

“Better evidence for a better world”, Campbell Collaboration
Colloquium, 19th May 2009, Oslo, Norway

“Towards a science driven evidence-based
criminal justice policy”

“An overview of 15 years of scientific research
in crime and justice”

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Structure of the presentation

1. Towards a “smart” Justice : objectives and different elements
2. The research project: objectives, methodology and results
3. State of the art on evaluation research
4. Questions and concerns

Towards a 'smart' Justice (1)

- Objective: to broaden the “science based level” of criminal policy;
- “Rationalisation”and “managerialism” of public policing applies new management orientations based on a ‘need to know’ factor;
- Minister of Justice (2000) developed for the first time a “federal security plan” with main programs and 92 projects;
- Strong belief in knowledge,- and evidence-based policy, proposition for Balance Score Card: “What get’s measured get’s done”;
- Belief in transparency and visibility, accountability, trust and legitimacy of the justice system is important.

Smart justice integrates different elements in the policy process

- Knowledge on interventions that work and that doesn’t work (evaluation research) and of the “research agenda” (what topics of interest need to be examined);
- Knowledge of the context (other variables than research findings);
- Using results of scientific research, statistics and ‘best practices’;
- Using the ‘voice of the population’ (results of public opinion research).

How to achieve a smart justice? Start with the basics... The research project (1)

1. Statement:

- Complete lack of knowledge on availability of criminological research findings
- Complete lack of inventory on scientific research financed by the federal government in the field of crime and justice
- Blackbox on availability and nature of evaluation research....

Starting a longitudinal research project (2 criminologists)

2. Objectives (3)

1. Developing an inventory of 15 years (1995-2008) of scientific research in the crime and justice domain (done by universities)
2. Analysing the scientific reports on different topics (content, methodology used, financier, university involved, results, budgets, duration, etc...)
3. Providing the policy maker with in depth summaries of each research

The research project (2)

3. Methodology

3.1. The first steps:

- Expedition in search of the research contracts (archives, basement, ..)
- Contacts and networking with responsible persons for financing in our own ministry
- Starting up a « research co-ordination unit » within the ministry (streamline research outsourcing procedures, streamline research topics and research programs, valorisation programs, etc...)
- Creation of a 'Research Platform' in collaboration with other departments (internal affairs, federal police, department of science, and regional departments,...) to obtain information on their research programs in the crime and justice domain

The research project (3)

3.2. The data collection

Development of a standardized format (chip) for data collection with the following variables:

- Title
- Duration
- University involved (promotor and researchers)
- Basic assumptions and content of the research
- Methodology used
- Main results
- Type of research (applied, evaluation, knowledge-driven, policy relevant, explorative, descriptive, action, ..)
- Domain in the criminal justice chain (police, public prosecution, courts, execution, legislative, other,....)
- Potential usefulness (benefit) for policy maker

Inventory of research contracts gave an overview but no in-depth information:

- Expedition in search of the scientific reports of each research conducted;
- Insignificant presence in the department of justice itself;
- Demanding universities to send copies;
- Visiting university libraries making our own copy;
- Data from other departments for research they financed.

The research project (4)

4. The results: start with the basics....

To detect the number and nature (experimental or not) of evaluation research and the level of methodological quality and internal validity on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale (Farrington 2002), we first need an overview of all the available research



- Overview of data from multiple studies (N= 453)
- Research review (literature review) (narrative summary of results of multiple studies)

NOT:

- A systematic review (guidelines Campbell)
- A meta-analysis

The research project (5): the results

Overview of financing institutions (federal)

- Department of Science
- Department of Justice
 - Minister of Justice
 - Division Research&Development&Statistics
 - Service of Criminal Policy
 - National Institute for Criminalistic & Criminology
- Department of Internal Affairs
 - Directory Security & Prevention
 - Federal police

Department of Science (general overview)

- Different scientific programs (9)
4 programs in the field of Crime & Justice (total 187)

	Agora	Society and Future
Period	1/1/1999 - ...	1/12/2005 - 31/12/2010
Projects	84	35
Budget	2.500.000 € annual	16.000.000 €

	Drugs	Policy relevant priorities
Period	1/2/2002 - ...	15/6/2005 - 31/12/2009
Projects	39	29
Budget	910.000 €	3.460.000 €

Overview of financing institutions (federal)

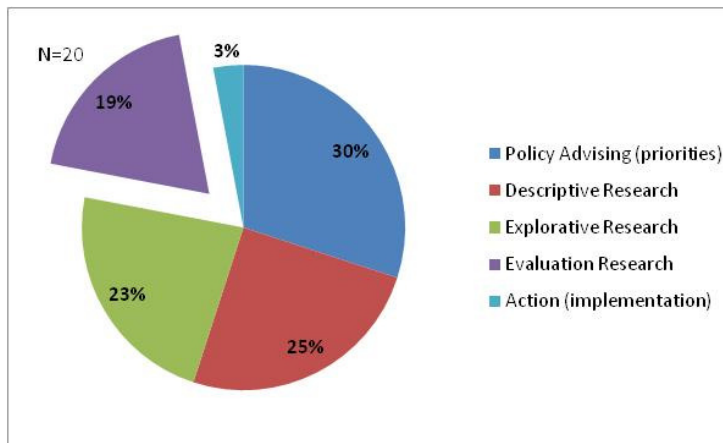
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Department of Justice (1)

- **Minister of Justice**
Academic research (universities) financed by the minister of Justice
 - Period: 1995-2009
 - Total: 106
 - Total amount: 8.055.657 €

Department of Justice (2)

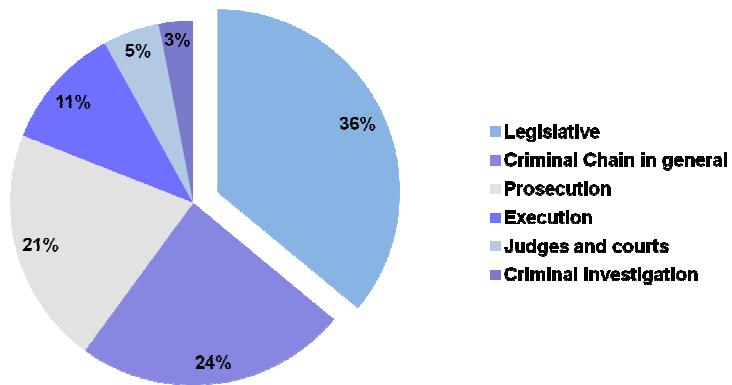
Nature of Justice research



N=106

Department of Justice (3)

Content of Justice research



Department of Justice (4)

(two research institutions)

- **Division “Research & Development & Statistics”** (focus on policy relevant research)
 - 5 scientific researchers
 - Period: 2002-2009
 - Total: 9
 - Duration: 12 months
 - Expertise:
 - Chain of criminal justice in general
 - Police-public prosecution matters in specific
 - Current project on the position of the judge of instruction
 - Recently: statistic project on the chain of criminal justice

Department of Justice (5)

- **National Institute for Criminalistic & Criminology** (focus on statistical analyses)
 - Division Criminology: 12 scientific researchers
 - Period: 1997-2009
 - Total: 26
 - Duration: 1-5 years (PHD's)
 - Academic research in collaboration with NICC
 - Financed by the department of Justice
 - Period: 1997-2009
 - Total: 4

Overview of financing institutions (federal)

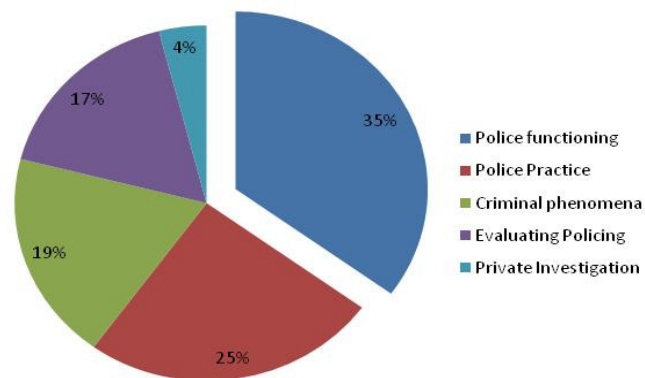
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- ➔ ● **Department of Internal Affairs**
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Department of internal affairs (1)

- **Federal Police**
 - Period: 1999-2008
 - Total: 28
 - Totaal amount: 953.310 €
- **Directory of security and prevention**
 - Period: 1995-2008
 - Total: 93
 - Totaal amount: 8.595.128 €

Directory of security and prevention (2)

Content of Research of Internal Affairs (Police matters)



Nature: Mostly policy relevant supporting policy process

N=93

State of the art on evaluation research?

Results: very few evaluation studies (N= 453)

Justice research: 20 of 106 (19%)
Internal Affairs: 16 of 93 (17%)
Department of Science: 5 of 187 (2,6%) (Drugs)

- + Comparison with the Netherlands: 58 evaluation studies in 2 years (Leeuw & Klarhuis)
- + Lack of experimental evaluation studies
- + Lack of evaluation legislation ex ante – ex post
- + No research that accompanies the guidelines into practice (implementation process) (action research)
- + Lack of knowledge of norms (standards), concepts of measurement, indicators, ...

The existing research can be situated on level 1 and 2 of the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale

Level 1

Correlation between an intervention and a measurement of criminality degree on one specific moment

Level 2

Measurement of degree of criminality before and after the intervention, without

Conclusion: Mission accomplished?

•Did our review broaden the knowledge and evidence-base for criminal policy in Belgium?

•Concrete use of the review on crime and Justice by the policy maker?

Not really: “Nice to know but no need to know”

- Very little use by the policy maker of the data
- Policy maker is only interested in the research he/she ordered
- No demands for detailed scientific results
- Few demands for summary reports

Usefulness:

- State of the art of criminology in Belgium
- Very complete overview of methodology used in criminological research
- Useful to know what the different universities do (who is who, expertise centers within the universities)
- Universities very interested in knowing what the partners do...
- Use for policy advisors and administrators in different departments

Towards a 'smart' Justice : questions and concerns

Possible causes for minimal use

1.The moment matters

- + When is the best **time**? When to introduce scientific results in the criminal justice process? Which phase in the policy cycle is best served with research? (policy preparation, policy determination, policy evaluation...)
- + Findings can be very time-specific, results give "photo" on a specific moment (old news...). This "photo" can change very quickly under certain circumstances (incidents): Need to design a long term "impact evaluation" (monitoring)
- + Policy maker want results in a short time period while experimental design needs longitudinal bases (Pawson, 2002)
- +Belief in innovation and constant "testing" (not only implement measures that 'work')
- + Implement options for long terms and let experimental criminology evaluate if they 'work' or don't work

Towards a 'smart' Justice : questions and concerns

2.Need for translation of the scientific results into practice

- +Results of scientific research don't provide a "receipt-book";
- +Embrace the 'critical' function of science and scientific research
- +Research findings need to be understandable and usable (recommendations);
- +Need for specialized professionals to translate research results into criminal policy recommendations and to implement the results into practice;
- +Need for combination other sources (statistical data, qualitative data, pressure groups, citizen, ...) in the criminal policy process;
- +Research findings aren't "solutions" for a better criminal policy;

Towards a 'smart' Justice : questions and concerns

3. Communication and information can help

- +The more close the communication between researcher and policy maker during the research process, the more chance for succes and understanding (Van der Laan, a.o., 2007)
- +Communication is time-consuming but worth while
- +Try to overcome resistance by communication (Devroe, 2002)
- +Include the party involved (financing or stake holders) in the research process, let them think along with you (Felder, a.o. 2000).
- +Try to offer the research results to a format appropriate for the policy environment
- + Include some research questions of specific interest to the party involved (Borkovec & Echemendia, 2001).

Towards a 'smart' Justice : questions and concerns

4. What with 'bad' evaluation results?

- + Policy maker has to mention this and communicate answers in response to bad research results
- + If the results don't please the politician: the research method will be criticized,..
- + Bad results" are usefull to learn from (towards innovation), but often politician will see them as 'personal failure'



Many items for discussion about the role of the scientific researcher in the policy process.....

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Thank you for your attention !!

Questions and discussion