

Research, policy and practice: Why is research important?

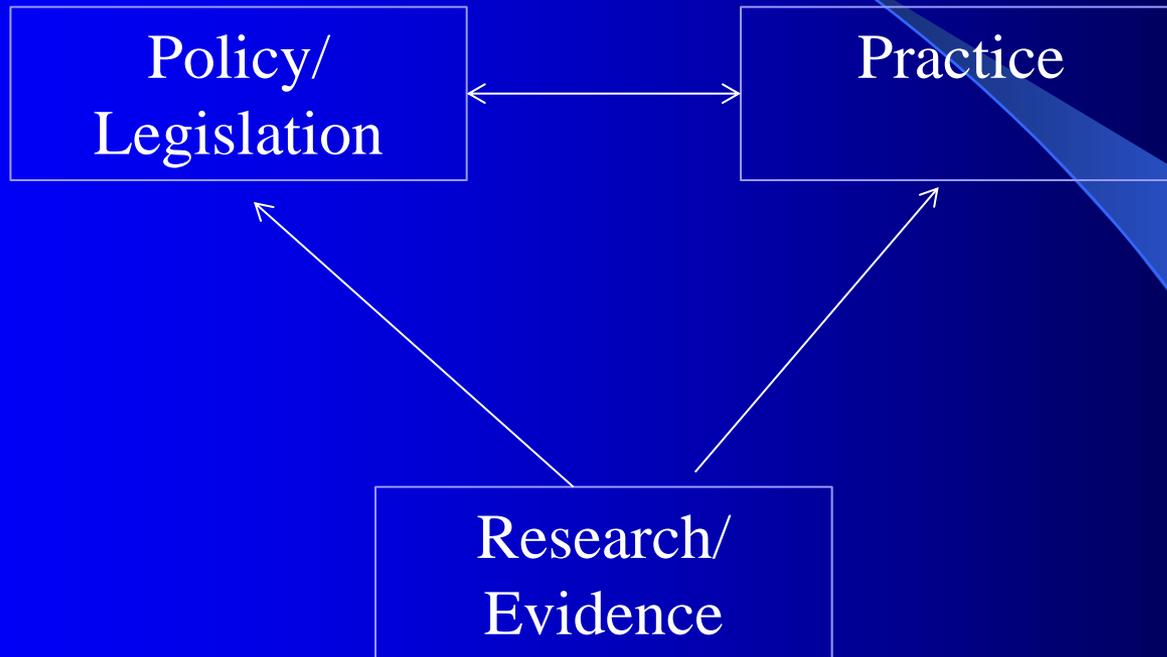
Prof Paul Delfabbro
School of Psychology
University of Adelaide

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 'guesstimates'.

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 met; 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