

Developing a systematic map on foster care: an Australian example

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Overview of study with 2 key phases:

1. A systematic map of foster care research 1995-2008
2. Interviews with “users” to examine the utility of the map. User perspectives include:
 - Researchers
 - Policy makers
 - Knowledge ‘translators’

Aims to examine the utility of a systematic map as a tool to:

- Locate the available Australian research in the broader context of international research
- Examine the potential use of a searchable bibliographic database from the perspectives of different ‘users’
- Identify priorities for narrower policy and practice-relevant systematic review questions
- Contribute to the national research agenda by identifying gaps and opportunities for possible collaborations both nationally and overseas.

Background/Contextual factors

- Audit of Australian out of home care research (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004)
- *Out-of-home care: Messages from research* extended the audit (Bromfield, Higgins, Osborn, Panozzo & Richardson, 2005)
- Crime Misconduct Commission Inquiry into abuse in foster care – findings recommending strengthened evidence based policy and practice (2005)
- ‘Insider – researcher’

Starting point.....

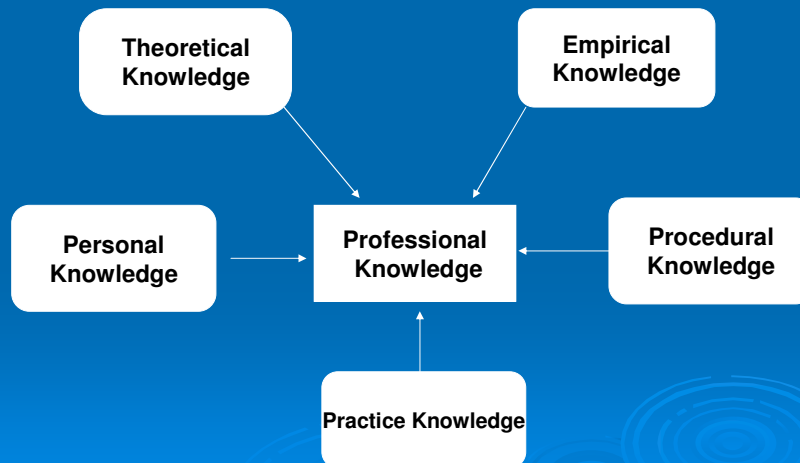
Issue

The accessibility of the out-of-home care research to Australian policy makers & practitioners

Key questions

1. What is the nature of the out-of-home care research, in terms of coverage, quality and perspectives?
2. How can this research inform policy and practice in the out-of-home care field?

Model of Professional Knowledge (Drury-Hudson, 1997)



Range of questions of the research

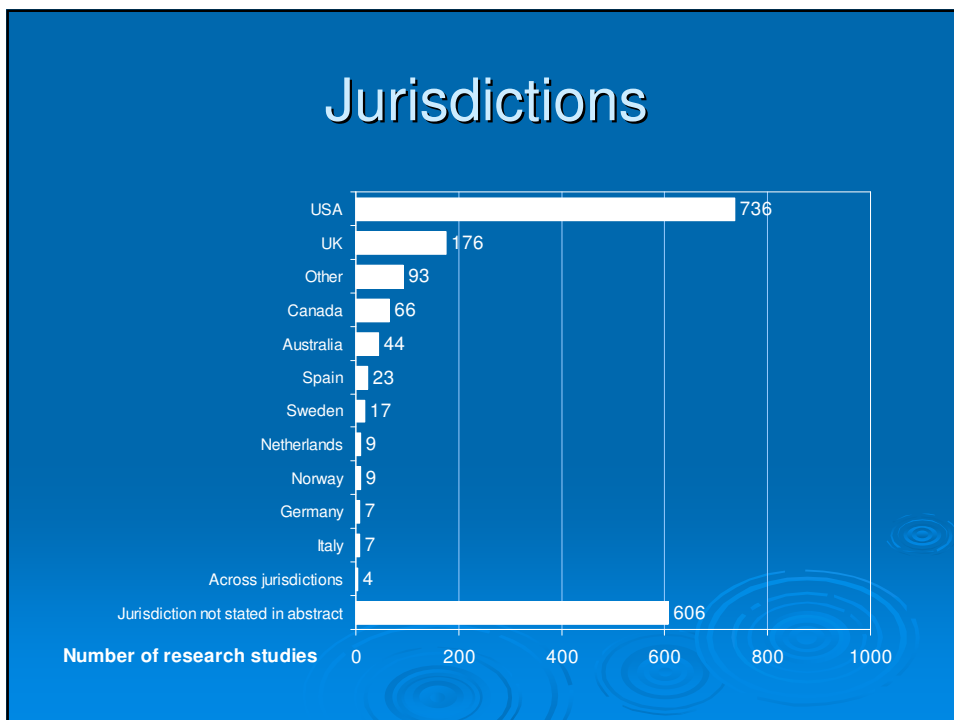
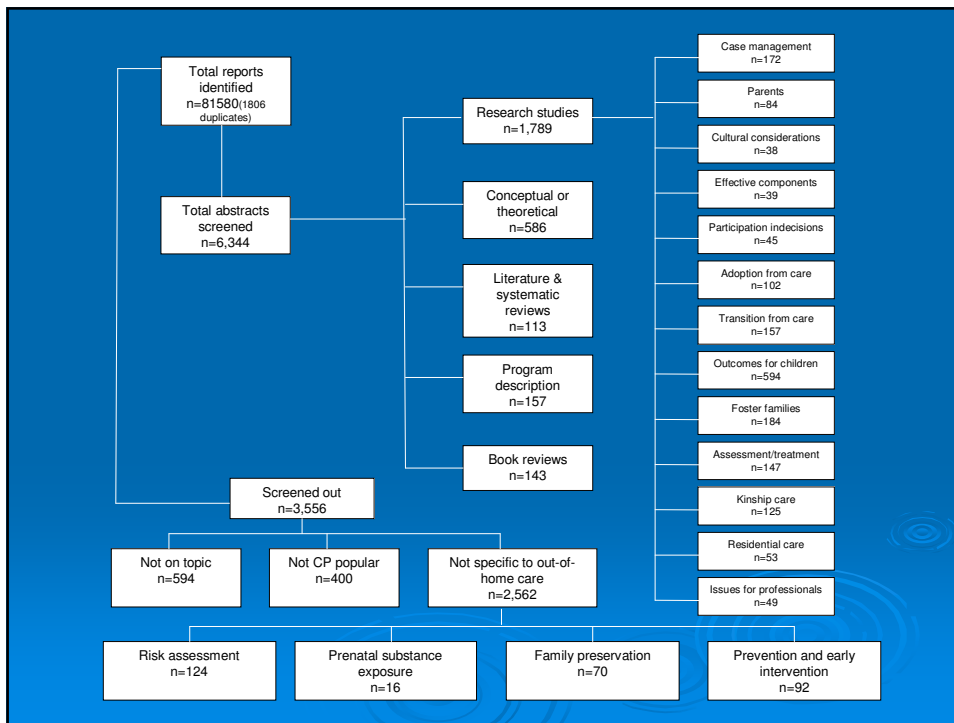
- Not only what works but for whom, in what circumstances, why and for what outcomes
- Practitioners perspective – case management includes key decisions about removal, assessment of protective and care needs, placement matching, interventions etc. – basis for the scope and breadth of this systematic map
- Policy makers – often short timeframes eg post inquiry 12 weeks to prepare the Blueprint for reform. A key driver for wanting the broader map
- Program development and management require different types of information, re cost effectiveness, feasibility, service and system level outcomes
- How conceptual literature may also inform....rather than directing what we do - to query/challenge current jurisdiction specific approaches; have we got it right or are there other ways eg permanency planning

Key methodological questions

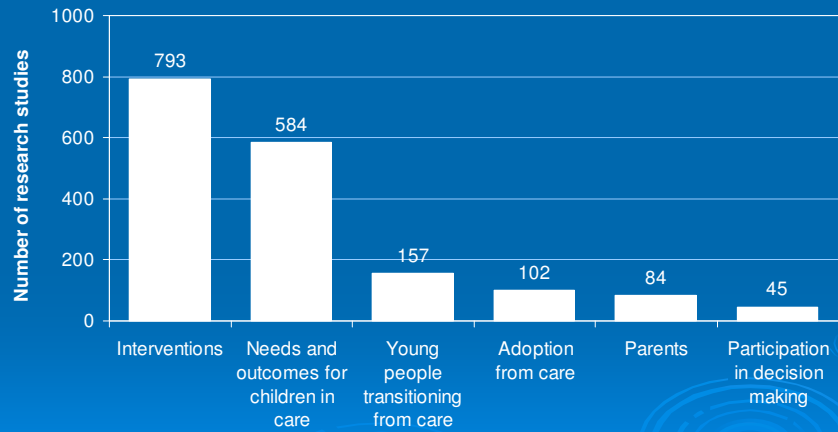
- The scope of the map in terms of the topic areas
- Search terms – issues due to different terminology across jurisdictions
- Inclusion criteria
- Screening criteria –where studies didn't neatly "fit" eg part of cohort children in care, relevant to more than 1 category – not discrete categories
- Breadth and depth – how many databases, years, jurisdictions, books or only journal articles
- Software to support the mapping process

Methodology

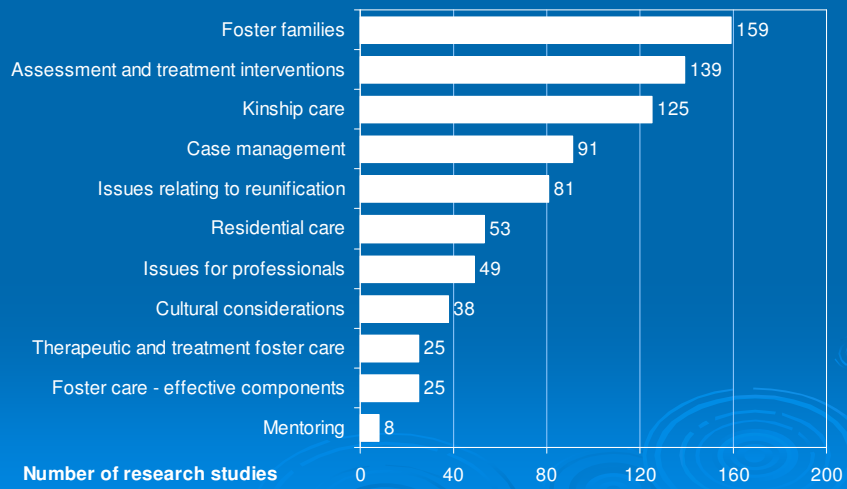
- Preliminary handsearch of 10 years of a key UK journal and USA journal
- Electronic searches to test individual search terms, prior to a 'rolled up' search
- 1995-2008 (built on timeframes for Australian audit)
- To date searches in PsycInfo and ERIC
- Screening only on abstracts



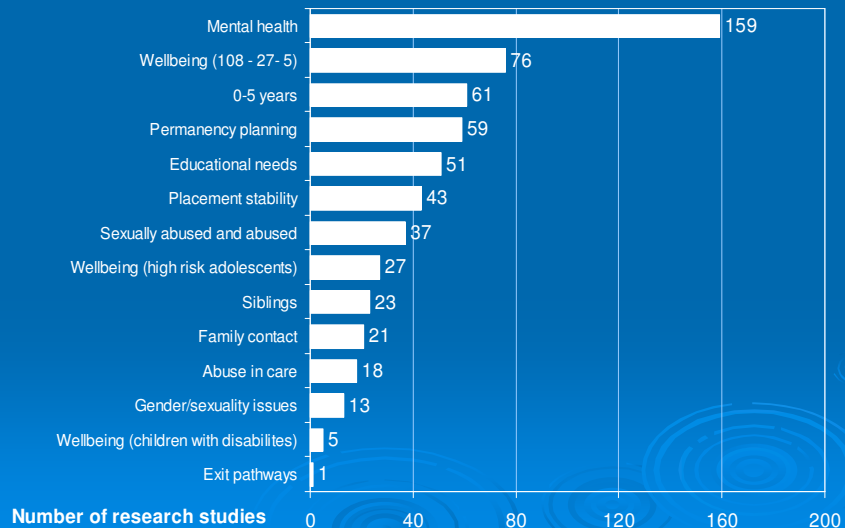
Broad topic clusters



Interventions



Outcomes for children and young people in care



- Concept of 'tagging as you go', even studies screened out but of relevance to child protection eg family preservation; risk assessment
- Focus on putting research studies in the context of the broader literature
- Capacity to roll up into broader topic areas or drill down into sub topic areas and to increase utility for multiple in depth reviews

Quality of reporting

In 227 screened in reports child protection population was not explicit and 143 were research studies

In 1121 reports the jurisdiction/s is not stated in abstract and 606 were research studies.

Emerging themes

Gaps in the the research on key topic areas and types of studies eg Longitudinal studies – 66 out of 1789

Number of thesis studies without further articles 266 of 1789 – issue of accessibility compounded

Limitations/challenges

- An emerging methodology
- Single reviewer undertaking the study on a part-time basis
- Time intensive
- Difficulty of screening based on abstract alone eg high number where cp or ooHC population not explicit

Using research to inform policy and practice

- Drawing on the research on human reasoning
- Challenges the notions of research leading to certainty (Taylor & White 2006)
- Greater potential in using the research to strengthen analytical thinking and asking is there another way to understand this.....
- 'Respectful uncertainty' when faced with the complexities of individual cases (Sheppard, Newstead et al. 2001; Munro 2002; Munro 2005; Taylor & White 2006). Often reviews highlight the limitations of the research evidence that underpins key practice assumptions.

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