



**E v i d e n c e**  
N E T W O R K

**WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN?**

**How well does research fit the needs of practitioners working to improve the well-being of children and families?**

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# Does research answer practitioners' questions?

A review of what practitioners say they want from research



A mapping of research funded by five major funders in social care

- Focus on social care for children and families

# Background to the study?



## What works for children

[www.whatworksforchildren.org](http://www.whatworksforchildren.org)

“Identifying the best available evidence from research”  
“Promoting the sharing of policy and practice solutions based on the best available evidence”

## The research information service

Issues identified (Stevens et al. 2005):

- Lack of relevant research on certain topics
- Lack of information on implementation and costs
- Lack of UK research on effectiveness

# Data collection

## Practice questions

- Literature review
- Existing survey data
- Website survey
- Practitioners' questions database

## Funded studies

- Literature review
- Mapping of research projects from five major funders since 1996
- Funded studies database

# Practitioners' questions



- “Of the problems that you encounter in your work ... which do you think are in most need of further research?”

CEBSS and Barnardo's NI

- “If you could commission a single piece of research to help you in your ... practice what would it be?”

NCH and WWfC

# Practitioners' questions



Question Source	Frequency	%
CEBSS 2000	429	43
NCH 2000	238	24
NCH 2004	78	8
NI Barnardo's 2004	186	19
WWfC 2004	74	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1005</b>	<b>100</b>

# Funded studies



Funder	Frequency	%
ESRC	468	57
Joseph Rowntree Foundation	241	29
Nuffield Foundation	53	6
Gatsby Foundation	32	4
Community Fund	29	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>823</b>	<b>100</b>

# Results – practice questions



Topic area	n	%
Practice issues	190	19
Family support	138	13
Parenting	114	12
Child protection	106	10
Adoption/fostering	63	6
Mental health	53	5
Behaviour problems	50	4
Disability	47	4
Therapy	42	4
User-practitioner communication	36	4

# Results



Questions mentioned more than 20 times	n
Child protection – what works?	31
Effects on children living with substance-abusing parents	27
Engaging with hard-to-reach families/individuals	26
Should adopted children have contact with their birth family?	25
Preventative family support work vs crisis intervention	24
Multi-agency working – what works?	23
Family support services – do they work?	23
Workloads and associated problems	23
Behaviour problems – what works?	21

# Results- recurring topics



	O'Brien et al	Smith	SCIE	Tozer & Ray
Contact with birth parents for long-term accommodated children	✓		✓	✓
Behaviour problems	✓		✓	
Multi-agency working		✓	✓	
Needs and risk assessment, particularly in child protection		✓	✓	✓

# Results - common questions



Questions mentioned more than 20 times	n	Study
Child protection – what works?	31	0
Effects on children living with substance-abusing parents	27	✓
Engaging with hard-to-reach families/individuals	26	✓
Should adopted children have contact with their birth family?	25	✓
Preventative family support work vs crisis intervention	24	0
Multi-agency working – what works?	23	✓
Family support services – do they work?	23	✓
Workloads and associated problems	23	0
Behaviour problems – what works?	21	✓

# Results - funded studies

## Parental substance abuse

- In-depth interviews with young people whose parents had or were misusing substances
- Semi-structured interviews with problematic drug users, one of their siblings, their parents and professionals
- Literature review about children's experiences of living with domestic violence, parental substance misuse or parental health problems

# Results - funded studies

## Multi-agency working

- Survey of policy makers, professionals and consumers about inter-disciplinary working for children and young people in difficulty in Scotland
- Document analysis to look at professional knowledge-sharing in action
- Case study of an innovative model of multi-agency childcare network

# Results - funded studies

## Family support

- In-depth interviews with users and staff of 13 family centres to assess how they were working with fathers
- In-depth interviews with parents from four South Asian groups to explore their views on family support services
- Trial of the effectiveness of a home-visiting programme in improving parenting and preventing the maltreatment of infants in high-risk families

# Results - types of questions



Type of question/study	Studies	Practice
Effectiveness of interventions	14%	45%
What interventions are there?	2%	4%
Effects of not intervening	0%	1%
Users' views	8%	2%
Understanding problems	62%	16%
Policy	4%	2%
Practice issues	4%	19%
Other/not clear	5%	10%

# Results - literature review



- Lack of intervention research in public health (Millward et al 2003)
- Lack of research on government child health and well-being priority issues (Sherburne Hawkins & Law 2005)
- Lack of information on long-term outcomes and cost effectiveness for children's NSF (Sloper & Statham 2005)
- Low-level of funding in social care research, research community needs to communicate a consensus on priorities (Shaw et al 2004)

# Conclusions

When we offered the research information service to practitioners they asked about implementation.

When practitioners were surveyed about what research would help their practice they asked questions about effectiveness.

- Much research is relevant
- More UK research needed on the effectiveness of interventions
- Further work is needed to find ways of getting research used
- Should practitioners be more involved in setting research priorities?



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We are grateful and indebted to the researchers who generously and willingly gave us their data and their time in putting the data together for us. They are Alice Moseley and Annie Ellis from CEBSS, Caroline Hart from Barnardo's Northern Ireland and John O'Leary from the NCH.