

The evaluation of the Separated Parents Information Programme (PIP)



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Focus



- Most evaluations of govt-led interventions take many months/years
- Yet a lot of pressure for fast results
- So sensible to consider:
 - The circumstances that allow for speedy evaluations
 - The implicit compromises
- PIP evaluation gives an example of a ‘full evaluation’ done extremely quickly
 - Evaluation led by Prof Liz Trinder
 - Took place between Dec 2010 and March 2011

What is PIP?



- ❑ A four-hour programme for separated parents who are in court because of disputes over contact or residence
- ❑ Parents are referred by the court
- ❑ Both parents are ordered to attend
- ❑ The programme is educational. Focus is on demonstrating children's needs and perspectives
- ❑ Free since April 2010
- ❑ Around 1,200 parents attend a PIP per month

Why the rush?



- Evidence needed for Family Justice Review
- And late start because needed the programme to be reasonably well-established with sufficient number of families

Evaluation aims



- To establish whether PIP improves outcomes (esp contact) – IMPACT STUDY
- To understand whether PIP is being implemented as well as possible – PROCESS STUDY
 - Covering multiple stages: referrals by courts, liaison between courts and providers; the programme itself; follow-up with parents
- To establish the costs/cost-savings of PIP relative to its impacts – COST-EFFECTIVENESS
- To make recommendations for future changes

Evaluation elements



- ❑ Survey of 300 parents going through PIP between April-Oct 2010
- ❑ Survey of a comparison group of 300 parents not going through PIP (selected from courts not routinely referring to PIP)
- ❑ Cost-collection exercise with 10 providers of PIP
- ❑ In-depth interviews/focus groups with parents, PIP providers, judges, solicitors, CAFCASS staff
- ❑ All data collection completed in approx 6 week period

How it was made to work



- ❑ Large team of very experienced researchers, able to hit the ground running
- ❑ Able to shelve other projects for the period
- ❑ All elements ran in parallel
- ❑ Extremely tight management/timetabling
- ❑ Very clear articulation of research aims
- ❑ Co-operation of professionals
- ❑ Very fast sign-offs by DfE/CAFCASS

The methodological sacrifices



- ❑ No staging of the research (so impact study design could not learn from process study or vice versa)
- ❑ Impossible to fix the interval between PIP and survey (so outcomes not time-standardised)
- ❑ Lower survey response rate than possible (probably)
- ❑ No opportunity for longitudinal tracking. Baseline data on survey respondents collected retrospectively
- ❑ Snap-shot of PIP costs only (proved atypical for some)

The practical sacrifices



- ❑ Team had to be senior. Rather little learning for junior staff
- ❑ Limited opportunity to unpick the findings
- ❑ Little time for double-checking analysis
- ❑ Christmas

Did it work?



- Yes, as far as we can tell
 - All elements completed to deadline
 - The elements gave a consistent story
 - Non-standardised outcomes for the impact study highly unlikely to have affected the conclusions
 - Generated evidence that was useful for the review

Would I recommend it?



- Not sure**
 - Lack of opportunity for junior researchers is a problem
 - Absolutely no room for error/revisions
 - No room for a Plan B
 - Outcomes without standardised time-intervals can be a problem
 - For many programmes it just isn't feasible
- But it does concentrate the mind**