Questions

Important areas which the POCLS can address

- Progress of children in care vs.
 normative standards on a range of
 health and developmental areas
- The wellbeing and progress of Aboriginal children
- Kinship care vs. Foster care
- Risk factors and areas for early intervention

Areas (continued)

- What factors are associated with kids going home?
- Levels of placement instability and relationship with outcomes
- Family relationships: how these change over time and association with outcomes (Judy's work)

Areas (continued)

- Service delivery: are needs being bet; for which children and are there any geographical differences (Ilan's work)
- Educational outcomes
- Links with other service systems (juvenile justice)

Knowledge Translation

- Whole literature on this topic (well covered in Holzer al. (2007)
- Clarity and communication: statistics vs. principle messages/ policy vs practice implications
- Bringing data together with practice wisdom
- What affirms or seems to challenge practice experience?

Challenges

- Communication of findings
- Time-lines for policy and practice
- Bringing together different knowledge claims: data vs. practice wisdom
- General findings vs. local variations

Discussion and Questions