

## What works and what doesn't: An overview of evidence-informed policies and programs.

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## Question:

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Do you want your doctor to use practices and medicines that have been proven effective and safe by research?

## The Experimenting Society

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- Openness to new ideas
- But skeptical, wanting evidence

## The role of researchers in the Experimenting Society

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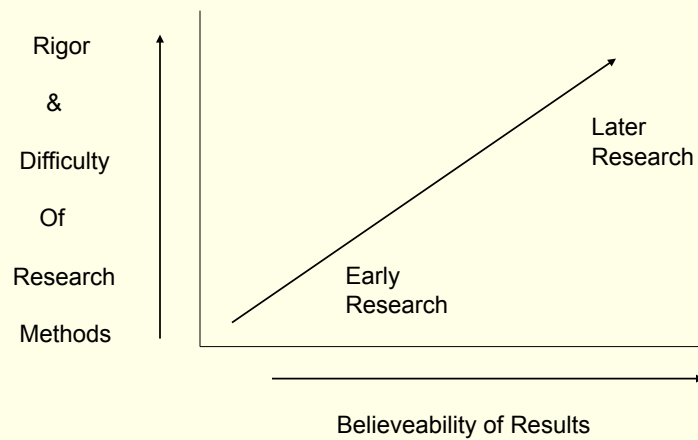
- Not to make decisions or represent public values
- To summarize what has been tried
- To test new policies and programs

# Types of Evaluations



- Process
- Output (or Accountability)
- Impact
  - \* Efficacy Trial
  - \* Effectiveness Trial
  - \* Cost-Benefit Analysis

# “Programmatic Evaluation”



## The Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT's)



- \* Random assignment
- \* To at least 2 groups (Treatment and Control)

## A Familiar Randomized Controlled Trial



## Common weaknesses to research designs

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- Lacking a comparison group
- Lacking random assignment to group

Example of a finding with unclear meaning: Children in the program get better grades.

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- Did the program CAUSE the improvement in grades?
- Or did these children just mature?
- Or did the most highly motivated parents sign up first?
- (Many alternative explanations for the finding.)

## The beauty of random assignment to group:



- Every possible characteristic is evenly distributed to both groups.
- Any difference in outcome has only 1 plausible explanation: the program.

## National Registries of Evidence-Based Programs



- Hosted by federal agencies or research organizations
- Programs meet criteria for effectiveness
- Most are focused on a specific outcome (e.g. prevention of violence, drug use)
- Searchable

## Should we ONLY use Evidence-Informed Policies & Programs?

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- Probably too restrictive
- Other kinds of evidence are still useful
- But we might want to focus our investments on EVP's (like locking in a favorable interest rate)

## Washington State Legislature

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- Their aim was to reduce recidivism of criminals
- Commissioned a cost-benefit review of programs
- 30 were proven to be effective and cost-effective!
- Strongest programs targeted younger criminals, and families.
- They made a "fiscal bet" based on these results.

## Side Effect of Evidence-Informed Policymaking

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- Programs will focus more on (measurable) results and on documenting results
- You may wish to fund some selective evaluations

## How research evidence serves policy-makers

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- Program design: Knowledge of what has worked or not in the past
- Program justification: Help in selling your position
- Help in avoiding a connection to dud programs
- Program oversight: Guidance in demanding program changes
- Social & fiscal accounting: Help in documenting the good you do



# The Experimenting Society

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- Putting our own pet programs to the test
- Faith that we are better off knowing the facts