

# What is this thing called research?

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**Parenting Research Centre**  
*raising children well*

# Parenting Research Centre

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- Non profit, independent research, development and implementation organisation
- Turnover \$14 million 2013 – 2014
- Approximately 70 staff
- Work nationally with offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Darwin

**We encourage the use of evidence in practice through supporting practitioners, org leaders and through understanding the context of implementation.**

# Covering

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1. What is research
2. Research vs evaluation
3. Why do we need evidence
4. What are the key issues to consider

# 1. What is research?

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***Put most simply, research is collecting information  
and thinking systematically about it***

Research is about understanding and knowing something.

# Types of research

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## Creating knowledge

<http://www.parentingrc.org.au/index.php/creating-knowledge/parent-wellbeing/mental-health-of-fathers-of-young-children/>

## Sharing knowledge

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

# The research process - why

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- Starts with people sitting down and asking questions (refining them)
- Then setting out to answer those questions
- Getting the research question right... clarity on the 'why'

*The mere formulation of a problem is far more often essential than its solution, which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advances in science.*

[Albert Einstein](#)

# How

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- The 'how' flows from the 'why'...
- Getting a good research design is essential and depends on:
  - the nature of the project
  - Budget
  - scale of inquiry
- What method and tools to use depend on the nature of the study as well as budget, expertise available etc (you are talking about this later)

# Findings

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- Working out what you found out
- Involves interpretation –
  - what does it mean, what are the themes,
  - Analysis, and
  - getting messages down in a format that attends to the audience.



# Findings

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- Research can become rarefied... something belonging to the academy...
- It should always be as rigorous as possible – with transparency about its limitations

HOWEVER: research about people's lives should be made available in digestible ways to those who might benefit from knowing.

## 2. Are research and evaluation the same?

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Yes *and* no...

- To do an evaluation is to do a piece of research (you need to use research methods to evaluate)
- BUT the purpose of research and evaluation is different!

# How are they different?

## **Evaluation determines the merit, worth, or value of things.**

The evaluation process identifies relevant values or standards that apply to what is being evaluated, performs empirical investigation using techniques from the social sciences, and then integrates conclusions with the standards into an overall evaluation or set of evaluations (Scriven, 1991).

**Social science research, by contrast, does not aim for or achieve evaluative conclusions. It is restricted to empirical (rather than evaluative) research, and bases its conclusions only on factual results—that is, observed, measured, or calculated data.**

Social science research does not establish standards or values and then integrate them with factual results to reach evaluative conclusions. In fact, the dominant social science doctrine for many decades prided itself on being value free. So for the moment, social science research excludes evaluation (but this is changing).

# Evaluation

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- There are many different definitions of evaluation and these include a wide range of activities.
- Evaluation of community services can range from a caseworker's evaluation of the success of a client's case plan to a large-scale evaluation of a national program.
- Although the aims of these two evaluations might be similar (e.g. to determine whether the case plan or the program has achieved its desired outcomes), the methods used to answer this question are different.

*“Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs to **make judgements** about the program, **improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions** about future programming” Patton (2008).*

# What is similar

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- Good evaluators and evaluations use research methods to understand an issue
- Often, evaluations are as rigorous and systematic in collecting data as other forms of social research

## Example – Implementation Study Royal Commission

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Looking at recommendations from previous inquiries relating to institutional child sexual abuse

How to find out if 288 recommendations from 67 different inquiries have been implemented? An evaluation using various research methods with a number of limitations.

- Scoping review
- Survey of implementers in government
- Interviews of key stakeholders familiar with formulating, implementing and monitoring recommendations
- Document audit
- Legislation verification

### 3. Why do we need evidence?

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# Why do we need evidence?

Why do we need evidence?

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**What we do matters**



# Why do we need evidence?

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- We intervene as practitioners, policy makers or managers, in the lives of vulnerable people
- We need to ensure that we know what we are doing and that we are doing more good than harm
- Vulnerable people have the right not to be the 'victims' of untested and possibly harmful interventions, however well-intentioned
- Not all good ideas have the desired effect

Rutter K SCIE 2006

## Examples of more harm than good

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- Dr Benjamin Spock – sleep babies on tummy (1940s onwards) – work in the 1970s showed that sleeping babies on their backs was safer. Didn't change practice until the mid to late 1980s.....

## 4. Issues to consider

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# Sources of evidence

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- Clients' (participants, service users) preferences, actions, characteristics, circumstances
- Practitioners
- **Research evidence**
- Context

# Research evidence issues

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- Often synthesised into Research Briefings or Research Reviews

*But:* research in social work isn't always geared to generating evidence for practice...

*So:* it's not always easy to gather the right kind of research messages...

## But when we do know - issue is Evidence to service gap

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Gap between:

- what is *known* about empirically supported treatment/s and
- what is *provided* to and experienced by clients / participants in routine care settings

**Widespread, sustained implementation has been hard to achieve**

# Issues: Evidence to service gap

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Implementation: a way to bridge that gap

What is implemented often disappears with time and staff turnover

***Moving empirically supported innovations  
from development to actual practice settings,  
with fidelity and good effect, involves far more than  
making the practice models available***

Fixsen et al 2005; Kauffman Foundation Best Practices Project; Rogers 1995.

# Implementation matters

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These things won't work without it:

- Law and policy directives
- Funding
- Identification and cataloguing of empirically supported programs
- One way dissemination of info
- Implementation without changing supporting roles and functions
- Training along

Embry & Biglan 2008; Fixsen et al 2005.



# Uptake of evidence...

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Requires more than one way communications and one off training

Instead it needs:

- Genuine interaction among researchers, decision makers and stakeholders
- *AND* active, planned implementation

# Uptake of evidence

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- **Dissemination:**

One way - from researchers to research users Walter et al 2003

- **Knowledge translation and exchange**

Interactive exchange – assumes two way flow - Manion 2009

- **Implementation**

The planned and intentional use of strategies to put into practice EBPs within real world settings ( Fixsen 2005)

# Evidence based practices (EBPs) & programs

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## Practices

- Skills, techniques and strategies that can be used by a practitioner
- Common elements approach (Chorpita et al)/kernals (Embry 2004)

## Programs

- Collections of practices that are done within known parameters (values, service structure and treatment components)

# What should you use?

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- Where we are looking to achieve change outcomes with a particular target group, and a manualised EBP has been shown to achieve this change, we should strive to effectively implement that EBP with high fidelity
- This will often mean changing the service setting in which the program will be implemented (skills, supervision, org systems and structures)

# An emerging alternative

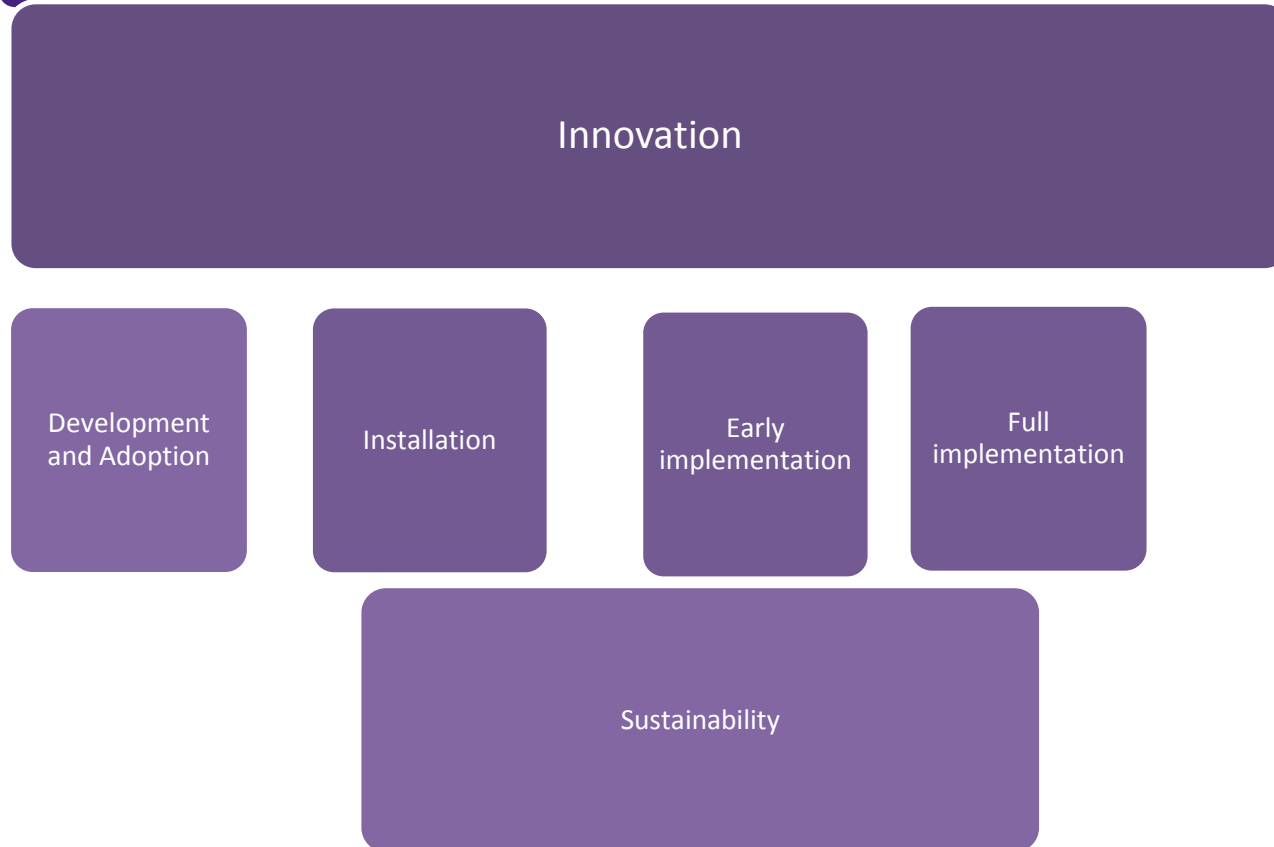
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BUT a number of EBPs have limited effectiveness, issues with scalability and services may have difficulty adapting to their setting....

This has led to explorations of the kernels approach or Common elements approach.... Evidence based **practices** adapted to service and context.

Egs include Burnside in NSW – approach to DV

# Knowledge to implementation cycle (Fixsen 2005)



*Solving Complex  
Implementation  
Problems*



# 2nd Biennial Australian Implementation Conference

Sheraton on the Park, Sydney, Australia | 17 & 18 September 2014

Co-Hosts



ARACY

Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth

Collaboration • Evidence • Prevention



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#AIC14  @AIC2014

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# Questions and comments



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