

ENHANCING EVALUATION QUALITY IN A DEVELOPING CONTEXT: A SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY

Wim Roestenburg (University of Johannesburg)

Emmerentie Oliphant (Stephen F Austin State
University)

Purpose of the presentation

- Abstract - Evaluation practice is in its infancy in South African Social Work Service delivery. Evaluation requirements in research briefs from this context remain weak in detail and lack clear specification. The authors conducted a research project that would be the first step in the evaluation of a Governmental program for youth in conflict with the law. The brief was to assess changes in youth crime profiles over two time periods and the extent to which a range of diversion programs were effective in changing youth perceptions about crime and behavioral intentions towards a crime free life. This project presented with a number of contextual, financial and logistical challenges to evaluation quality. This paper demonstrates how the authors overcame these challenges by rigorous conceptualization, formulation, structural and methodological strategies to conduct the project in such a way that higher levels of beauty, truth and justice were achieved than originally required.

Purpose of presentation

- To share realities of evaluation in a developing country
- To initiate discussion on evaluation in a global context
- To demonstrate a case study on programme evaluation in SA
- To confirm that most programme evaluation contexts are largely similar in characteristics

Focus questions

- What are the contextual similarities/differences you have experienced in your context?
- What solutions have you used to overcome these challenges?
- Please provide critique to our approach

Background to Afri.Yze Consult

1. SA organization specializing in research consultancy and evaluation of social programmes. Established in 2001 in response to a need in Africa for the kinds of services we render. Services – research, programme design and development, measurement, training, programme evaluation
2. Has its roots in social work, and therefore aims to conduct evaluation of social service programmes
3. The service programme – government managed and coordinated, with assistance from NGO's
4. Multi-State department involvement – Police Services, Criminal Justice dept and Social Development
- 5.

Program Evaluation in African Context

1. Limited Resources (Funding, staff, human resources)
2. Limited and incomplete data
3. Unclear conceptualization of focus areas for evaluation
4. Lack of evaluation experience in agencies
5. Unclear vision and purpose statements related to evaluation
6. Broad scope of evaluation opportunities
7. Short term nature of programs (sustainability)
8. Participatory Action Model (research team including the client)
9. contextual, financial and logistical challenges
10. Opportunity towards growth and learning regarding PE
11. Illiteracy of participants a contextual reality
12. No IRB for independent evaluators (Ethical decisions an isolated process)

Case study: Children in conflict with the law

□ Evaluation Brief

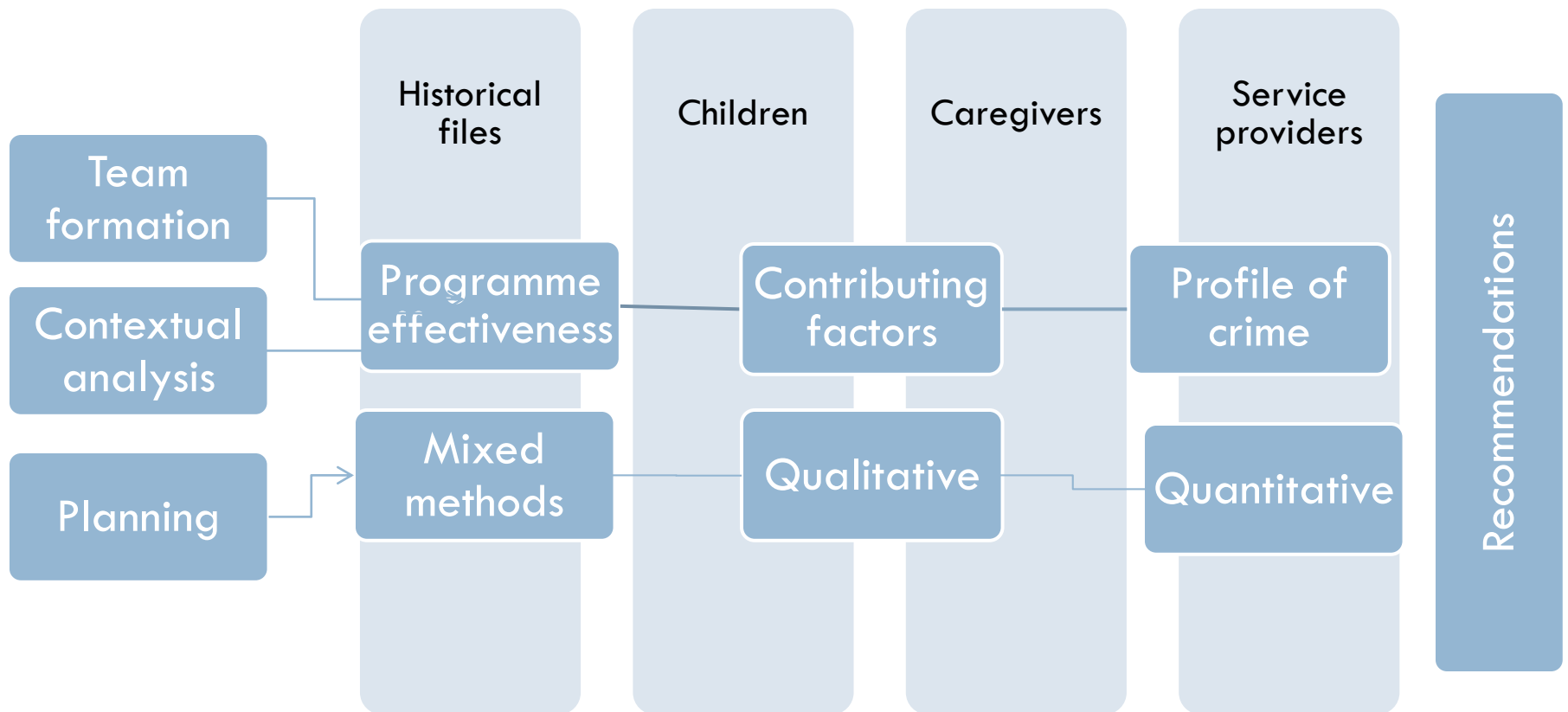
Are there differences in crime profile between 1995 and 2006?

What are the factors that contribute towards youth crime in the country?

How effective are the services that are provided to youth offenders in Gauteng?

Based on evidence what recommendations can be made to enhance service delivery by the department?

Graphical view of project components



Phases of Evaluation

- Team decision making and planning (reflection)



- Profile of Youth Offending Patterns (1995 and 2006)



Qualitative Study (Perceptions and Views of Service Providers regarding the effectiveness of services & what factors lead to crime)



Cross section survey (children's attitudes related to crime and effectiveness of services)

CHALLENGES:

Conceptualization, Formulation, Structural and Methodological Strategies

- Conceptualization – limited literature indigenous to youth crime in SA, limited and conflicting policies, no “agreed upon” conceptual framework as departure point, multiple social factors contributing to crime (difficult to isolate “real” contributing factors), files were vastly different in content
- Formulation – data “seemed” not trustworthy, agency need and evaluators vision and capabilities differed
- Structure – files incomplete, responses/progress notes superficial, limited use as qualitative data, files missing, repetitive responses (weak data set), inconsistent cooperation levels with agencies
- Methodological strategies – participant accessibility problematic (community-based, court appearances) - more than 50% of children still serving a sentence, care-giver access difficult (unemployed, not at home) – sample bias,
- Research team diversity and participant diversity in terms of language, social class and literacy levels
- Insufficient funding for continuous evaluation to occur – no follow-up opportunity

SOLUTIONS:

Conceptualization, Formulation, Structural and Methodological Strategies

Conceptualization

- Unified coding system
- Qualitative methods selected when limited literature

Formulations

- Participatory Action – enhanced authenticity of data
- Four different data sources (youth offenders, care-givers and service providers as well as files)
- Credibility of responses – are responses reflective of their views (honesty)

Methodologies

- Applied consistently in spite of challenges
- Validity of instrument enhanced by theoretical foundation and qualitative data
- Mixed methodology – cross informing of data
- Triangulation strategies were applied
- Neutrality – field workers were trained, protocol development
- Up to date technology to analyze data
- Challenges turned out to be opportunities for learning and growth – results from this study led to contracts with other institutions

Reference

- Roestenburg W & Oliphant E (2008). *Programme Needs of Children in Conflict with the Law*. Gauteng Department o Social Development, Research and Policy Unit, Gauteng, South Africa.