

## 2009 International Campbell Collaboration (C2) Colloquium

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### Abstract Information

**Abstract Title:**

Tax and welfare benefit changes: Issues in systematically reviewing the data on what works

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Paper

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**Abstract:**

Many governments have taken the view that paid employment is the optimal route out of poverty. Changes in taxation and/or welfare benefit payments are used, sometimes in conjunction with other types of interventions such as the provision of free or subsidized childcare, as interventions to achieve these goals. The question arises then of how effective are different tax and benefit system changes when compared to each other? and when compared other interventions that could achieve the same goal? A recent systematic review by a team of researchers at the EPPI-Centre investigated the impact of tax and welfare benefit payment changes on the participation in paid employment of poor families where at least one of the parents was already in paid employment (the so called working poor). The review was commissioned by the UK Government Department for Work and Pensions who wanted to use the review findings to inform the development of future policy in this area. To be included in the review studies had to evaluate the impact of changes in the tax/welfare benefit system on a poverty/ employment related outcome measure of the target group. None of the studies we identified were prospective experimental designs. Rather the studies fell into one of the following methodological groups • Retrospective evaluations involving the statistical modelling of secondary data. • Statistical modelling of the effects of hypothetical changes to existing policies. The statistical modelling techniques used were those used in econometrics which appears to be dominant approach in this field. The review team were therefore presented with the problem that the available evidence did not conform to the methodological requirements for a classic meta-analysis. An option would therefore have been to state that there was not evidence of sufficient quality that could be used to provide a synthesis of the effectiveness of this type of intervention. However this type of evidence is the only type of evidence about impacts that is available in this field and within econometrics is viewed as the 'gold standard'. Furthermore this type of financial intervention is a very common form of welfare intervention internationally. The team therefore decided that synthesis should be attempted But were immediately confronted with two methodological issues • How should the quality of the studies be assessed? • How should the results of the individual studies be synthesised? We could find no existing quality assessment tools or examples of the formal synthesis of data from this kind of study. The presentation will therefore present the rationale and approaches to quality assessment and synthesis used by the team with a view to generating discussion about their appropriateness and utility. Reference Tripney J, Newman M, Bangpan M, Hempel-Jorgensen A, Mackintosh M, Tucker H, Sinclair J (2009) In-Work Poverty: a systematic review. London. Department of Work and Pensions.

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